FAITHFULNESS OF GOD VS WORLDLINESS OF GOD'S PEOPLE

COMMENTARY ON BOOK OF JUDGES

DETERIORATING CYCLES OF IDOLATRY AND REBELLION DESPITE THE LORD'S PATIENT FAITHFULNESS AND GRACIOUS DELIVERANCE END UP IN THE DEPTHS OF RELIGIOUS AND MORAL DEPRAVITY

Paul Apple (August 2012)

For each section:

- Thesis statement … to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline … to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions … to encourage life application
- Representative quotations … to stimulate deeper insight

Judges 21:25 "*In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes*."

This data file is the sole property of the author Paul Apple. However, permission is granted for others to use and distribute these materials for the edification of others under two simple conditions:

1) The contents must be faithfully represented including credit to the author where appropriate.
2) The material must be distributed freely without any financial remuneration.

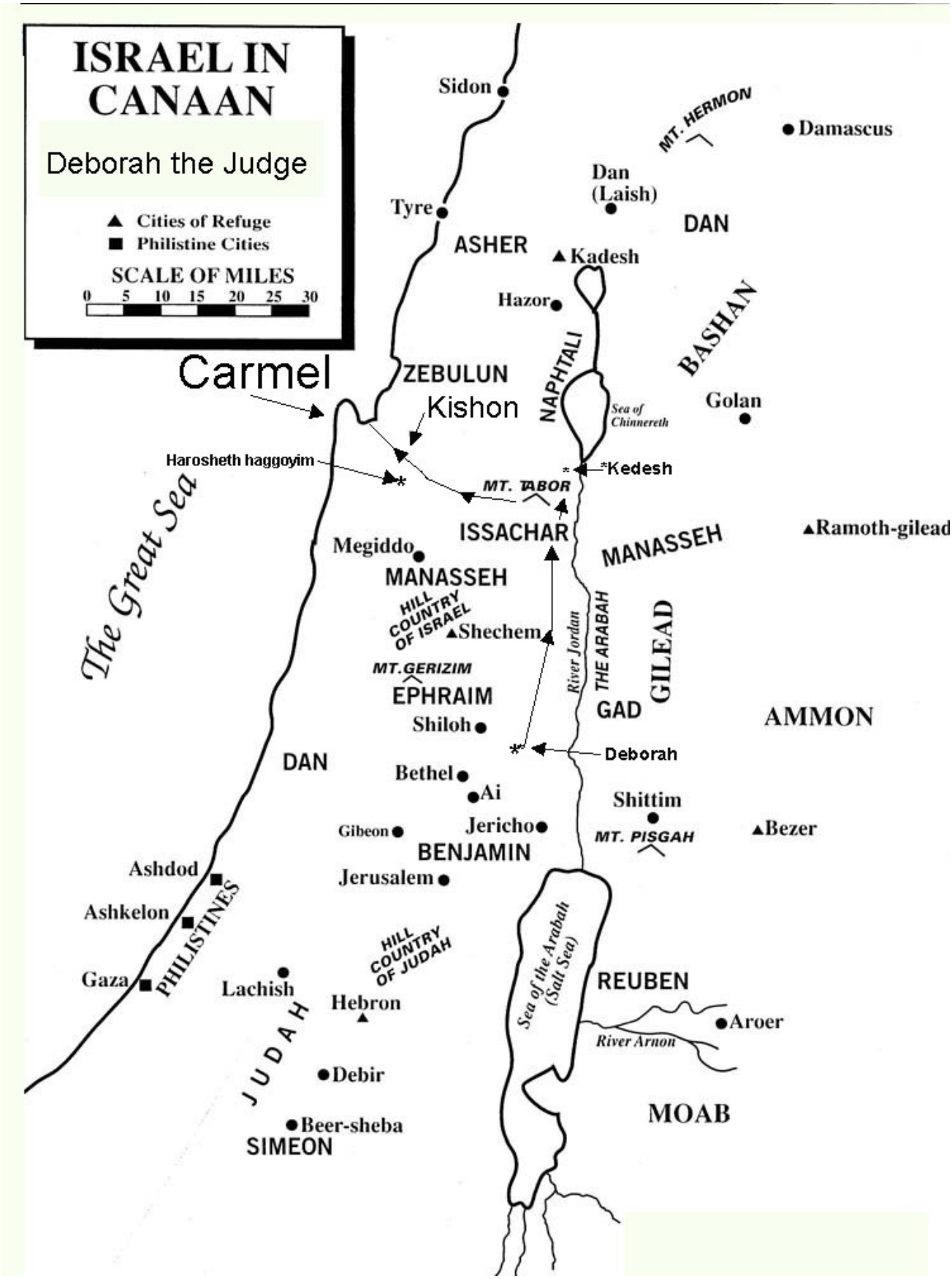
This data file may not be copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Paul Apple. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to:

Paul Apple, 304 N. Beechwood Ave., Baltimore MD 21228.

www.bibleoutlines.com

paulgapple@gmail.com

http://www.ldolphin.org/Deborah.html



OVERVIEW NOTES

Baxter: **Failure Through Compromise**
Its intent is to expose the cause and course of Israel's ruining downgrade in such a way as to sting the national conscience into repentant return to Jehovah. . . Incomplete mastery of an evil at the outset always means constant trouble from it afterwards, and often defeat by it in the end.

Inrig: **Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay**
In our time, the winds of the "me generation" are blowing a strong and deadly virus. "Doing your own thing" has been enshrined as the national life-style, and the virus of relativism has infected every area of life, especially our concepts of spiritual truth and moral absolutes. Our society is increasingly secular, increasingly pagan, and vigorously anti-Christian. If ever a verse of the Bible has the ring of the twentieth century about it, it is the motto of the times of the judges: "*Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*" . . .

The book of Judges is filled with people very much like us – people with God-given potential for greatness and unfailing capacity for catastrophe. When they dared to trust God and depend upon Him, they were indeed people with hearts of iron, who made a positive, godly impact on their times. But when even the greatest heroes depended upon the flesh, they were revealed as people with feet of clay, who not only experienced but caused spiritual catastrophe.

Malick: In Judges obedience is not a prerequisite to blessing. Judges shows that God's covenantal blessings are apart from any human merit, which in turn call for a response of obedience. The judges are weak. God delivers, not on the basis of human merit or might, but according to His choice of covenantal faithfulness to Abraham. . . .

Purposes for Judges:

- To present YHWH as faithful to His covenant to Abraham even through the people break their covenant with Him and never repent of their evil (cf. Deut 11:26-28; 28:15)
- To remind the people that YHWH is faithful to His covenant and that He, not a judge or king, is the One ultimately responsible for the welfare of Israel

Message Statement: Because of the outward and inward anarchy of the tribes of israel, the theocracy nearly collapsed as YHWH ruled over her by raising up discipline to humble the nation and providing mercy to deliver her through her judges making evident the need for a king to direct the nation.

Constable: [Collection of quotes] Arthur Cundall suggested that one of the purposes of Judges may have been to provide apologetic justification for Israel's monarchy. William Dumbrell believed its purpose was primarily to show the sovereign grace of God in preserving Israel in spite of Israel. Leon Wood wrote that its primary purpose was to show why Israel did not experience God's promised blessings. Herbert Wolf believed

the primary purpose was to show that Israel's spiritual condition determined its political and material situation. Daniel Block argued that it was to reveal the Canaanization of Israel in the pre-monarchic period of Israel's history. David Howard wrote that the purpose was "to show the consequences of disobedience to God and to point the way to a king, who, if he were righteous, would lead the people to God." All these explanations seem to me to be in harmony with what the book records.

Outline:
I. **The reason** for Israel's apostasy 1:1—3:6
A. Hostilities between the Israelites and the Canaanites after Joshua's death 1:1—2:5
B. Israel's conduct toward Yahweh and Yahweh's treatment of Israel in the period of the judges 2:6—3:6

II. **The record** of Israel's apostasy 3:7—16:31
A. The first apostasy 3:7-11
B. The second apostasy 3:12-31
C. The third apostasy chs. 4—5
D. The fourth apostasy 6:1—10:5
E. The fifth apostasy 10:6—12:15
F. The sixth apostasy chs. 13—16

III**. The results** of Israel's apostasy ch. 17—21
A. The idolatry of Micah and the Danites ch. 17—18
B. The immorality of Gibeah and the Benjamites chs. 19—21

Block: Once the backbone of Canaanite resistance had been broken and the Israelite clans began to settle down, they established local sanctuaries for the worship of Yahweh. For the average Israelite the cultic services at these regional centers quickly took the place of the great national celebrations at the central shrine. The failure of the religious authorities to establish a permanent home for the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant, combined with the necessity of Israelite worshipers to pass through enemy (Canaanite) territory to get to the central place of worship, undoubtedly resulted in a rapid declension in the significance of the central sanctuary in the life of the nation. Without the regular celebration of the tribes' common origin in Yahweh's saving and covenantal acts at the great annual festivals, the nation experienced increasing political and territorial fragmentation. . .

This is a prophetic book, not a political tractate. It represents a call to return to the God of the covenant, whom the people have abandoned in favor of the virile and exciting fertility gods of the land. The theme of the book is the Canaanization of Israelite society during the period of settlement. The author's goal in exposing this problem is to wak up his own generation. This is an appeal to the covenant people to abandon all forms of paganism and return to Yahweh. In so doing the narrator also offers his readers a profound commentary on the grace of God. Left to their own devices the Israelites would surely have destroyed themselves. Only by the repeated gracious

intervention of God do they emerge from the dark pre-monarchic period as a separate people and nation.

Wiersbe: The nation of Israel quickly decayed after a new generation took over, a generation that knew neither Joshua nor Joshua's God . . . Instead of exhibiting spiritual fervor, Israel sank into apathy; instead of obeying the Lord, the people moved into apostasy; and instead of the nation enjoying law and order, the land was filled with anarchy. Indeed, for Israel it was the worst of times.

Stedman: These people were not trying to do wrong. They were not rebellious people, bent on frustrating God's will for their lives. At this stage of Israel's history these people were determined to do right – but they were trying to do what was right in their own eyes. They succumbed to the folly of consecrated blundering. They were well-intentioned blunderers, intending to do right but ending up all wrong. . .

The great lesson of Judges is that we must take God seriously, and we must take our enemy seriously. Jesus Christ has come to save us from our sins, not to help us to comfortably accommodate ourselves to them. He has come to drive those sins and habits out of us. If we do not take God seriously about these so-called little things, then step by step, gradually and imperceptibly, we will move away from God's grace, and we will sink into moral and spiritual collapse.

MacArthur: God compassionately delivered His people throughout the different geographical areas of tribal inheritances which He had earlier given through Joshua (Jos 13-22). The apostasy covered the whole land, as indicated by the fact that each area is specifically identified: southern (3:7-31); northern (4:1 – 5:31); central (6:1 – 10:5); eastern (10:6 – 12:15); and western (13:1 – 16:31). His power to faithfully rescue shines against the dark backdrop of pitiful human compromise and sometimes bizarre twists of sin, as in the final summary (Jdg 17-21).

JUDGES OVERVIEW –

The last verse in the Book of Judges provides a familiar summary of the cycles of apostasy during this period of Israel's history:
Judges 21:25 "*In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes*." -- Moral relativism with no strong central leader – Some R rated stories – graphic violence, prostitution, driving tent pegs through heads, dismembering bodies – pretty ugly stuff

Judges covers the *time period* from the death of Joshua until the birth of Samuel who would end up anointing Saul as the first king over Israel.
Timeline Slide – Judges covers about a 325 year period from 1375 B.C. until 1043 B.C.

Authorship: Traditionally Samuel has been considered the author.

Title: **Judges – referencing the special heroes that provide the story line for the book --**
Why are these special heroes called "*Judges*" – not what we think of when we use that term = someone sitting in a courtroom in majestic flowing robes making decisions about various cases. These men and women are special deliverers or saviors sovereignly raised up by God to deliver His people from oppression from foreign conquerors because of their own apostasy and disobedience to God's covenant.

- Their primary role was as a military leader and
- the Spirit of God came upon them to empower them for miraculous heroic actions.
- But they also subsequently functioned as civil administrators.
- They did not rule in a centralized fashion but over local regions or tribes. So some of their administrations could overlap.
- They also did not pass their rulership down to their children as was customary in the subsequent monarchy. Once they died, they had no ongoing impact on the nation's behavior or status before God.

There are 12 judges recorded in the book. [I don't consider Abimelech in chaps. 8-9 to be one of the judges] 6 of these are featured with longer treatment that flesh out the repetitive cycle of apostasy while the others are passed over with just a brief mention.

The Theme of the book is **Apostasy** = a compound word in the Greek meaning "stand away from or turn away from the truth." So a church or denomination can only be apostate if it formerly held to the truth.

Contrasts between Book of Joshua and Book of Judges:
God's covenant promise to Abraham looks solid at the end of Joshua – God had promised to make them a great nation; to give them a land to possess; with the goal being that they would represent God to the world by the way they lived in the land – bringing blessing to the world. But not so fast. Judges shows a huge reversal. Still God will remain faithful to His covenant promise – but the nation demonstrates a pattern of unfaithfulness.

1. Leadership Structure

- **Joshua**: Centralized leadership under **Joshua**, a strong, divinely-appointed leader who succeeded Moses.

- **Judges**: Decentralized, tribal leadership. No king or central figure; instead, **various judges** rise sporadically to lead in times of crisis.

---

2. Military Outcome -- Military Success vs. Struggle

- **Joshua**: Emphasizes **military victories** and the conquest of Canaan as largely successful and divinely sanctioned.
- **Judges**: Shows **incomplete conquest**; many Canaanite groups remain, leading to ongoing struggles and oppression.

---

3. Spiritual Condition -- Faithfulness vs. Apostasy

- **Joshua**: The Israelites are portrayed as largely **faithful to God** under Joshua's leadership.
- **Judges**: Repeated **cycles of apostasy**, where Israel turns away from God, suffers oppression, repents, and is delivered.

---

4. Tone and Theological Message

- **Joshua**: Optimistic and victorious; underscores **obedience brings blessing**.
- **Judges**: Darker, more pessimistic; illustrates **disobedience brings chaos**.

---

5. Land and Settlement

- **Joshua**: Focuses on the **conquest and allotment** of the land to the twelve tribes.
- **Judges**: Focuses on the **struggles of living in the land**, including conflicts with neighbors and among tribes.

---

7. Literary Structure

- **Joshua**: Linear narrative (entry → conquest → settlement).
- **Judges**: Cyclical narrative structure: **sin → oppression → repentance → deliverance**.

---

6. Tribal Unity -- Unity vs. Fragmentation

- **Joshua**: Israel is portrayed as **united** under a single leader and mission.
- **Judges**: Israel is depicted as **fragmented**, with each tribe acting independently, often at odds with each other.

---

8. God's Role -- Divine Presence

- **Joshua**: God is consistently **present and guiding**, often directly communicating with Joshua.
- **Judges**: God's presence is more **sporadic**, sometimes seeming distant, with periods of silence.

---

9. Genre and Style

- **Joshua**: **Historical epic**, structured around fulfillment of divine promise.
- **Judges**: More **moralistic and tragic**, highlighting human failure and divine mercy.

Structure of the Book:

I. **(1:1 – 3:6) <u>Reasons</u> for Israel's Apostasy – Introduction**

II. **(3:7 – 16:31) <u>Record</u> of Israel's Apostasy – 6 Repeating Cycles of Apostasy**

III. **(17-21) <u>Results</u> of Israel's Apostasy – Appendix**

BIG IDEA:
Deteriorating cycles of idolatry and apostasy
(despite the Lord's patient faithfulness and gracious deliverance)
end up in the depths of religious and moral depravity.

<u>Descriptions of the Cycle of Sin and Apostasy:</u>

- Sin / Servitude / Supplication / Salvation / Silence (Rest)
- Apathy / Apostasy / Affliction / Answered Prayer
- Disobedience / Desperation / Deliverance
- Rebellion / Retribution / Repentance / Rescue / Rest

These cycles **spiral downward** – Decline / Deliverance / then **deeper Decline**

I came up with a few other <u>pithy sayings</u> that summarize the contents of the Book of Judges:

- Pockets of sin breed pervasive depravity
- A little leaven leavens the whole lump
- A nation without effective leadership goes off the rails (down the tubes)
- The "freedom" of Moral Relativism is the seedbed for the "bondage" of national oppression

<u>Expanded Summary:</u>
"*I did it my way*" is the defining song of our culture today. The Book of Judges shows us all what tends to go horribly wrong when we become too casual about seeking God's will and God's ways. It is the bridge between the entrance into the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua and the establishment of the first kings over the nation Israel. God was still ruling the nation as a theocracy and the land was very fragmented. There was very little national cohesiveness.
We witness the repeating cycles of sin and deliverance as God raises up a variety of different champions to meet the desperate needs of the moment. The opening verses accurately describe the situation: the compromise of subtle sin sows seeds of spiritual decay that lead to future catastrophic failures. A little bit of leaven then leavens the entire lump. These historical examples are recorded for our benefit that we might put a premium on obeying God and not allowing our present prosperity to divert our focus from dependence upon the Lord.

Purpose of the Book:

Gary Inrig: The Purpose of the Book
The book of Judges is filled with people very much like us – people with God-given potential for

greatness and unfailing capacity for catastrophe. When they dared to trust God and depend upon Him, they were indeed people with hearts of iron, who made a positive, godly impact on their times. But when even the greatest heroes depended upon the flesh, they were revealed as people with feet of clay, who not only experienced but caused spiritual catastrophe.

J. Sidlow Baxter: The Purpose of the Book
Its intent is to expose the cause and course of Israel's ruining downgrade in such a way as to sting the national conscience into repentant return to Jehovah. . . Incomplete mastery of an evil at the outset always means constant trouble from it afterwards, and often defeat by it in the end.

Daniel Block: The Purpose of the Book
Judges was written to reveal the Canaanization of Israel in the pre-monarchic period of Israel's history.

****

Key Enemy Nations:

Judges 3:5-6

"*And the sons of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites;* [6] *and they took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.*"

- **Philistines**: Occupied the southwestern coastal plain, including cities like Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath.
- **Moabites**: Located east of the Jordan River, in the region south of the Ammonites.
- **Ammonites**: Positioned east of the Jordan River, north of the Moabites.
- **Midianites**: Came from the east, likely from the Arabian desert, and invaded Israel during Gideon's time.
- **Canaanites**: Inhabited the central and northern regions, including cities like Hazor and Megiddo.
- **Amalekites**: Lived in the Negev desert and frequently raided Israelite territories.

Territorial Map of Israelite Tribes, the 12 Regional Judges and the Key Enemy Nations:

****

I. (1:1 – 3:6) Reasons for Israel's Apostasy – Introduction

Subtle Roots of Decay Lead to Moral, Religious and Political Ruin:

Illustration: Decay – rust around base of pole holding up basketball hoop at the end of our driveway; integrity of the system did not give way all at once; it was gradually decaying over time; I sprayed black paint on the exterior so it still looked fine; but over time it continued decaying on the inside of the pole – when Julie had some high school boys over for a party – one strong dunk broke the pole off at the base

- **A. Incomplete Obedience** – not exterminating the inhabitants of Canaan

Judges 1:1-19 – Judah was more aggressive and successful than the other tribes in defeating the pagans – but still they had problems as well – **vs. 19** --
"*Now the LORD was with Judah, and they took possession of the hill country; but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had iron chariots*."

- **B. Ignorance in Knowing God -- Generational Disconnect**

Judges. 2:6-10
"*When Joshua had dismissed the people, the sons of Israel went each to his inheritance to possess the land.* [7] *And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the LORD which He had done for Israel.* [8] *Then Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of one hundred and ten.* [9] *And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.* [10] *And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel*."

- **C. Idolatry in Pursuing False Gods**

Judges 2:1-5
"*Now the angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, 'I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, I will never break My covenant with you,* [2] *and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars. But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done?* [3] *Therefore I also said, I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.* [4] *And it came about when the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept.* [5] *So they named that place Bochim; and there they sacrificed to the LORD*."

Judges 2:11-13
"*Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals,* [12] *and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the LORD to anger.* [13] *So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroth*."

- **D. Intermarriage with Pagans**

Judges 3:4-6

"*And they were for testing Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers through Moses.* [5] *And the sons of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites;* [6] *and they took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods*."

Remember: **Subtle Roots of Decay Lead to Moral, Religious and Political Ruin:**
Illustration: Tree in our backyard looked fine; one bright sunny day, I hear this load crack and boom; My young granddaughters call out: "Pop, why did you turn off our electricity?" I look out the back window and our huge oak tree has broken off about 3 feet up from the base and has taken down the power lines to the neighborhood and is lying across our back fence on the neighbor's deck and backyard. It had rotted out on the inside and was now hollow.

Cf. how Christ castigated the Pharisees for their internal root – despite all of their self righteous efforts to look good on the outside – calling them whitewashed tombs

First couple of chapters document these roots of decay within the nation of Israel.

Compromise leads to conflict and then to chaos
Instead of removing the moral decay represented by the Canaanites, they contracted the disease

****

II. The record of Israel's apostasy (3:7 - 16:31) – 6 Repeating Cycles of Apostasy

Introduction to Cycles of Apostasy – **Judges 2**:

- **2:13** "*So they forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtaroth*"
- **2:14** "*The anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them*"
- **2:16** "*Then the Lord raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them.*"
- **2:19** "*But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers*"

I don't think it is a coincidence that we are looking at 6 repeating cycles of apostasy. According to Bible scholars, just as the number 7 typically signifies completion or perfection especially of God, the number 6 is one shy of that, which means it signifies **imperfection**. You cannot find a historical account of the nation of Israel that highlights more of their imperfection than the book of Judges.

****

A. The first cycle of apostasy (3:7-11) Othniel (Mesopotamia)
Stripped down model of how a judge should function – nothing special or fancy – just highlights

each of the steps along the cycle of apostasy.

1. (:7) Sin

"*And the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served the Baals and the Asheroth.*"

2. (:8) Servitude – King Cushan-rishathaim of Mesopotamia – 8 years

"*Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim* [nicknamed King Cush] *king of Mesopotamia; and the sons of Israel served Cushanrishathaim eight years.*"

Rishathaim means "*double-wickedness*" which suggests that he was a cruel and powerful man. Probably a pejorative term ascribed to him by his enemies – if you can't defeat him, at least you can call him names behind his back. He was the most powerful of all the enemies of Israel named in the book of Judges. Large territory of the Arameans.

3. (:9a) Supplication

"*And when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD*,"
Emphasis on the suffering and misery experienced by the Israelites that caused them to turn back to God for deliverance.

4. (:9b-10) Salvation

"*the LORD raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand, so that he prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim.*"

We were introduced to Othniel -- this heroic figure from the family of Caleb back in **1:12-13**
"*And Caleb said, 'The one who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will even give him my daughter Achsah for a wife.' [13] And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, captured it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah for a wife.*"

Importance of the role of **the Spirit of the Lord**

5. Silence / Rest – 40 Years

"*Then the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.*"

That's the story of Judges in microcosm – but the nation continues to spiral downward.

****

B. The second cycle of apostasy (3:12-30) Ehud (Moabites)

Remember that Moab and Ammon were descendants of Lot by incestuous breeding with his daughters. The daughters learned such morality from their lives in Sodom and Gomorrah, and Moab and Ammon are, in Scripture, seen as historical extensions of Sodom and Gomorrah. So it

is no surprise to see them allied together along with the Amalekites to oppress Israel for 18 years.

Distinctives of Ehud:

- Left-handed – probably some of you are left-handed; seen as a defect in ancient times

Gary Inrig: An ironic situation in a man from the tribe of Benjamin, which means "*son of my right hand*." A man who is awkward is called *gauche*, a French word meaning left-handed. Something that is wicked or evil we call *sinister*, the Latin word for the left hand. But someone with skill and ability is *dexterous*, which means right-handed in Latin.

Cf. all the positive references in Scripture to the Lord's right hand -- *At his right hand are pleasures for ever more*, and there his Chosen One sits. It is the hand of power, glory, and blessing.

- Opportunistic Warrior and Hero for the Israelites

Look at how the story makes fun of the overly obese king Eglon – Ehud comes to supposedly bring him tribute but instead schemes to assassinate him with a concealed sword that he buries in the king's folds of fat. This proud leader of Moab is reduced to a pile of excrement. How ironic!

(:30b) Rest now for 80 years – 2 generations instead of just one
"*And the land was undisturbed for eighty years.*"

****

C. The third cycle of apostasy (chs. 4-5) Deborah and Barak (Canaanites)

GOD USES UNCONVENTIONAL MEANS -- INCLUDING THE LEADERSHIP ROLE OF WOMEN -- TO ENSURE THAT THE GLORY FOR SALVATION BELONGS ULTIMATELY TO HIM ALONE

She is the only woman in biblical history who has a major, God-given leadership role. That immediately marks her out as a uniquely gifted individual, a leader of distinction from whom we can learn a great deal.

Look at the monotony of the cycles of apostasy – no creativity – just the same pattern of failure over and over – receiving the same disastrous results – very depressing picture of the human condition – Sin might seem exciting and enticing … but in reality it is boring and miserable
4:1 "*Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died.*"

Formidable enemy: King Jabin of Canaan and his military commander Sisera (**4:1**)
Israel was at a severe military disadvantage in terms of weaponry:
4:3 "*And the sons of Israel cried to the LORD; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years.*"

Ps. 20:7 "*Some boast in chariots and some in horses, but we will boat in the name of the Lord, our God.*"

5:8 – they didn't even have shields or spears

Introduction to prominent leadership role of Deborah – (**4:4-5**)
"*Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. And she used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment.*"
Name Deborah means "HoneyBee" -- dispensing sweet nuggets of wisdom, but packing a sting when necessary – Mohammad Ali – "float like a butterfly, sting like a bee"

Partnership with Barak:
(:6-9a) "*Now she sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali, and said to him, 'Behold, the LORD, the God of Israel, has commanded, Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun. And I will draw out to you Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his many troops to the river Kishon; and I will give him into your hand.' Then Barak said to her, 'If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.' And she said, 'I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the honor shall not be yours on the journey that you are about to take, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman.'*"

Providential Rout described in **vs. 9b-16** – God turned the river Kishon which at this time of year was dried up into a muddy quagmire by means of a mighty storm (**5:21** "*the torrent of Kishon*" -- Caused the chariots to bog down and become a liability instead of an advantage

Warren Wiersbe: The word translated "*routed*" (**4:15**) means "confused, thrown into panic" . . . When you remember that the Canaanite god Baal was the **god of storms**, you can see how the sudden change of weather could have affected the superstitious Canaanites. Had their own god Baal turned against them? Was the God of Israel stronger than Baal? If so, then the battle was already lost, and the wisest thing the soldiers could do was flee.

The victory was capped off when another heroic woman Jael drove a tent peg through the temple of Sisera
5:31 "*And the land was undisturbed for forty years.*"

****

D. The fourth cycle of apostasy (6:1 - 10:5) Gideon (Midianites)
Midianites would let the Israelites do all the hard work of planting and cultivating their crops and then they would swoop in and plunder all of their produce and livestock. Left the nation impoverished and suffering.

6:4 "*So they would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth, as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey.*"

6:7-8 "Now it came about when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD on account of Midian, [8] that the LORD sent a prophet to the sons of Israel,"

Illustration: At Johnson and Towers, we repair trucks and buses that break down. Our special expertise has been in Detroit engines and Allison transmissions; but we have expanded our services to work on everything on the truck. Imagine the reaction of a customer – say MTA or Greyhound – who has a bus broken down on the Baltimore Beltway. They call for our road service and we send out a philosopher to lecture them on proper preventive maintenance practices. They would not be too pleased. They want a mechanic dispatched to fix their bus and want it fixed NOW!

8 Aspects of the Divine Calling of Gideon:

1. **(6:11) The Circumstances of the Calling -- Called by the Angel of the Lord while in Hiding**

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

2. **(6:12) The Celebration of the Calling to be a Valiant Warrior because of God's Presence and Favor**

"*And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, 'The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior.'*"

Not mocking Gideon – but viewing him in light of the possibilities due to God's transforming power and enablement – just like the Savior came to Simon and noted "*You are Simon, the son of Jonah. You shall be called a Rock – Peter*."

3. **(6:13) The Climate of Discouragement and Defeat Despite the Calling**

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

4. **(6:14) The Commissioning of the Calling -- Called by the Power of God to Deliver Israel**

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

5. **(6:15) The Criticism of the Calling -- Excuses and Objections**

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

Important Principle: God's Power is best seen through accomplishing the impossible through the transformed weakness of men

6. (6:16) The Comforting Words of Reassurance to Support the Calling

"*But the LORD said to him, 'Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man.*"'

7. (6:17-21) The Confirmation of the Calling by a Miraculous Sign
<u>Gideon's Famous Fleece</u>

Not trying to determine God's will but to confirm it and be reassured.
Not the pattern today for trying to determine God's will. Doesn't mean that God won't sovereignly sometimes give us a sign that provides some confirmation or assurance. But don't demand one.

8. (6:22-24) The Conclusion of the Calling – Mindset of Peace and Confidence Rather Than Fear

"*When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the LORD, he said, 'Alas, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face And the LORD said to him, 'Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die.' Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it* ***The LORD is Peace****. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.*"

<u>Strength Through Weakness</u> – Cutting Gideon's army down to the Lord's size (**Chap. 7**)
7:2 "*And the LORD said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, lest Israel become boastful, saying, 'My own power has delivered me*.'"

Initial 32,000 cut down to only 300! Tremendous victory achieved by the Lord

****

E. The fifth cycle of apostasy (10:6 - 12:15) Jephthah (Ammonites)

Our sin can exhaust the patience and forbearance of God:
(10:11-14) Pattern of Unfaithfulness That Puts Mercy At Risk
"*And the LORD said to the sons of Israel, 'Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the sons of Ammon, and the Philistines? Also when the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hands. Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods; therefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress.*"'

11:1-3 – Jephthah was a valiant warrior but the son of a harlot
From a dysfunctional family; looks like he will amount to nothing; living like **Swamp Fox**

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE GRACE OF GOD IN TRANSFORMING HUMAN OUTCASTS INTO CONQUERING HEROES

The elders of Gilead went to recruit Jephthah from the land of Tob (**11:4-6**)

Rash Vow of Jephthah: 11:30-31

"*And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, "If Thou wilt indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand, [31] then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the LORD's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering*.'"

2 main views:

1) Jephthah's vow involved sacrificing whoever first came out of his door to greet him and he actually carried through and put his only daughter to death

2) Jephthah's vow resulted in dedicating his daughter to perpetual virginity as she served the Lord at the tabernacle (similar to Hannah's later dedication of Samuel)

Don't have time to wrestle with all of the arguments on either side here – it seems to me like he goes ahead and sacrifices his daughter – that seems like the obvious reading of the text – it is only controversial because it is so shocking and so against God's law – but these her

****

F. The sixth cycle of apostasy (chs. 13-16) Samson (Philistines)

Every time Israel passes through this cycle, the deliverer God raises up becomes more and more flawed. By the time you get to Samson, you can see that he is a mess in many ways.

7 Key Lessons:

1. God Can Use Imperfect People

- Despite Samson's flaws—anger, lust, vengeance—God used him to fulfill divine purposes (**Judges 14:3-4**). God at work in strange and unexpected ways.
- Lesson: God's plans are not thwarted by human imperfection. He often works through flawed individuals to accomplish His will.

---

2. Strength Comes from God, Not Ourselves

- Samson's physical strength was not innate; it was a gift from God tied to his Nazirite vow (Judges 16:17).
- Lesson: True strength—whether physical, emotional, or spiritual—comes from dependence on God, not from self-reliance.

---

3. Compromise Leads to Downfall

- Samson repeatedly compromised his calling: he broke his Nazirite vows (drinking wine, touching a dead body, and ultimately cutting his hair).
- Lesson: Small compromises in integrity or faith can lead to larger failures and spiritual decline.

---

4. Lust and Poor Relationships Can Lead to Destruction

- Samson's attraction to Philistine women (especially Delilah) led to betrayal and loss (Judges 16).
- Lesson: Unwise relationships and giving in to temptation can derail a person's calling

and bring painful consequences.

---

5. Pride Precedes a Fall

- Samson assumed his strength would always be with him, even after breaking his vow.
- Lesson: Pride and taking God's gifts for granted can blind us to the consequences of sin.

---

6. Sin Has Consequences

- After Delilah betrayed him, Samson was captured, blinded, and enslaved (Judges 16:21).
- Lesson: God's forgiveness is real, but sin often carries real-world consequences.

---

7. Repentance Can Lead to Redemption

- In the end, Samson repented and prayed for strength to defeat the Philistines one last time (**Judges 16:28–30**).
- Lesson: It's never too late to turn back to God. Even in failure, sincere repentance can lead to redemption.

****

III. The results of Israel's apostasy (ch. 17—21) -- Appendix

A. Religious Depravity -- Idolatry of Micah and the Danites (**ch. 17—18**)

17:1-6 The Man-Made establishment of a counterfeit worship sanctuary
Established a personal worship shrine; at the center was a graven image out of silver

17:7-13 The Man-Made establishment of a counterfeit priesthood
Vs. 13 – essence of the prosperity gospel – treating his priest like a good luck charm
"*Now I know that the Lord will prosper me, seeing I have a Levite as priest*."

COUNTERFEIT, MAN-MADE SPIRITUALITY REINFORCES ITS OWN CYCLE OF SELF DECEPTION (AND OFFENDS GOD BY REPLACING OBJECTIVE DIVINE STANDARDS WITH ANARCHY AND MORAL RELATIVISM)

Four Deceptions of the Prosperity Gospel:

1) **(18:1-6) Its Attractiveness** – 5 spies from the tribe of Dan who are seeking to acquire a more attractive land as their inheritance – they come to the religious shrine of Micah – the tribe had failed to drive out the Amorites – Judges 1:34 indicates that Dan was forced into the hills – not a good situation

2) **(18:7-10) Its Mission** – Not pursuing God's agenda, but personal gain – coveting power and possessions

3) **(18:11-26) Its Treachery** – 600 Danites mobilized to attack the country of Laish – stole Micah's gods (the graven image, the ephod and household idols and the molten image) and his counterfeit priest

4) **(18:27-31) Its Results** – Danites conquer Lish, settle there and establish their own

worship center and priest – Achieve short term results that look impressive but are at odds with God's kingdom program

What happened to the tribe of Dan? In the book of 1 Chronicles, when the list of the tribes and families in Israel is given, Dan is the only tribe which is **totally ignored**. They had vanished into obscurity, probably because of intermarriage with the Philistines. Dan did not take what God had given to them, and they took what God had not given them. In the process, they lost all that they had.

B. Moral Depravity -- Immorality of Gibeah and the Benjamites (**chs. 19—21**)
Shocking story – a Levite hooks up with a concubine from Bethlehem; ends up in a depraved city of Gibeah. They were shown hospitality by an old man who took them into his home so they would not be vulnerable to sexual attack by sleeping in the open square. Still the wicked men of the city demanded sexual relations with the Levite guest but ended up instead seizing the concubine by force and raping her until she died. The Levite dismembered her body into 12 pieces and sent the pieces to the 12 tribes of Israel to galvanize military support for seeking vengeance against the tribe of Benjamin. Look how bad things are – Civil War.

Sacrificed his concubine to save his own skin. Jesus sacrifices Himself to save His chosen bride.

****

WHY STUDY THIS BOOK? 6 Key Reasons:

- To warn ourselves of the inherent dangers of times of prosperity and rest when it is so easy to lose sight of our need for dependence upon God
- To learn the lessons of history of how compromise with sin can lead to such catastrophic failures and judgmental oppression
- To appreciate the patience and faithfulness of our covenant-keeping God who never gives up on His elect people (**Judges 2:1-2**)
- To observe Satan's tactics in raising up such formidable enemies in opposition to God's kingdom agenda
- To see how God can use individuals (both men and women) to accomplish His purposes despite their warts and flaws – provides insights into the grace of God
- To value Christ our Savior as we see how God raised up a variety of limited human champions to provide temporary deliverance in the moment – the cycle of failure demonstrates that ultimate salvation must come through divine intervention = the coming Messiah-King

****

Outline:

I. **The reasons** for Israel's apostasy (1:1 - 3:6) – Introduction
   A. Incomplete Obedience – not exterminating the inhabitants of Canaan
   B. Ignorance in Knowing God -- Generational Disconnect
   C. Idolatry in Pursuing False Gods
   D. Intermarriage with Pagans

II. **The record** of Israel's apostasy (3:7 - 16:31) – 6 Repeating Cycles of Apostasy

A. The first cycle of apostasy (3:7-11)	Othniel	(Mesopotamia)
B. The second cycle of apostasy (3:12-30)	Ehud	(Moabites)
C. The third cycle of apostasy (chs. 4-5)	Deborah and Barak	(Canaanites)
D. The fourth cycle of apostasy (6:1 - 10:5)	Gideon	(Midianites)
E. The fifth cycle of apostasy (10:6 - 12:15)	Jephthah	(Ammonites)
F. The sixth cycle of apostasy (chs. 13-16)	Samson	(Philistines)

III. **The results** of Israel's apostasy (ch. 17—21) -- Appendix
   A. Religious Depravity -- Idolatry of Micah and the Danites (ch. 17—18)
   B. Moral Depravity -- Immorality of Gibeah and the Benjamites (chs. 19—21)

OUTLINE OF JUDGES

FAITHFULNESS OF GOD VS WORLDLINESS OF GOD'S PEOPLE

BIG IDEA:
DETERIORATING CYCLES OF IDOLATRY AND REBELLION DESPITE THE LORD'S PATIENT FAITHFULNESS AND GRACIOUS DELIVERANCE END UP IN THE DEPTHS OF RELIGIOUS AND MORAL DEPRAVITY

I. (1:1 – 3:6) Justification for the Lord's Anger --
Introduction to the Judges

A. (1:1-21) The Compromise of Subtle Sin Sows Seeds of Spiritual Decay Leading to Future Catastrophic Failures

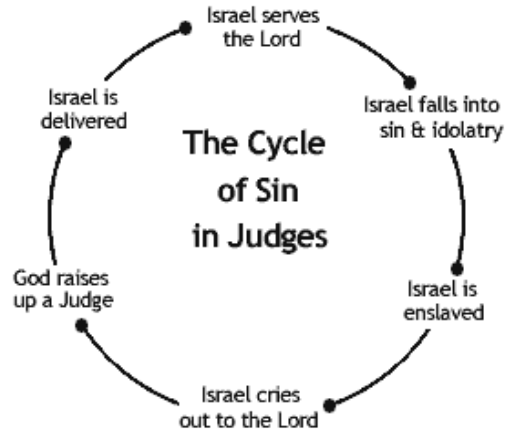
B. (:1:22-36) Northern Tribes Intensify the Disappointing Pattern of Failed Objectives and Compromise With the Enemy

C. (2:1-15) Despite Spectacular Miracles and Divine Favor Extended to Their Fathers, the Second Generation Sinks Into Apostasy and Defeat

D. (2:11 – 3:6) Stubborn Sin Provokes the Lord to Anger and Perpetuates the Cycle of Defeat: Sin, Servitude, Supplication, Salvation, Slippage (Rest)

II. (3:7 – 16:31) Journal of Six Repeated Cycles of Apostasy and Deliverance Highlighting the Faithfulness of a Long Suffering God --
Main Section – Selected History of Twelve Key Judges and their role in bringing deliverance from specific different enemies –

Traces **Six Times** the repeated cycle of:



- Apathy / Apostasy / Affliction / Answered Prayer
- Disobedience / Desperation / Deliverance
- Rebellion / Retribution / Repentance /Rescue – Restoration - Rest
- Sin / Suffering – Servitude / Supplication / Salvation / Slippage

Structure is marked by the repetition of the phrase:

"*and the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah*"
(**3:7; 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1**)

Interesting that **8:33** shows this variation in language: "*the children of Israel turned again, and played the harlot after the Baalim*" – because the "deliverer" in this case was the self-appointed Abimelech rather than one of the judges raised up by God; he brought even more trouble down upon the people – so this is more of an Aside by way of contrast

God Can Transform Different Types of People Into Courageous and Effective Leaders:

A. (3:7-11) **Cycle #1** – Deliverance from Mesopotamia -- The Cycle Summarized and Idealized – Privileged Othniel (**Judge #1**) – God can use a man controlled by the Holy Spirit

B. (:3:12-30) **Cycle #2** – Deliverance from Moab (along with Ammon and Amalek) -- The Cycle Expanded – Limited Ehud (**Judge #2**) – God can use a man who allows his weakness to be converted to a strength

PARENTHESIS (3:31) -- The Cycle Minimized – Resourceful Shamgar (**Judge #3**) – God can use a man who dedicates all he has to the cause of the Lord

C. (4:1 – 5:31) **Cycle #3** – Deliverance from Canaanites -- Deborah (**Judge #4**) and Barak – God can use a woman who gives God all the glory

1. (4:1-24) Historical Narrative -- God Uses Unconventional Means – Including the Leadership Role of Women (Deborah and Jael) – To Ensure that the Glory for Salvation Belongs Ultimately to Him Alone

2. (5:1-31) Hymn of Celebration -- The Lord Brings Victory When Leaders Lead and People Commit Themselves to Fight the Battle

D. (6:1 – 8:32) **Cycle #4** – Deliverance from Midianites -- Gideon (**Judge #5**) – God can use a man who overcomes his fears and trusts the divine blueprint for warfare

1. (6:1-24) The Call of Gideon -- The Call of God Should Transform Our Sense of Inadequacy Into a Mindset of Peace and Confidence as We Focus on the Lord's Enabling Presence

2. (6:25-32) Consecration of Gideon and his Family – Consecration is the Prerequisite to Effective Spiritual Service

3. (6:33-40) Confirmation of Gideon's Calling – The Patience of God Transforms the Hesitancy of Our Weak Faith Into Bold Action Empowered by His Spirit

4. (7:1-8) Cutting Gideon's Army Down to the Lord's Size – Only Desperate Odds Ensure That the Lord Gets the Glory For Giving the Victory

5. (7:8 – 8:3) Blueprint for Victorious Warfare: The Sword of the Lord and of Gideon – Following the Divine Blueprint for Warfare Yields Amazing Victory Over Formidable Foes As We Understand the Character of Our Commander-In-Chief

6. (8:4-21) No Fence Sitting in Spiritual Warfare – Not Taking sides Is Not An Option When the Lord Calls On You To Support the Righteous

7. (8:22-32) The Snare of Hierarchical Human Leadership: The King Complex – God's Plan For Governance Should Not Be Embraced In Theory Only

ASIDE (8:33-9:57) – Failed Human Model of Abimelech – Lording it Over the Sheep

1. (8:33-35) – Transition – No Loyalty to Their Covenant God or the Household of Gideon

2. (9:1-21) -- Lording it Over the Sheep: The Abimelech / Diotrephes Model of Leadership – One Man Rule That Lords It Over the Sheep Usurps God's Preeminent Role and Results In a Reign of Futility That Culminates In Destruction

3. (9:22-57) The Curse of Jotham: Treachery Rewarded With Treachery – The Faithfulness of God Includes the Fulfillment of His Curses

PARENTHESIS (10:1-5)

1. (10:1-2) Tola (**Judge #6**)

2. (10:3-5) Jair (**Judge #7**)

E. (10:6-12:15) **Cycle # 5** – Deliverance from Philistines and Ammonites – Jephthah (**Judge #8**) – God can use a man who is rejected by the world but appropriates His grace

1. (10:6-11:28) Rise of Jephthah – From Despised Reject to Desired Recruit -- Don't Underestimate the Love of God in Remaining Faithful to His People Despite Their Repeated Apostasies . . . And Don't Underestimate the Grace of God in Transforming Human Outcasts Into Conquering Heroes

2. (11:29-40) Jephthah's Tragic Vow – Don't Bargain With God – Commitments Made to the Lord Must Be Kept Regardless of the Cost

3. (12:1-7) Jephthah's Legacy -- Internal Conflict Tears Apart the People of God – Inflated Egos and a Harsh Spirit Erupt in Tragic Conflict for the People of God

PARENTHESIS (12:8-15)

1. (12:8-10) Ibzan (**Judge #9**)

2. (12:11-12) Elon (**Judge #10**)

3. (12:13-15) Abdon (**Judge #11**)

F. (13:1-16:31) **Cycle #6** –Deliverance from Philistines – Samson (**Judge #12**) – God can use a man who trusts in Him for supernatural results despite severe character flaws

1. (13:1-25) Samson's Bright Beginning – The Awesomeness of Our God Calls for a Life of Separation From Sin Unto His Service

2. (14:1-20) Samson's Fatal Flaw – Part of God's Providential Plan – The Fatal Flaw of Self Indulgent Lust Becomes the Stimulant God Uses to Accomplish His Providential

Plans For His People

3. (15:1-20) Samson's Supernatural Strength – The Lord Anoints Israel's Deliverer With Supernatural Strength to Emerge Victorious in the Cycle of Retaliation with the Conniving Uncircumcised Philistines

4. (16:1-31) Samson's Final Feat – Israel's Flawed Champion Fulfills His Calling By Bringing Down the House in His Final Feat of Supernatural Strength – Providential Preparation and Positioning Lead to the Performance of a Champion

III. (17:1 – 21:25) Jumbled Mess of Religious and Moral Depravity –
Characteristic phrase: **17:6** "*In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes*." Repeated in **18:1; 19:1; 21:25**

2 Appendices:

A. (17:1 – 18:31) Religious Depravity Decried – The Prosperity Gospel Exposed

1. (17:1-13) Household System of Counterfeit, Man-Made Spirituality – House of Micah – Reinforcing its Own Cycle of Self Deception and Offending God by Replacing Objective Divine Standards with Anarchy and Moral Relativism

2. (18:1-31) Tribal System of Counterfeit, Man-Made Spirituality – Tribe of Dan – Don't Confuse Material Prosperity with the Blessing of the Lord

B. (19:1 – 21:25) Moral Depravity Decried

1. (19:1-30) The Nation's Shocking Depths of Moral Depravity -- What Does It Take to Shock God's People Into Outrage Over Depraved Wickedness?

2. (20:1-48) The Nation's Response – The Painful Process of Purging Evil – The Pervasiveness of Perversity Reaps Tragic Judgment on God's People

3. (21:1-25) The Nation's Crisis – The Fruits of a Canaanized Culture are Messy Situations and Messy Solutions – Yet God By His Grace Preserves His People

TEXT: Judges 1: 1-21

TITLE: SUBTLE SIN SOWS SEEDS OF SPIRITUAL DECAY --
HAVE YOU SEIZED THE VICTORY THAT GOD HAS GRACIOUSLY GIVEN?

BIG IDEA:
THE COMPROMISE OF SUBTLE SIN SOWS SEEDS OF SPIRITUAL DECAY LEADING TO FUTURE CATASTROPHIC FAILURES

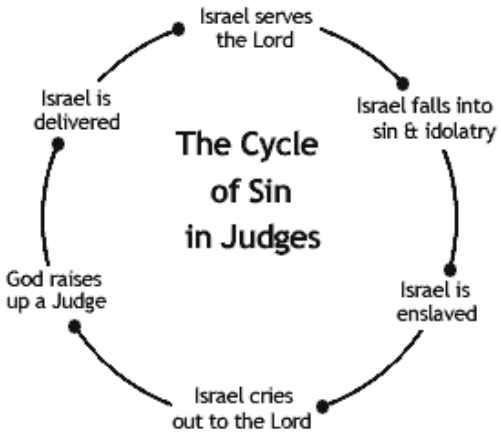
INTRODUCTION:

We embark this morning on a new adventure. Leaving the record of the victorious spread of the gospel recorded in the book of Acts, we turn our attention to the **book of Judges** and the struggles of the tribes of Israel as they seek to fully possess the promised land. Never have a people been promised so much by God and yet failed to appropriate the blessings because of their disobedience and lack of faith. We are going to witness a sad tale of people that just refuse to learn from their failures and continue to commit the same sins repeatedly over and over and over again. It is no surprise that the consequences of idolatry and rebellion and friendship with the world and spiritual apathy remain consistently painful and severe.

Overall structure of the book is easy to follow:
I. (1:1 – 3:6) Introduction to the Judges – **Justification for the Lord's Anger**

II. (3:7 – 16:31) Main Section – Selected History of a Number of Key Judges and their role in bringing deliverance from specific different enemies – **Journal of Repeated Cycles of Apostasy and Deliverance highlighting the Faithfulness of a Long Suffering God**

Traces the repeated cycle of: (six or seven of these cycles involving 12 judges – Eli and Samuel would raise the number to 14)



Apathy / Apostasy / Affliction / Answered Prayer
Disobedience / Desperation / Deliverance
Rest / Rebellion / Retribution / Repentance /Rescue
Sin / Suffering – Servitude / Supplication / Salvation

You get the picture

III. (17:1 – 21:25) 2 Appendices – **Jumbled Mess of Religious and Moral Depravity**

Why are these special heroes called "*Judges*" – not what we think of when we use that term = someone sitting in a courtroom in majestic flowing robes making decisions about various cases. These men and women are special deliverers or saviors raised up by God to deliver His people from oppression from foreign conquerors because of their own apostasy and disobedience to God's covenant. But they did not pass their leadership down to their children. They also did not rule in a centralized fashion but over regions or tribes. So some of their activities could overlap.

Dale Ralph Davis: This Introduction is an apology for omitting an introduction. Not that it couldn't be done. We could wade through it all: . . . the moral problems in the stories, chronology, archaeology, date, authorship – all those exciting things readers are just dying to know. … [he quotes I. Howard Marshall's introduction to his commentary on Luke:] I have a growing conviction that we would find far more fun and profit in Bible study if we gave more heed to the introductions the biblical writers themselves prefaced to their works . . . We do better to jump straight into the biblical text and get dirty with its ink.

Not to say that we won't touch on all of these matters where appropriate, but we will concentrate on jumping right into the text itself.

Passage traces through a geographic progression … but we will also be looking at a common moral and theological thread:
SEVEN ?? SEEDS OF DECAY – SUBTLE SINS INVOLVING COMPROMISE

Interpretation Problem: Is what has been recorded positive or negative from a moral standpoint??

Military Campaigns look successful on the surface, but there is cause for concern as we think of the consequences down the road from these seeds of decay

Everything centers around the difficulty God's people have fully obeying the commands of their invisible leader; we have been called to be different from the world around us; but we fall into the trap of using the tactics and methods of the world because we fail to rely solely on the Lord and His resources for victory

Illustration: Decay – rust around base of pole holding up basketball hoop; integrity of the system did not give way all at once; it was gradually decaying over time; sprayed black paint on the exterior, but still decaying inside – when the catastrophe hit it was sudden and dramatic

(:1-3) CONTEXT: CRISIS IN LEADERSHIP –
#1 SEED OF DECAY: CHOOSING MAN'S WISDOM OVER GOD'S WISDOM -- REASONABLE HUMAN STRATEGY THAT FAILS TO TRUST THE DIVINE DIRECTIVE

> "*Now it came about after the death of Joshua that the sons of Israel inquired of the LORD, saying, 'Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?' And the LORD said, 'Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand.' Then Judah said to Simeon his brother, 'Come up with me into the territory allotted me, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I in turn will go with you into the territory allotted you.' So Simeon went with him.*"

Contrast between book of Joshua and Judges:

- Victory and Conquest - Defeat and Despair
- Strong leadership - Total Anarchy

Key verse: **17:6**; **21:25** "*In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes*."

- Joy, strength, sense of unity - Sorrow, weakness, lack of unity
- Apostasy and Idolatry - Loyalty and Faithfulness to the Lord

What brought about this great change?

Remember God's key promises in the Abrahamic Covenant:

- **A seed** – remarkable given the elderly state of Abraham and Sarah – culminates in the Messiah – early history of Israel under the leadership of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph)
- **A land** – never forget the importance of the promised land – Moses brought the people out of bondage in Egypt in the Exodus and Joshua brought them into the land; important to fully possess the land graciously given to them – culminates in the Messianic kingdom
- **A blessing to the world** – culminates in the New Covenant

Despite the ups and downs of Israel in terms of their obedience and then unfaithfulness to the covenant, God remains faithful to His promises; He will never cast aside His covenant; that is what we believe God is not done yet with His program for the nation of Israel.

Contrast between **the faithfulness of God** and the **unfaithfulness of His people**

> **2:1-5** *Now the angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you, 2 and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done? 3 "Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.'" 4 And it came about when the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept. 5 So they named that place Bochim; and there they sacrificed to the LORD.*

Should break our hearts as we think of our own lives and consider our own sinfulness set against the holiness and faithfulness of our Savior

Problem of the Second Generation:
They lose their fervent love for the Lord; they tend to function more on external obligation than on heart conviction
Josh. 24:31 "*Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, and had known all the deeds of the Lord which He had done for Israel*."

Daniel Block: Presumably the divine will on the matter was to be ascertained by the high priest's manipulation of the Urim and Thummim, as prescribed for Joshua in Num. 27:21.

Why would this alliance between Judah and Simeon make natural sense:

- Full brothers – the offspring of Jacob and his first wife Leah
- The territory promised to Simeon co-existed with that larger segment promised to Judah

Gen. 49:8-12 – prophecy of Judah's preeminence

I. (:4-7) UPLAND CAMPAIGN AGAINST BEZEK – ("*went up*")

#2 SEED OF DECAY: COLLECTING PRIDEFUL TROPHIES AFTER THE PATTERN OF THE WORLD

> "*And Judah went up, and the LORD gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hands; and they defeated ten thousand men at Bezek. And they found Adoni-bezek in Bezek and fought against him and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. And Adoni-bezek said, 'Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to gather up scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me.' So they brought him to Jerusalem and he died there.*"

Constable: Each of the major divisions of 1:1—2:5 opens with a form of the verb *'alah* (to go up; **1:4, 22; 2:1**). This verb also appears in 1:1, 2, and 3.

A. Impressive Victory – does not mean that Judah was right to engage the tribe of Simeon in co-leadership position
Look at how the Lord consistently **gives** His people the victory and yet they have to fight to make it happen

What should they have done with Adoni-bezek when they caught up with him?

- Not followed the course of the world – crippling him from any effective military action or opposition; made him helpless and object of scorn and derision
- Commentary of pagan king saying that his punishment was justified along the lines of "what goes around comes around" does not mean that God was pleased with this outcome
- Not make him a personal trophy as a point of pride in their success
- Should not have died in Jerusalem but outside the camp

Shawn Drake: This was an act to humiliate the enemy and it was something that many other nations did. Since when did God want His people to take on the actions of other nations?

David Block: The author hereby declares obliquely that the newly arrived Israelites (including the tribe of Judah) have quickly adopted a Canaanite ethic. Apart from the issue of having spared a man who clearly came under the sentence of death [Deut. 7:1-2; 20:16-17] with the rest of the people, instead of looking to Yahweh for ethical guidance, the Israelites use the Canaanites as models when deciding how to treat captives.

II. (:8) CAMPAIGN AGAINST JERUSALEM –

#3 SEED OF DECAY: GOING BEYOND THE LORD'S INSTRUCTIONS -- FAILING TO OCCUPY THE CAPTURED CITY ON A PERMANENT BASIS

"*Then the sons of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire.*"

Is this a little like Moses getting ticked off and striking the rock twice in anger and ruining the symbolic picture the Lord wanted to present to His people?
You set a city on fire to make it uninhabitable and undesirable – they needed to take it under their control and domination and not allow any enemies to set up strongholds there in the future

Sanctify the city for the Lord's purposes; don't try to wipe it out and then allow for the devil to move back in with even stronger forces
[But what about other exceptions: **Josh. 6:24** – but Jericho was cursed and not to be rebuilt; **8:8** – God commanded Joshua to treat city of Ai just like Jericho; **11:11-13** only burned Hazor]

Constable: Even though the soldiers of Judah and Simeon captured and burned Jerusalem, the Israelites were not able to keep the Jebusites from returning to control their ancient capital (cf. v. 21; 19:11-12; Josh. 15:63).

"The Jebusites were a mixed people who descended from early colonies of Hittites and Amorites in Canaan."

Jerusalem became Israel's permanent possession years later when David finally exterminated the Jebusites (2 Sam. 5:6-9). The Israelites' unfaithfulness in subduing the land is one of the major emphases of Judges

III. (:9-18) DOWNLAND CAMPAIGNS ("*went down*")

(:9) Overview

"*And afterward the sons of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites*

- *living in the hill country* Judahite uplands south of Jerusalem
- *and in the Negev* southern part of Judah which is mainly desert
- *and in the lowland.*" Transitional region of Judah between the hill country and the coastal plain

A. (:10-15) Campaign against those in the <u>Hill Country</u> – two part campaign

<u>1. (:10) Hebron</u>

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

2 Sam. 5:1-5 Hebron later became capital city for King David; highest city in elevation in Judah

Block: To the Israelites the name *Anakim* became proverbial for great and fearsome foes (Deut. 9:2).

<u>2. (:11-15) Debir</u> --

<u>#4 SEED OF DECAY</u>: CUTTING DEALS WITHOUT REGARD TO SPIRITUAL CONVICTIONS AND PRIORITIES

"*Then from there he went against the inhabitants of Debir (now the name of Debir formerly was Kiriath-sepher). And Caleb said, 'The one who attacks*

Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will even give him my daughter Achsah for a wife.' And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, captured it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah for a wife. Then it came about when she came to him, that she persuaded him to ask her father for a field. Then she alighted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, 'What do you want?' And she said to him, 'Give me a blessing, since you have given me the land of the Negev, give me also springs of water.' So Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs."

Zondervan Pict. Ency. Of Bible: located in the hill country of the Shephelah to the west of Jerusalem

Shawn Drake: the Hebrew actually means "*to nag*". She was "nagging" her husband to get this field for her

Land had characteristics similar to the desert Negev area – she wanted a more fertile land

B. (:16-17) Campaign against those in the <u>Negev</u> – two part campaign
<u>#5 SEED OF DECAY</u>: ASSIMILATING FOREIGNERS WITHOUT SUBJUGATING THEM TO THE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

1. (:16) Campaign against Arad

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

They did not wipe out the Canaanites living in the area … they just took up residence with the existing pagans.

2. (:17) Campaign against Zephath – named Hormah

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

Positive example by way of contrast to the compromise involved in campaign against Arad

C. (:18) Campaign against those in the <u>Lowland</u> – Against Three Key Cities and surrounding territories

1. Gaza

"*And Judah took Gaza with its territory*"

2. Ashkelon

"*and Ashkelon with its territory*"

3. Ekron

"*and Ekron with its territory.*"

(:19-21) SUMMARY – MUCH SUCCESS (ATTRIBUTED TO THE FAVOR OF THE LORD) BUT SEEDS OF FAILURE (GIVING UP IN AREAS WHERE THEY FAILED TO TRUST THE POWER OF THE LORD)

A. (:19) Summary with respect to Tribe of Judah

#6 SEED OF DECAY: OVERESTIMATING THE STRENGTH OF THE ENEMY AND UNDERESTIMATING THE POWER OF GOD

> **"***Now the LORD was with Judah, and they took possession of the hill country; but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had iron chariots.*"

Daniel Block: In light of Deut 7:1-3 and after the miraculous conquest of Jericho (Joshua 6), no one, no matter how technologically superior to the Israelites, should have been able to withstand Judah's attack. This verse must be read in light of Josh 17:16-18, according to which Joshua had encouraged Ephraim and Manasseh by specifically declaring that the Canaanites' superior strength and their possession of iron chariots would be no hindrance to the Josephite tribes' conquest of the river valleys and plains. In our test (v. 18a) the narrator explicitly attributes Judah's successes in the hill country not to equivalent military power but to the presence of Yahweh. Then why could they not take the lowland? Why is Yahweh's presence canceled by superior military technology?

B. (:20) Summary with respect to Caleb

> "*Then they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had promised; and he drove out from there the three sons of Anak.*"

C. (:21) Summary with respect to the Tribe of Benjamin -- Transitional

#7 SEED OF DECAY: COEXISTING WITH THE ENEMY

> "*But the sons of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have lived with the sons of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.*"

Constable: Jerusalem (v. 21) was on the border of Judah and Benjamin but mainly within Benjamin's territory. The Hinnom Valley on the southern edge of the city was the boundary. Even though the soldiers of Judah and Simeon captured Jerusalem, the Benjamites could not hold it. This is evidently why the writer referred to the Benjamites at this point. This failure was another significant incident of inadequate trust and obedience (cf. v. 19). It also foreshadowed the Benjamites' role in the final disastrous chapters of the book (chs. 19—21).

Shawn Drake: God had told them many times that when they took a city that they were not leave any of the people alive; but we see here several times where instead of killing everyone they just made them slaves. Now what would be wrong with that? They could get the best of both worlds. They didn't have to kill anyone and they could get someone to do their manual labor and the types of things they didn't want to do.

CONCLUSION:

This passage is all about taking sin seriously; trusting God totally and being committed to Him so that we don't compromise in any of those subtle areas.

We need to seize possession of the blessings that the Lord has promised us and experience the spiritual victory He has for us. He does not want us just to try to be holy. He wants us to be holy because He is holy.

Seeds of spiritual decay will sprout eventually and the fruit will be ugly. Our life will come crashing down just like my basketball hoop.

Be Careful: THE COMPROMISE OF SUBTLE SIN SOWS SEEDS OF SPIRITUAL DECAY LEADING TO FUTURE CATASTROPHIC FAILURES

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) If the Lord gives us spiritual victory, why does He also require us to fight for it?

2) Where does human reason seem to conflict with the divine directive for a particular situation?

3) What are some iron chariots in our experience where we over-estimate the challenge and under-estimate the power of the Lord?

4) What sins are we allowing to co-exist with our devotion to following the Lord?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gil Rugh: **Survey of Judges**
Joshua: enemies have been crushed; land parceled out to various tribes; book of success
Judges: named after various key deliverers who functioned at this time; people are settled into the land but fall into subjugation from time to time because of their sin; covers about 350 years in time; from death of Joshua to the establishment of the kingdom and appointment of Saul; 1375-1050 B.C. a long period of time; failure of the nation because of apostasy and disobedience; spiritual desolation; **17:6** no central control; no dominant over-arching leader who passes on his leadership; overlapping periods with these judges; **21:25** repeats theme statement; time of lawlessness; pertinent book for our day; seriousness of compromise with the world; large consequences to what seemed to Israel not major acts of disobedience; made slaves out of their enemies instead of wiping them out; seemed like a better solution to them; each tribe is responsible to clean out the opposition that remains in their allotted section; but they have the land; book of the settlers instead of pioneering spirit of Joshua; more days of routine than dramatic, eventful times; remember the warnings back in Joshua;

1:1-2:5 Introduction to book;
1:1-7 alliance between 2 tribes – Judah and Simeon – Simeon did not get quite as defined a territory as the other tribes; prophesied that he would be scattered among his brethren; his portion among the land of Judah anyway; so this was a natural alliance; major opposition broken in Joshua but major numbers remain to be driven out; lord of Bezek or king of Bezek; since they used spears and swords as weapons of warfare, he would be incapable of warfare; could not plant himself with secure footing; Jerusalem one of the oldest cities in the world; continuously occupied for about 5000 years; Benjamin's territory just above Judah; but very small tribe; southern kingdom will be comprised of both Benjamin and Judah; Jebusites not driven out of

Jerusalem until time of David when it becomes the city of David; each tribe required to depend on God and recognize their need of Him and go to war for Him; pattern of not completely driving out the enemy;

David Silversides: **The Lord's Battle 1:1 – 2:5**
Two main sections:
First 16 chapters the cycles of Israel's defeats and deliverance; judges = deliverers or saviors
Chap. 17 – end – 2 appendices giving examples of Israel's dreadful condition; very dark picture of human nature; terrible sins
Judges shows how repulsive sin is; never makes it attractive; lessons about human nature within context of God's people

1. Victory because the battle is the Lord's (1:1-18b)
The Lord had promised the land of Canaan to the seed of Abraham; now they renewed the war against the Canaanites
Preeminence of Judah had been prophesied; lion of Judah would come through this tribe; Simeon assisted Judah
:11-15 Debir more difficult to take; Caleb offered special inducement; some situations require greater faith; certain rashness in Caleb some think; father reserved right to give his daughter to whom he would; keep in mind two things:

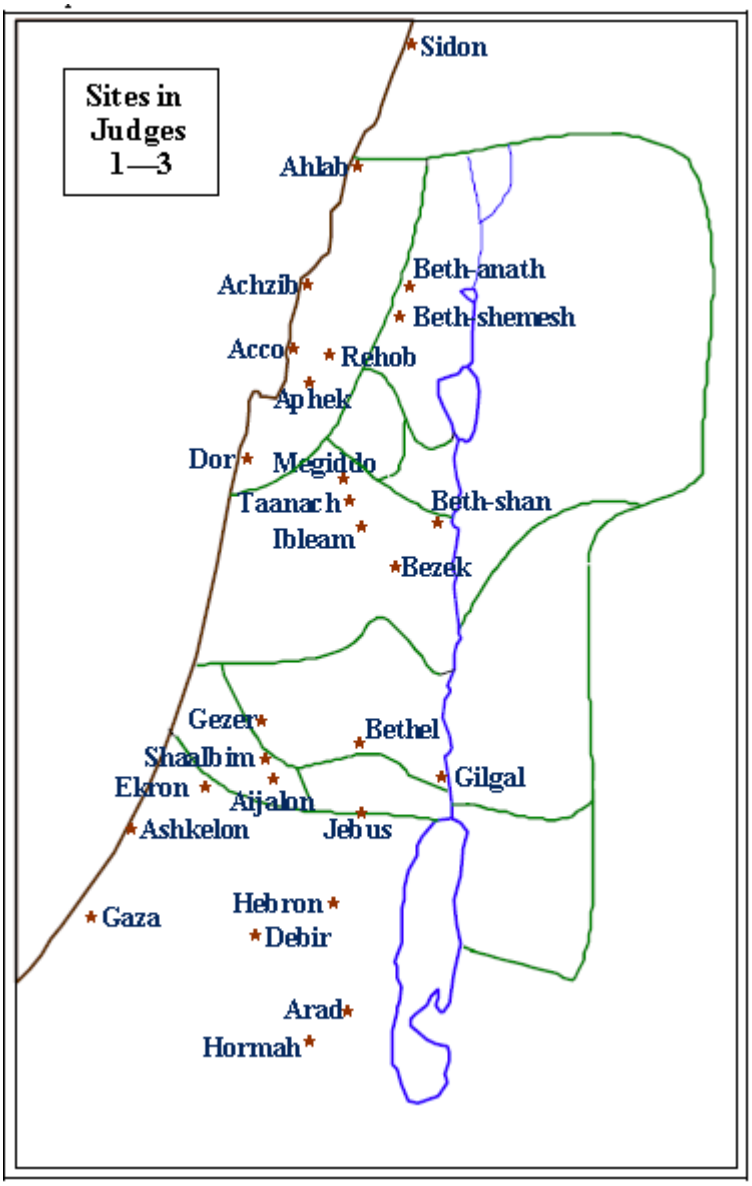
- As a leader of the people he was demonstrating the extent of his commitment to kingdom of God; he would give up his daughter to have Debir taken
- Might have also been keeping his daughter's interests in mind; warrior like this would be a man of faith and confidence in the Lord

:16 – Jethro's family joined Israel
:17 – further victories of Judah

2. (1:19- end of chapter) – The effects of unbelief
Josh. 24:14ff – commitment to embrace God entirely; answered too readily; did not grasp their own sinfulness and inability to walk in paths of God; if you profane His covenant, He will judge you; Joshua perceived the overconfidence of the people
What Joshua perceived begins to show itself in actions of Judah and Simeon; took the hills but not the valleys; Benjamites had Jebusites dwelling among them; etc.

Shawn Drake: **The Start of Decay** [takes more of the approach I see in this passage]
1:1-3 Compromised Leadership
1:4-7 Compromised Attitudes
1:8-15 Compromised Families
1:16-36 Compromised Warfare

Constable: Arthur Cundall suggested that one of the purposes of Judges may have been to provide apologetic justification for Israel's monarchy.[9] William Dumbrell believed its purpose was primarily to show the sovereign grace of God in preserving Israel in spite of Israel.[10] Leon Wood wrote that its primary purpose was to show why Israel did not experience God's promised blessings.[11] Herbert Wolf believed the primary purpose was to show that Israel's spiritual condition determined its political and material situation.[12] Daniel Block argued that it was to reveal the Canaanization of Israel in the pre-monarchic period of Israel's history.[13] David Howard wrote that the purpose was "to show the consequences of disobedience to God and to point the way to a king, who, if he were righteous, would lead the people to God.



http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/judges.pdf

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **The Danger of Partial Obedience**

Introduction: We're going to be doing a series through the book of Judges that we're calling Faithfulness in Faithless Times. Joshua, the faithful servant of the Lord, is gone. He had died. And the nation is now called to finish what God commanded, what was the command, where they were to take full possession of the land of Canaan, the promised land. And at first they start out well. When you read the first part of Judges chapter one, you see faith, you see victory, you see courage. But by the end of chapter one, what you see is compromise begins to creep in. And the tone shifts from victory to failure. And so this chapter teaches us a real powerful lesson in our own life, and that is **partial obedience leads to partial victory. And partial victory will lead eventually to spiritual defeat.**

Big Idea: **Three Observations**

I. The call to conquest – vs. 1-11

After Joshua's death, God again calls his people to complete the task. They are to finish, to take possession of the land, the occupation of the promised land.

A. The Guidance they requested – **vs. 1**

When faced with the question of who will lead us into battle, the children of Israel, they turned to God, not to human strategy. That's a good way to start. In the vacuum of leadership, the Israelites acknowledged that God was their leader, and so they seek the guidance of God.

B. The Guarantee they received – **vs. 2**

It's almost like God is reaffirming this promise here to this new generation. And so, God gives a promise of victory before even they can unsheath their sword.

God chooses Judah to be the lead tribe. Judah will lead you into battle. Now, why does God choose Judah?

- **Gen. 49** -- prophetic word that Judah would emerge as the lead tribe; There's a sense in which having Judah lead in Israel's battle was God foreshadowing the ultimate deliverer, the ultimate leader, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- **Vs. 3** – Partnership with tribe of Simeon – they were blood brothers. They both had Leah as their mother. United by blood. Shared their inheritance. Simeon was the smallest tribe so it needed the help of Judah.

Adonai Bezek = wicked king who receives punishment – **vs. 5**

- He got what he deserved because this is what he had done to conquered kings
- This ensured that he would not be a future threat – just like how the Lord has defeated Satan and taken the sword out of his hand

C. The Ground they recovered – **vs. 9**

Here are three strategic areas that are mentioned that they took possession of. The mountain, that's the hill country. The south, that's the Negev, that is the desert area right around Sinai. It's just a big desert area. And then there's the valley, which is the foothills that is also called the Shepela.

1. The hill country, that ws the central highlands.

This was a strategic place because whoever controlled the high ground always had a military advantage. So they wanted to control the high ground. It's also a natural defensive barrier against invaders. Spiritually, as a child of God, you know what? The high places in our lives are those areas that are hardest to reach, but you know what? Those areas need to be surrendered to God as every other area in our life. Victory in the heights brings stability to everything else.

2. The south, that is the desert area.

And this was a region that was really a frontier against desert raiders. Controlling the south meant safeguarding Israel's borders. Spiritually speaking, the dry places of life can represent, I think, and illustrate to us the times in our life that are times of testing and scarcity. You know what? God wants us to have victory in those dry seasons of our life, just as everywhere else. We have to learn to say like the Apostle Paul, I know how to be abased, I know how to abound. I can do what? All things through Christ. Even in the wilderness seasons, God wants to give us victory. He wants to give us protection.

3. The valley, the area called the Shepela.

This would be fertile farmland, the rolling hills, broad valleys. This would really be called the breadbasket of Judah. This was also a buffer zone between the Philistines that lived on the coast and the Israelites that lived in the hills. One way I picture this, it might not help you, but it's always helped me when I was studying the Old Testament. I picture the Philistines as kind of beach people, beach bums, you know? And I picture the Israelites as hillbillies living in the hills. And there's the valley right in the middle of that plain where they would meet. There was a buffer zone. And many of the battles that were fought in the Old Testament were fought in that buffer zone. But here Judah had to take this place here as well, the valley, that buffer zone, And again, the spiritual lesson is, the valley represents the everyday battles of life, the place where the crops grow and the daily needs are met. We have to have spiritual victory in the ordinary places of daily living, not just on the mountaintop, but we also have to have victory there in those daily... places in the plain.

But there's another place I think that is interesting that they conquered. Look at **verse 11**. *And from thence he went against the inhabitants of Deborah. And the name of Debar before was Kerjeth Sefer. And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kerjeth Sefer and taketh it to him will I give aches of my daughter to wife.*

But let's just focus on **verse 11** here first. The word Debar comes from the Hebrew word, which means **word.** And Kirgeth Sefer means *city of books* or *city of the scrolls*. Now some scholars believe it may have been the center of Canaanite learning or the place where there was record keeping. But whoever held that area between the hill country and the lowlands controlled the movement in that land. In Joshua chapter 10, Deborah was a city that was conquered once already, but we can see by now the Canaanites had taken over that city again, and it had to be reconquered. What's the spiritual lesson from Deborah that we can learn?

Since his name means *city of books*, Deborah reminds us that battles are fought not only with swords, but they're fought with ideas, with ideas. There's a **battle for the mind**. And I can say Deborah is an illustration of the strongholds of thought. Remember what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 10, *for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God through the pulling down of strongholds, casting down every imagination, every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*

D. The Giants they routed – **vs. 10**

Earlier, Israel failed to enter the land because of these giants. They could not conquer these giants, but now under the leadership of Judah, they confront them and they defeated them. You know what this teaches us? that what we once feared, or what we once may have caused our defeat, what once may have intimidated us, doesn't mean it has to stay that way. We can overcome the giants that previously defeated us.

II. The Courage to continue – vs. 12-18

A. The Courage of Caleb – **vs. 12**

He's just as ready now as he was 40 years prior. He's ready to take possession of what God has given him, and he needs the help of those around him. This is a father that values his daughter.

B. The Courage of Othniel – **vs. 13**

Othniel, his nephew, rises to the challenge. He wins the battle and he wins the bride. He captures

the city and he becomes Caleb's son-in-law. And by the way, this foreshadows his role as a judge in Israel. We'll see him in chapter 3. He'll come back up. He is one of the great judges that led over the nation of Israel.

C. The Courage of Aksa – **vs. 14**
She didn't just settle for a barren land. She asked her father for something that would make that land fruitful. And so she comes to him boldly, and she asks boldly.

D. The Courage of Judah – **vs. 16**
When God commands us to do something, if we take God at his word, and we obey, and we put feet to faith, you know what's gonna happen? There's gonna be victory in our life. That's what happened here with Judah. God promises spiritual victory, and he'll give it if we obey and we trust.

III. The Cracks of Compromise – vs. 19

The iron chairs are not a problem for God. God will defeat them. So that really wasn't the problem. The problem was they had faith on the mountain, but they had no faith in the valley. That's the problem. They allowed what looked like to them an insurmountable problem in the valley to limit their faith. They allowed fear to dominate them and they forgot faith. They looked at their problem instead of looking at God.

See, when you are following the will of God, don't despair when circumstances seem daunting. The God on the hill is the God in the valley. He's the same God. He's the exact same God. Don't let the size of your problem become bigger than the size of your God. And so what we see as a result of that, when they took their eyes off of God and they put their eyes on the problem, they went from victory to defeat. And they went from full obedience to God to partial obedience, and they brought defeat.

So the rest of chapter 1, what do we see? We see a few wins, but we see massive losses. What we tolerate will eventually dominate us because sin never stays small. Paul said this in Galatians chapter five verse nine. A little bit of leaven leavens the whole lump, right? Just a little bit of leaven. A little compromise can spread and it can affect the whole heart and it can bring defeat in your Christian life. Just as sure as cancer will metastasize, little sins will grow. So leaving Canaanites in the land is like leaving a small crack in the dam. Over time, water pressure enlarges the crack until eventually the whole dam just bursts and it's over. And so we see these litany of failures here at the end of chapter one. And it kind of reaches a crescendo by the end of chapter one.

Closing Lessons:

1) Compromise always leads to captivity.
2) Half obedience is still disobedience.
3) Have faith in God's promise.
4) Don't live below your inheritance.

TEXT: Judges 1:22-36

TITLE: PATTERN OF FAILURE WORSENS

BIG IDEA:
NORTHERN TRIBES INTENSIFY THE DISAPPOINTING PATTERN OF FAILED OBJECTIVES AND COMPROMISE WITH THE ENEMY

INTRODUCTION:

I. (:22-29) HOUSE OF JOSEPH

A. (:22-26) Acts of Joseph – Tribe of Benjamin

"*Likewise the house of Joseph went up against Bethel, and the LORD was with them. And the house of Joseph spied out Bethel (now the name of the city was formerly Luz). And the spies saw a man coming out of the city, and they said to him, 'Please show us the entrance to the city and we will treat you kindly.' So he showed them the entrance to the city, and they struck the city with the edge of the sword, but they let the man and all his family go free. And the man went into the land of the Hittites and built a city and named it Luz which is its name to this day.*"

Josh. 18:22 – Bethel assigned to tribe of Benjamin??

Block: However, unlike Rahab, whose family is fully integrated into Israelite faith and life, the "traitor" (from the Canaanite point of view) is permitted to leave and build his own city and continue his life as a Hittite. Technically Luz/Bethel was conquered, but in reality the city was simply transferred to a new site. The mandate had been betrayed. The new city functions as a sanctioned symbol of" the Canaanite in their midst."

B. (:27-28) Tribe of Manasseh

"*But Manasseh did not take possession of Beth-shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; so the Canaanites persisted in living in that land. And it came about when Israel became strong, that they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but they did not drive them out completely.*"

Jordan: Ordinarily the firstborn of the house receives both the rule over his brethren and a double portion of the inheritance. Jacob divided these two blessings, giving rulership to Judah, and the double portion to Joseph, so that the tribe of Joseph became two tribes, **Ephraim** and **Manasseh** (Gen. 48). Ordinarily Scripture refers to the tribe of Ephraim or the tribe of Manasseh. It is unusual to refer, as here, to the "house of Joseph." In this context, the initially faithful actions of the Joseph tribes are said to be the acts of Joseph, while the later failures of these tribes are said to be the acts of Manasseh and Ephraim.

C. (:29) Tribe of Ephraim

"*Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites who were living in Gezer; so the*

Canaanites lived in Gezer among them."

II. (:30) TRIBE OF ZEBULUN

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

III. (:31-32) TRIBE OF ASHER

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

IV. (:33) TRIBE OF NAPHTALI

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

V. (:34-36) TRIBE OF DAN

"Then the Amorites forced the sons of Dan into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the valley; yet the Amorites persisted in living in Mount Heres, in Aijalon and in Shaalbim; but when the power of the house of Joseph grew strong, they became forced labor. And the border of the Amorites ran from the ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela and upward."

Jordan: Finally, in verse 36, we come to the appalling climax of the second section of this narrative, the response of man. We are told that the Amorites had a border. That is, they were so strong that they had a defined territory which was their own. They were not just hiding out in Israelite territory; they had their own land, and their own recognized border!

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Brensinger: Quoting Barry Webb regarding the progression in this passage:
(:22-26) Israelites victorious over Canaanites
- But some Canaanites allowed to live at a distance

(:27-33) Israelites fail to drive out the Canaanites
- Canaanites live among the Israelites
- Israelites live among the Canaanites

(:34) Canaanites press back Israelites
- But Israelites allowed to live at a distance

While the account repeatedly refers to a failure to "*drive out*," emphasis seems also to fall on acts of compromise. Even the imposition of forced labor implies an agreement of sorts. Rather than

driving them out, the Israelites "worked things out" with the Canaanites.

Dale Ralph Davis: The picture Judges 1 gives us if of an Israel in substantial control of Canaan, a people clearly successful though certainly disobedient. Pragmatic success and spiritual failure – a strange but possible combination. So Israel is dominant if not obedient; she enjoys superiority even if she does not maintain fidelity. . .

In chapter 1 Israel permitted conditions which brought no instant disaster. The impact of her failure became visible later (2:11-13, 19; 3:5-6). What began as toleration became apostasy. What seemed so reasonable proved lethal. Living with Canaanites led to worshiping with Canaanites. Tolerate Baal's people and sooner or later you bow at Baal's altar. But it seemed like a rather small matter at the time.

TEXT: Judges 2:1-15

TITLE: SECOND GENERATION APOSTASY -- A CRYING SHAME --
THE FAMILY TREE OF APOSTASY

BIG IDEA:
DESPITE SPECTACULAR MIRACLES AND DIVINE FAVOR EXTENDED TO THEIR FATHERS, THE SECOND GENERATION SINKS INTO APOSTASY AND DEFEAT

INTRODUCTION:

Today's topic touches each of us very deeply because it deals with the spiritual struggles of those who are closest to us. Why do some children from Christian families have trouble embracing the faith of their parents? We all know situations where this topic is relevant. Those of you at Christian colleges – especially in a mentoring role to younger students – see a wide range of spiritual temperatures – from those who hold passionately to the Lord Jesus as the one they supremely love to those who are lukewarm to those who at this point in their life reject the gospel message.

The OT has plenty of examples of children from godly parents who stray from the path of righteousness:

- Eli and his kids
- David and Absalom
- But the normal pattern should be that of Timothy – **2 Tim. 1:5** "*For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well.*"

Think of the emotional anguish of the parents:

- Heartache of the parents
- Cf. Heartache of God who looks for fruit and finds apostasy instead

Many privileges growing up in a Christian home with godly parents . . .

- But all of the exposure to the truth of God's Word can cut both ways – where there is more light, there is more accountability

Many dangers as well … and we will try to highlight some of these …
you have not seen a perfect model of Christianity but a flawed one

As we continue in this introductory portion of the Book of Judges, we see the transition from the generation of Joshua and those who first entered the promised land to the next generation that is described in terms of Apostasy and Disobedience and Defeat. **What went wrong so quickly**?? Our text more presents the harsh reality of the situation than it does the reasons behind the behavior … but we will try to offer some possibilities so we can be aware of the pitfalls to watch out for as we try to pass the baton of the Christian faith to succeeding generations.

DESPITE SPECTACULAR MIRACLES AND DIVINE FAVOR EXTENDED TO THEIR FATHERS, THE SECOND GENERATION SINKS INTO APOSTASY AND DEFEAT

I. (:1-5) THE ANGEL OF THE LORD INDICTS THE UNFAITHFUL FOR THEIR SHIFTING ALLEGIANCE

A. (:1a) Preeminent Judge = the Angel of the Lord

"*Now the angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim.*"

We know it is a significant occasion when we see the angel of the Lord arrive on the scene – God's special messenger to bring God's perspective to the crisis at hand.

It seems when the definite article "the" is used, it is specifying a unique being, separate from the other angels. The angel of the Lord speaks as God, identifies Himself with God, and exercises the responsibilities of God. . . The appearances of the angel of the Lord cease after the incarnation of Christ. Would appear to be here an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ – a special type of theophany
http://www.gotquestions.org/angel-of-the-Lord.html

Here is one who is qualified to make a righteous judgment – to distinguish between right and wrong; He delivers God's verdict – makes sense for us of the puzzling incidents recorded in Joshua chapter 1 – military campaigns that seem somewhat successful and yet fall short of obeying the divine directive – we talked last week about the **Subtle Sins that Sow Seed of Spiritual Decay that result in future catastrophic failures.** The verses we skipped over at the end of Chap. 1 speak about the failure of the other tribes to drive the Canaanites out of the land assigned to them.

Brensinger: Quoting Barry Webb regarding the progression in this passage:

(:22-26) Israelites victorious over Canaanites
- But some Canaanites allowed to live at a distance

(:27-33) Israelites fail to drive out the Canaanites
- Canaanites live among the Israelites
- Israelites live among the Canaanites

(:34) Canaanites press back Israelites
- But Israelites allowed to live at a distance

Powerful enough to make slaves out of the Canaanites – should have carried through and exterminated them from the land

The contrast in locations is significant – **Gilgal** was the base of operations for Joshua to lead the military attacks against Jericho and other cities in the hill country. The word probably has reference to a circle of stones – **Josh. 4:19-24** – a testimony to future generations of God's great work on their behalf – vs. **Bochim** which will be a place of defeat and weeping instead of victory and joy

B. (:1b) Promised and Performed Covenant Faithfulness—on the part of God

"*And he said, 'I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, I will never break My covenant with you,*'"

gracious work of God on their behalf is reviewed – they have forgotten their tremendous deliverance from Egypt – we constantly need to go back to our experience of redemption and remind our families of how God has been gracious and faithful to us in every way – think of the eternal security we enjoy as children in God's family – **Ephes 2** talks about how far off we were

as enemies and people of the uncircumcision before God brought us near

Great theme of Judges is the Covenant Faithfulness of God despite the repeating cycle of rejection and rebellion by the Jewish people

C. (:2) Professed but Profaned Covenant Unfaithfulness – on the part of the sons of Israel
"*and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars. But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done?*"

We live in a day when leading evangelical Christians are making covenants that seem to me to be very dangerous and against the spirit of the Great Commission mandate. Instead of confronting the error of opposing religions and taking the hit in the media for being narrow-minded and intolerant, some leaders are pursuing a misguided course of reconciliation as if there is value in trying to find points of common agreement. [cf earlier attempts of evangelicals to work with Catholics under some type of official covenant relationship – trying to get leaders to sign some document]

D. (:3) Providential Reversal of Fortunes
"*Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.*'"

Enemies looked like a significant challenge – but Israel had the promise of God of success – now that promise has been overturned because of their unfaithfulness

I have never had *thorns* in my side –small splinters in my fingers are painful enough
Illustration: son Rick fell into a cactus plant on his bike riding excursion across country – had to have his fellow riders pull the stickers out of his backside – not a pleasant experience

God had promised that any toleration of the Canaanites in any form would lead to serious pitfalls **Num. 33:50-56** God's instructions could not have been clearer

E. (:4-5) Penitent Weeping and Wailing
"*And it came about when the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept. So they named that place Bochim; and there they sacrificed to the LORD.*"

Sometimes it is too late to be crying about our failures – although when the people made supplication, God responded in patience and long suffering … it's just that the remorse of the people didn't stick; they kept going back to their pattern of compromise and sin

II. (:6-10a) THE ALLEGIANCE OF JOSHUA'S GENERATION DIES OUT

A. (:6-7) The Faithful Try to Finish Strong

1. (:6) Final Attempts at Possessing the Land they had Inherited
"*When Joshua had dismissed the people, the sons of Israel went each to his inheritance to possess the land.*"

2. (:7) Final Attempts at Serving the Lord
"*And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the*

elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the LORD which He had done for Israel."

Does your family know the *great work of the Lord* on your behalf? Do we have memorials like the stones at Gilgal? Do we live in a context of praise and joy or one of grumbling and discontent?

B. (:8-10a) The Faithful Die Out and are Buried

1. (:8-9) Death and Burial of Joshua

"*Then Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of one hundred and ten. And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.*"

"*the servant of the Lord*" – what a beautiful expression – to be characterized as one who was faithful as a servant leader of God's people

Interesting that this passage does not place the blame on Joshua and his contemporary elders – despite their subtle sins – it lays the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of those who came after and failed to maintain allegiance to their God

2. (:10a) Death and Burial of Joshua's Generation

"*And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers;*"

III. (:10b-13) THE APOSTASY OF THE SECOND GENERATION PROVOKES THE LORD TO ANGER

A. (:10B) Close Connection to God Lost

1. To His Person

"*and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD,*"

Not a problem of intellectual knowledge – but of staying in touch with God; having a close connection; experiencing God

2. To His Work

"*nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.*"

B. (:11) Conduct Shift From Holiness to Wickedness

"*Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals,*"

C. (:12-13) Change in Allegiance to Forsake the Lord and Serve Idols

"*and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them . . . So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroth.*"

Progression: Forsook / followed other gods / bowed down / served them

Very degrading form of religion – involved temple prostitutes, even in its worst form the sacrificing of children

Some of the contributing factors:

- Sensitivity to hypocrisy – lot of talking that is not backed up by living
- Familiarity breeds contempt – look at brothers of Jesus – prophet gets no respect in his own country; etc.
- Blindness to self righteousness and pride – used to comparing yourself favorably to others from a moral and spiritual standpoint
- Minimizing the presence of the Lord and His activity as it directly impacts your daily living
- Religion a matter of legalistic observance rather than a matter of living out personal convictions developed from your own study of God's Word
- Tendency to become lukewarm rather than fervent and settle for mediocrity rather than strive for excellence; comfortable with the status quo
- Prosperity often leads to complacency and independence instead of dependence upon the Lord; taking God's blessings for granted
- Tendency to shy away from confrontation and challenging tasks

D. Consequence of Apostasy = Inciting the Lord to Anger

"*thus they provoked the LORD to anger.*"

The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of the wisdom – surely we don't want to be in a position of provoking the Lord to Anger

IV. (:14-15) THE ANGER OF THE LORD REDUCES THE UNFAITHFUL TO OPPRESSION AND WEAKNESS AND WEEPING

Description of the outworking of the Lord's Wrath:

"*And the anger of the LORD burned against Israel,*"

Jer. 44 is parallel – 800 years later – **pragmatism** – back in Judah when we were worshipping other gods, we seemed to be prospering; so we won't listen to the words of Jeremiah; everything was good back then;

A. Plundered (vs Enriched by God's Grace and Favor)

"*and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them;*"

The Lord is in control in either direction – giving riches and prosperity or giving people over to be plundered and impoverished

B. Oppressed and Defeated (vs Ransomed and Victorious by God's Grace and Favor)

"*and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies.*"

Brings back memories of Joseph being unjustly sold into slavery in Egypt; here the people are justly brought into bondage

Inrig: Diminished power is always the result of diminished faith.

C. Cursed (vs Blessed by God's Grace and Favor)
"*Wherever they went, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had spoken and as the LORD had sworn to them,*"

Key: is the hand of the Lord for you or against you?? Blessing or Cursing??

D. Depressed (vs Joyous by God's Grace and Favor)
"*so that they were severely distressed.*"

If you do good won't your countenance be lifted up?
Next week we will continue this section that previews the cycle seen throughout Judges
Sin, Servitude, Supplication, Salvation, Slippage

CONCLUSION:

Inrig: The second generation has a natural tendency to accept the status quo and to lose the vision of the first generation. Too often the second generation experience is a second-hand experience.

Ps. 106:34-48
Are we guarding against worldliness; against adopting the practices of those around us?
Are we looking to the counsel of the Word of God or relying on human reason and pragmatism?
Hold on to the Lord's great compassion and lovingkindness as we pray for those close to us who are struggling to lay hold of the faith of their fathers
Where there is repentance, there is grace and great blessing!

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How could the people so quickly forget their weeping at Bochim over the message from the angel of the Lord?

2) How do you remind your family of the work of the Lord on your behalf?

3) What elements of the worship of Baal would have been appealing to the Israelites?

4) What practices of the world around us are creeping into our Christian culture?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gil Rugh: **Israel's Pragmatism**
:1-5 remarkable appearance of the Messenger of the Lord; a theophany; preincarnate Christ; confronting the people about their disobedience; then they were so sorry with so many tears;
:6-10 reminded about Joshua's death; people faithful during those days; review of Joshua 24; did

the parents fail in their instruction? Did the priests fail in their role? We are not told; but it is a catastrophe; challenge to pass it on to the next generation
:11-19 shows a cycle that will be repeated throughout the book – sin, servitude, supplication, salvation – period of 300-350 years;

Reasons for this great apostasy:
1) failed to drive out the Canaanites; now have begun to adopt the gods and worship of the Canaanites; Baal = fertility god – supposed to be responsible for the rain that made the land fertile and productive; Ashtoroth = goddess who was consort of Baal; goddess of war and fertility; Ishtar in Babylon; animal sacrifice; temple prostitution and even human sacrifice of children; immoral and degrading system; can you believe how far the Israelites have fallen? Certain appeal that draws you in; Shiloh has been their worship center – that center now is diffused and central focus of worship lost; tribes doing their own thing; desire to fit in and be acceptable with your neighbors;
2) pragmatism – influenced by what seems to work; Canaanites had possession of much of the fertile areas; land flowing with milk and honey; land was already fertile when we got here; there may be something to their worship system; **Jer. 44** Israel has once again come under the domination of their enemies 800 years later (Babylonians)
3) Temple prostitution – sex is powerful motive; can be lustful without calling it immoral; part of your worship
4) Alliances with other religions
5) Intermarriage –

Sin (:11-13) leaves to **Servitude** (:14-15) – there is no rebellion against the Lord that ends up successfully; look at depths of depravity to which they sank;
Ps. 106:34-48 – account of Israel's rebellion and the Lord's forgiveness throughout their history
Salvation (:16-19) – jump over the Supplication stage – Lord graciously delivered them; sin always cycles downward;

Constable: The writer seems to have included the statement that the Angel of the Lord "came up from Gilgal" (v. 1) to connect the Angel's appearance here with His last recorded appearance at Gilgal (Josh. 5:13-15). On that occasion the Angel appeared after the people had consecrated themselves to God. He promised to lead them in victory against their enemies. On this occasion the Angel promised that He would not drive out the remaining Canaanites because Israel had been disobedient to God, specifically to the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Exod. 24:3, 7; Josh. 24:18, 21, 24). Of the 59 references to "the Angel of the Lord" in the Old Testament, 18 (30.5 percent) appear in Judges. He appeared on four separate occasions: in 2:1-5; 5:23; 6:11-24; and 13:1-25. Additionally, the title "the Angel of God" appears nine times in the Old Testament and at least three times in Judges: in 6:20 and 13:6 and 9. . .

Having revealed the roots of Israel's apostasy (vv. 6-10), the writer proceeded to examine its character. In this section a cyclical pattern of Israel's history during this era becomes clear. This section is chiastic, focusing on Israel's pursuit and worship of other gods. Israel departed from Yahweh and served idols (vv. 11-13). The Lord then disciplined His people by allowing them to fall under the domination of their enemies (vv. 14-15).[45] God then raised up judges to deliver Israel (v. 16). The people apostatized again (v. 17). God raised up another judge in response to His people's distress (v. 18). When that judge died, they wandered away again (v. 19). This continual rebellion resulted in God not driving

Israel's enemies out of their land (vv. 20-21), but leaving them in Canaan to test Israel's love and commitment to Him (vv. 22-23).[46] One writer called the stages in each cycle: sin, slavery, supplication, salvation, and silence.[47] Others have labeled them: rebellion, retribution, repentance, and restoration. . .

The worship of these idols did not involve or necessitate the abandonment of Yahweh. The Israelites worshipped both the idols and the true God. This practice constituted forsaking Yahweh because He demanded exclusive allegiance. The Israelites became syncretistic rather than exclusive in their worship. It is easier to understand why the Israelites apostatized so quickly and so frequently when we appreciate the syncretistic nature of Baal worship.

Inrig: Here [2:10] we come to the heart of the second-generation syndrome. It is a lukewarmness, a complacency, an apathy about amazing biblical truths that we have heard from our childhood, or from our teachers. . . . It is a pattern which challenges churches and even nations, and nowhere does it work with more devastating effect than in Bible colleges and theological seminaries where, day after day, we come in contact with God's truth. . . . History tells us that not even the most vivid display of the life transforming power of the Holy Spirit will prevent this problem.

But why? Why did it happen then, and why does it happen to us? . . . We must realize two things about this kind of complacency. The first is something Erich Fromm once pointed out when he said, 'Hate is not the opposite of love. Apathy is.' To be complacent in the face of Calvary is the greatest possible rejection of God. The second is that complacency grows like a cancer. . . . Maybe part of the problem lay with the first [Joshua's] generation. Interestingly, however, the book of Judges puts none of the blame there. The second generation was held responsible for their failure, and God would not allow them to shift the blame.

Dale Ralph Davis: The structure of verses 11-23 points out the importance of verse 16.
A Apostasy (vv. 11-13)
B Wrath (vv. 14-15)
C Grace (v. 16)
A' Apostasy (vv.17-19)
B' Wrath (vv. 20-23)

Steve Zeisler: **A New Generation . . . An Old War**
God deliberately left in place enemies, pressures, and temptations for his own good purposes and as judgment on their failure. He left in place nations that would require the next generation after Joshua, whose life ended as this book began, to learn war on its own. Joshua had led the people of Israel, as we saw last week, on the conquest of Canaan, and they had had great beginnings under Joshua's leadership. The next generation did well as long as the influence of the first remained, but then they were on their own. And they were faced squarely with the need to love and trust God amid trials.

The general impression [of the events of Chapter 1], however, is one of weakness and compromise on the part of the people (whether it was the mutilation of an enemy, or the incomplete conquering of the land that each tribe was given).

> **Our God is wise and gracious enough to place us into battles**
> **so that we will not settle for less than knowing him**

Now, chapter 2 is also introductory, but here we have the whole book outlined, if you will. We're given the themes very plainly. We're told of the cycles of failure that will repeat, and we are told why they do so. Both of these introductions, we should note, make the point that God did not drive out Israel's enemies. In verse 3 of chapter 2 the angel of the Lord says, "I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you." And in verse 21 of chapter 2: "I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died...."

John Piper: **Will the Next Generation Know?**

The three lessons for us that I want to draw out of this text are simple, but so needful. First, when the knowledge of God is preserved in a community, especially by those who have personally experienced God's power, faith is nourished and obedience flourishes. Second, if we parents

allow our children to grow up without this knowledge of God, we serve not only their ignorance and unbelief, but also their destruction. Third, therefore it is the solemn duty of all parents to teach their children about God and his saving work, so that the next generation will know and be saved. . .

my pastoral judgment is that among Christian parents in their 20s and 30s the tendency is to have expectations of obedience that are too low and too late, and discipline that lacks firmness and rigor and consistency.

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **When a Generation Forgets God**
Introduction: When a nation forgets its founder, it falls into confusion, it falls into compromise, and worse. So this chapter here, Judges 2, is one of the most sobering passages in the Old Testament. It shows us what happens to a people when those people forget God. Israel, remember, had seen God's mighty hand. They saw some of the great miracles, the miracles that were in Egypt, the miracles at the Red Sea, the miracle of the walls falling down at Jericho, all those things that happened under Moses and Joshua. And yet, within one generation, the Bible says, there came along a group of people that did not know the Lord. And within one generation, the next generation, they're bowing before idols.

It's been said that Christianity is always one generation removed from extinction.

Big Idea: **Five critical areas where Israel forgot and where we must remember**.

I. They forgot the faithfulness of God.
This angel of the Lord appears in two different places, and these are very two significant places.
A. Gilgal – vs. 1
This was the campsite that Israel first made when they entered into the Promised Land near Jericho. Gilgal is a word that means rolling away because there's a sense in which when they crossed the Jordan River, they were rolling away the reproach of their past unbelief, which is why they were not in the Promised Land already. And it was there at Gilgal that the Israelites erected a memorial of 12 stones. You might remember that in the book of Joshua. It was there at Gilgal that they celebrated the Passover. It was there at Gilgal that the commander of the Lord of Hosts met with Joshua and gave him the battle plans that he was to follow as they were to conquer Canaan. It was at Gilgal that Israel made commitments of faithfulness to God.

It's a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. This is God speaking to them. And he's reminding them of how he had been faithful to them, that he had kept all of his promises. He never broke the covenant. And yet, even though God was faithful to them, in return, what was their response? They were not faithful to God.

And as a result of their disobedience, as a result of their faithlessness, God announces that he will not drive the Canaanites out. You see, when you forget God, it will cost you. It will cost you future victories. It'll bring trouble down upon us.

B. Bochim – vs. 4
Gilgal was a place where God had given victory because of their obedience to him. But now, Bokom will be the opposite. It'll be the place where they will be given the promise of future defeat because of their disobedience.

The phrase, from Gilgal to Bokom, expresses the decline of Israel from spiritual lofty heights to a pit of spiritual despair. And they respond to this in three ways as we see here.

1) They wept – a loud wailing
2) They named that place Bochim = the place of the weepers
3) They offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, but it was too little and too late.

II. They forgot the example of a godly leader – vs. 6-9

Joshua's life was a testimony of faith and courage. As long as he was alive, he guided the people, and the people followed in his example. But when he died, they forgot all that. They forgot the example that Joshua had set, and they began to serve their own interests rather than serving the Lord. So Moses passes the mantle to Joshua. Joshua is a faithful leader, but when Joshua dies, there's no one to pass the mantle to. There's no clear successor. And without that strong leadership, Israel quickly fell apart.

III. They forgot to teach the next generation – vs. 10

Now, the problem here is that this new generation were ignorant. And we could say that this was a failure of the older generation to teach and to testify. There's a sense in which they dropped the baton.

A famous principle that is observed by historians and sociologists is called the three-generation rule. And this is what it is. The first generation earns or experiences revival. The second generation enjoys it. And then the third generation forgets it. And you can see this pattern throughout history.

IV. They forgot the holiness of God – vs. 11

The Bible says they served Baal. And this was all evil in the sight of the Lord. Who was Baal? And sometimes we see the word Balaam, which is really the plural form. Bael was this god who supposedly was, they called him the, Balaam means lord, but he was called the god of fertility or the god of thunder and rain. Ancient statues of Baal depict him with lightning bolts in his hands because it was supposedly the idea that he was in control of all of the rain And he was in control of fertility, allowing the land to bring forth fruit and all those sort of things. He was therefore the storm god. And he was paired with Ashtaroth, which was his wife. And so to serve Balaam meant that they served various local expressions of this god Baal.

Let me tell you what was involved with worship of Baal. It was, first of all, **child sacrifice**. You were encouraged to sacrifice a child to him, which is just heinous beyond words, but also it was immorality. Baal was often centered on **ritual prostitution**, both men and women would engage in as temple prostitutes and all kinds of heinous immoral acts. Supposedly, these acts were to encourage Baal to send the rain upon the land. It was incredibly wicked and vile. They had special offerings, **special feasts**. They had altars on high hills. The Bible talks about the **high places** where Israel would go and commit what God would call spiritual adultery by worshiping these false idols. All of this was incredibly evil in the sight of God, and God's anger was kindled.

V. They forgot the consequences of sin -- vs. 14

We see here God allowing them to be delivered into the hands of what the Bible calls **spoilers**. And this is what we call the cycle of sin in the book of Judges. the cycle of sin, where it's rebellion. We see this in verse 11, the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. And then that causes ruin. We see that in verses 14 and 15. He sold them in the hand of their enemies. They're enslaved, they're oppressed. Then in verse number 18, we see repentance. They get to a

place where they repent. They cry out to the Lord God in their distress. And God raises up deliverers to deliver them out of the hands of the enemies. He rescues them. Look in verse number 16. Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges which deliver them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.

TEXT: Judges 2:11-3:6

TITLE: FORMULA FOR ANGERING THE LORD

BIG IDEA:
STUBBORN SIN PROVOKES THE LORD TO ANGER AND PERPETUATES THE CYCLE OF DEFEAT: SIN, SERVITUDE, SUPPLICATION, SALVATION, SLIPPAGE

INTRODUCTION:

Because the Lord loves us so deeply, He is jealous for our loyalty. He is provoked to anger when we persist in rebelling against Him. Usually we talk in terms of how can we live in a way to please the Lord who loves us … but today in Judges we will be studying **the formula for angering the Lord**.

This anger can burn against God's own people in the form of discipline.
In this context it seems to burn against apostates in the form of judgment and condemnation and wrath.

Why would we ever want to make the Lord angry with us? Yet look at how quickly we forget about God and live as though God doesn't exist – make decisions without consulting Him; live as if there is no accountability
Then we turn around and wonder why life is so hard and there are so many battles for us to fight.

The purpose of speed bumps = to get our attention and cause us to slow down and obey the law.
God sends speed bumps of difficulties into our lives for the same purpose.

I. (2:11-19) 5 STAGES IN THE CYCLE OF DEFEAT

A. (:11-13) Sin – Switching allegiance from God to Idols

1. (:11) Conduct Shift From Holiness to Wickedness

> "*Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals,*"

[some overlap and review from last week's section because I wanted to include all five stages in this treatment]

Starting point in the various cycles in Judges = Sin

Issue of Accountability – God is invisible; but all we say and do is heard and seen by the Lord
For God, sight implies evaluation
Cf. "As for me and my house, we choose to serve Baal"
Look at call to holiness for the church in book of Ephesians

2. (:12-13) Change in Allegiance to Forsake the Lord and Serve Idols

> "*and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them . . . So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroth.*"

Jordan: So what was Baalism? In essence it was the ascription of power to Nature: The universe has within itself the force of life. The world as we know it is the result of the union of the ultimate male and female principles of the universe, which may be called Baal and Ashteroth. . . To the extent to which the processes of Nature replace the acts of God in any system, to that extent the system has become Baalistic.

3. Consequence of Apostasy = Inciting the Lord to Anger
"*thus they provoked the LORD to anger.*" = **Key Tone to the passage**

Nothing angers the Lord like spurning His grace and choosing rebellion and idolatry

Dr. Ralph Davis: To have a God who loves his people is to have a jealous God, and to have a jealous God is to have an intolerant God. "Love divine" is not soft laxity but blazing intolerance, an absolute claim (cf. Matt. 10:37-38). Such is the God of Israel whose jealous love makes him faithful in his anger toward you. Who ever heard of love and fidelity like that? You forsake him and he will pursue you – in his anger.

B. (:14-15) Servitude – Experiencing suffering and defeat instead of joy and victory

1. Plundered (vs Enriched by God's Grace and Favor)
"*and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them;*"

God wants to give riches to His people; but they choose the riches of this world:
- False riches
- Fleeting riches
- Foolish riches

Jordan: God's judgments are never arbitrary. God chastises and curses people by giving them what they want. Israel wanted Baalism as a philosophy, so God gave them into the hands of Baalistic civilizations. Since they were slaves of the gods of these cultures, it was only proper that they should be slaves of the cultures themselves as well.

2. Oppressed and Defeated (vs Ransomed and Victorious by God's Grace and Favor)
"*and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies.*"

Example of Joshua and David who had the courage and grace to stand before their enemies and wage war successfully
How do you face your enemies?

3. Cursed (vs Blessed by God's Grace and Favor)
"*Wherever they went, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had spoken and as the LORD had sworn to them,*"

God is faithful to His promises
Universal harvest law: as a man sows, so shall he also reap

4. Depressed (vs Joyous by God's Grace and Favor)
"*so that they were severely distressed.*"

Illustration: quoted by Inrig – One of my favorite hymns is "*Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*." It is a great hymn of praise to God, but there is a sad story related to it. Two strangers were riding in a coach – a miserable-looking man and a happy-faced woman, who was reading the hymn. She showed the hymn to her unknown companion and told him how much the words meant to her. The man looked at it and suddenly broke into tears. Sobbing, he said to her, "Madam, I am the poor, unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feeling I had then." Robert Robinson had drifted out of fellowship with God, and he knew the awful bondage that sin brings.

Rom. 7 – Paul spoke of the bondage of sin – we are unable to perform the righteousness that we desire apart from the gracious work of the Holy Spirit who gives us the victory in Jesus Christ

Does God Care??

C. (:18b) <u>Supplication</u> – Appealing to the tender mercy and compassion of the faithful, covenant God

> "*for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them.*"

Emphasis here is on the mercy of God, not the supplication of the people
God is a God of compassion and mercy as well as holiness and righteousness
He responds to the prayers of His people – on His timetable

Inrig: In Judges, each time His people call, God hears and intervenes. Not once does He refuse or turn His back. He does not condition His help on their improvement or on their past record, but on their need. The throne we approach in prayer is a throne of grace, where we receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (**Heb. 4:16**).

Dr. Ralph Davis: "*groaning*" – used only three other times in the Old Testament, two of which are in Exodus (2:24; 6:5). There the "groaning" is that of Israel under Egyptian slavery, a groaning that God hears – and he remembers his covenant and delivers them. The very word in Judges 2:18 should carry our minds back to Exodus.

How much groaning and sighing does the Lord hear from us?

D. (:16-18a) <u>Salvation</u> – Temporary deliverance but no inward transformation

1. <u>(:16) Gracious Deliverance</u>

> "*Then the LORD raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them.*"

Lam. 3:22 "*It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed*."

We will focus on the amazing stories of deliverance in the book of Judges; the mighty works of God

2. <u>(:17) Rebellious Apostasy</u>

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

they did not do as their fathers."

Robert A.Watson: Thus in the history of Israel, as in the history of many a soul, periods of suffering and of prosperity succeed each other and there is no distinct growth of the religious life. All these experiences are meant to throw men back upon the seriousness of duty, and the great purpose God has in their existence. We must repent not because we are in pain or grief, but because we are estranged from the Holy One and have denied the God of Salvation. Until the soul comes to this it only struggles out of one pit to fall into another.

3. (:18a) False Security

"*And when the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge;*"

Satisfaction with the status quo; not seeing the subtle sins; self deception; false security; apparent prosperity

E. (:19) Slippage – Stubborn persistence in sinful life patterns in a downward, degenerative cycle

1. Trigger for repeating the cycle

"*But it came about when the judge died,*"

Nothing in the sufficiency of God changed when the judge (provided by God for temporary deliverance) died; yet the people had never put their trust in the invisible God

2. Intensification of the downward spiral

"*that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them;*"

like Romans 1 pattern; God continually gives them up; things spiral downwards and get progressively worse

Dr. Ralph Davis: You discover the true nature of people by observing them when they are not bound by external constraints.

Illustration: what happens in a major city during a power failure, a blackout? Major looting and criminal activity

3. Addiction to stubborn sinful life patterns

"*they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways.*"

No real inward transformation and deliverance from bondage to sin
Think of ingrained habits – way we deal with stress and struggles and how we attempt to seek satisfaction; think of how enslaving sin is; a habit that grips you; you are unable to free yourself

Illustration: Frito Lays commercial: "Bet you can't eat just one"

What are the characteristics of addiction?

II. (2:20 – 3:6) 3 REASONS THE LORD ALLOWS TEMPTATIONS AND HARD TIMES

(2:20a) Tone of the Passage: **An Angry God**

"*So the anger of the LORD burned against Israel,*"

Brensinger: Given all of the difficulty associated with the remaining Canaanites, later readers might well ask why the Lord did not remove all of them while Joshua's generation was alive. In other words, with the success that Israel experienced under Joshua's leadership, why did the Lord not allow him to finish the task and save the next generation all of this difficulty (2:23)?

A. (2:20b-21) <u>Take Them to Task</u> – Will you repent and obey?

"*and He said, 'Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not listened to My voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died,'*"

Not some petulant temper tantrum on the part of God; consistent with His character and promises

B. (2:22-23) <u>Test Their Allegiance</u> – Whose side are you on?

"*in order to test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers did, or not. So the LORD allowed those nations to remain, not driving them out quickly; and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua.*"

Brensinger: the Lord leaves the Canaanites as a means of examining and reexamining the Israelites' commitment to him. The manner in which they deal with the Canaanites will reveal a great deal about their deepest convictions and allegiances. . . God can use failed tests too. As the writer reflects on this discouraging period, his conclusions indicate that the painful and frequently failed tests in Canaan did in fact bring increased understanding for later generations. Because of the various lessons learned, the members of the community now realize more clearly their own role and responsibility in what has transpired (2:20; cf. Lam. 1:5, 14; 3:39). Furthermore, they have caught a renewed glimpse of God's plans and intentions, not to mention his direct involvement in all the affairs of their lives (2:21 – 3:4; cf. Lam. 3:21-24, 40-42). With this new or rekindled insight, the sins so prevalent during the period of the judges (3:5-6) will hopefully not be repeated. As a result, Israel may now rise to greater heights in their commitment to the Lord and his covenant.

[Not necessarily true – look at times of Isaiah – nation still wrestling with the same sin problems; what lessons have they really learned?]

C. (3:1-6) <u>Toughen Them Up</u> – How strong are you to wage war against the enemy?

"*Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to test Israel by them (that is, all who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan; only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war, those who had not experienced it formerly). These nations are: the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath. And they were for testing Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers through Moses. And the sons of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and they took their daughters for themselves as*

wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods."

Philistines – five-city cluster along the southern Mediterranean coast – Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, Ekron (1:18, Josh. 13:3)

Sidonians = the Phoenicians – leading port city was Sidon
Wolf: After 1100 B.C. Tyre began to eclipse Sidon in importance (cf. 1:31).

What are the weapons of our warfare?? **Prayer** and the **Word of God**

Jordan: In the first place, Israel had to learn that there was a war, and that peace and compromise with Canaanites was impossible. In the second place, Israel had to learn how to fight the wards of the Lord. This does not mean military tactics, though such are not completely excluded, but rather means prayer and faith. The wars of the Lord are fought by faith and prayer. . . Israel was taught that war could be fought and won only in wholehearted trust and dependence on God. And so we can see that testing Israel's faith and teaching Israel war are the same thing. . . . faith entails an attitude of warfare (hatred) against sin and evil, in dependence upon the grace of God.

Herbert Wolf: The Canaanite presence in the land also kept the Israelites from being overrun with wild animals (Exod 23:29-30).

Steve Zeisler: These are the nations that were left behind to test the people, and the people regularly failed the test. And the Lord required them to need him, and he would not remove these obstacles. I know that each of us can identify fears we wish we were free of. Life would seem better if we had less pressure, less trauma, less temptation, and less struggle to deal with. Yet he knows that all of us would live lives of less faith if we had it easier, so he leaves behind those difficulties that will teach us war. They will teach us to do battle with what's wrong, to trust him, and to know him as a result.

As a last commentary on the importance of knowing the living God and the worthiness of the challenge, the final verses of the book of Galatians make an interesting statement. The apostle Paul wrote a combative book in Galatians. It was a book of debate against those who would dilute and destroy the gospel message. He railed against his detractors, and he taught them the truth, and then at the end of the book he said, "From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus." Paul had been beaten, stoned, jailed, shipwrecked, abandoned, attacked by robbers, worked over in every kind of circumstance by Jews, Romans, and pagans. By the time he wrote the book of Galatians there were scars on his face, his hands, and his back and a limp in his leg. He stood before them figuratively in the book of Galatians and he said, "Look at my body. There are scars on it. But these are not ordinary scars; they are the brand-marks of Jesus." Paul's refusal to compromise meant that he was "taught war" (Judges 3:2). And the scars that resulted from his hardships he wore proudly because they testified to his intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Our God is wise and gracious enough to place us into battles so that we will not settle for less than knowing him.

CONCLUSION:
Same pattern in Christian circles regarding sin and the world:
1) Toleration instead of separation – I am a strong Christian; I won't be changed by X
Failure to drive out the Canaanites; living among them

2) Embracing the sin – Intermarriage with the Canaanites

3) Bowing down to the world's gods and adopting the value system of the world; serving idols

Look at who has been changed when it all shakes out

Many sad examples in Scripture – like the story of Lot

We will see this pattern played out repeatedly through the Book of Judges

STUBBORN SIN PROVOKES THE LORD TO ANGER AND PERPETUATES THE CYCLE OF DEFEAT: SIN, SERVITUDE, SUPPLICATION, SALVATION, SLIPPAGE

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Where have we tolerated sin when we should have exterminated it?

2) Where do we have difficulty standing against the enemies of temptation and trial?

3) Where have we adopted the world's value system?

4) How skilled are we at waging spiritual warfare with the weapons of prayer and the Word of God?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

James Jordan: For ancient man, the heart of religious exercise was adoration, worship, prostration, sacrament (a fellowship meal with the god). This was true of Israel before the Lord, and of the Canaanites before Baal. And this is the Biblical view of worship: Preaching/proclamation is the Word from God, which leads to a response of adoration, prostrating, sacrament. The modern Christian, however, sees the heart of worship as entertainment (from a choir and an entertaining preacher) or as philosophical meditation (from a scholarly preacher). The sermon, instead of leading into worship, has become itself the climax of worship. And, just as the modern Christian view of worship is not much more than studying doctrine, so the modern humanist worships his god in the same way. We don't see humanists bowing down to their gods, but we do see them studying them, lecturing about them, writing books about them. And we don't see Christians bowing down to the Lord either, but we do see them studying Him, preaching about Him, and writing books about Him.

Dr. Ralph Davis: Baal was the god of storm and fertility, and, for the Canaanites, of course, fertility was the name of the game – fertility of crops and livestock and family. Baal, nature god that he was, naturally had his female consort, Ashtoreth. In Canaanite theology (and agriculture) the fertility of the land depended upon the sexual relationship between Baal and his consort. The revival of nature was due to sexual intercourse between Baal and his partner. . . Hence the Canaanites practices "sacred" prostitution as a part of their worship. . . The man would fulfill

Baal's role and the woman Ashtart's. The idea was that the copulating of the worshiper and of the holy whore would encourage the divine couple (Mr. and Mrs./Ms. Baal) to do their thing and thus the rain, grain, wine, and oil would flow again.

Block: In 3:5-6 the narrator announces the theme of the book: the Canaanization of Israelite society. Territorial accommodation had resulted in ethnic integration, which has yielded spiritual integration. In the mind of the author, the newcomers, who entered the land as a distinct people, vassals of Yahweh, have sold out. The subsequent narratives must all be interpreted in this light. Israel has failed; she rightfully stands under the judgment of God. When the narrator begins to recount the sociopolitical crises the nation experiences, the reader should not feel sorry for this people. They have it coming, and more. And in the pattern of Israelite behavior expressed by the three verbs of vv. 5-6, the modern reader should hear a warning for his or her own life: residing with, marrying, serving. Peaceful coexistence with the world leads to cohabitation and alliance with the world, which in turn leads to taking on the religious notions of the world. This is the rule; occasions when the influence is in the reverse direction are the exception.

To return to the text, for this reason the reader may justifiably be surprised when Yahweh intervenes on Israel's behalf. If this nation emerges at the end of this period with any sort of national self-consciousness and any sense of significance in history, it is due to no credit of their own. It is attributable entirely to the gracious heart of their covenant Sovereign. He deals mercifully with them, not because they deserve it in any way but because of his long-range mission of mercy for the world. He has chosen this nation to be the instrument of blessing, and he cannot let her die or disappear among the conglomerate populations of the ancient Near East. At times the nation appears determined to destroy itself, but each time he rescues her.

James May: **Perezites Are In Your Neighborhood**
The Canaanites were a sophisticated agricultural and urban people. The name Canaan means "Land of Purple" (a purple dye was extracted from a shellfish found near the shores of Palestine). The Canaanites had been around for at least 500 years before the Israelites entered their area and were probably the first people to invent a form of writing that became an alphabet, called Cuneiform.
The religion of the Canaanites was agricultural religion, with lots of fertility rites. Their main gods were called Baalim and Ashtoreth. . .

Who were the Hittites? They were a warlike people. Their history is filled with wars, rebellions and fighting. When Israel came into contact with the Hittites they were sure to have a real fight on their hands. No peace could be established; constant squabbles were sure to arise; and basically, they made life in Israel miserable. . .

Next comes the Amorites. They were the forerunners of the Babylonians that would found the regions around Mesopotamia. The Amorites did not believe that life after death held any promise or threat, so Amorite religion focused only this world. . .

The Perizzites were one of the largest enemy nations that dwelled in Canaan. They lived in smaller villages scattered over a large area and had no walled cities for protection. They lived like slaves and eventually even became slaves under King Solomon. What spirit can you see revealed in these Perizzites, and are there many of them around your neighborhood? Most importantly, are you a Perezzite in spirit this morning? The spirit of a Perizzite is one of low self-esteem, a feeling of worthlessness, believing that you are not capable of doing anything

right, or not up to the task that has been laid before you. . .

The Hivites were another nation of enemies that God allowed to stay around to teach his people how to fight and survive. These Hivites were a different kind of people than the rest. They were the only nation in Canaan that didn't practice circumcision of their male children, and they dwelled in the high country, up in the mountains. You can spot the spirit of the Hivite in our community, and sometimes even in our church. The Hivite says, "I don't care how much you preach about living a sanctified life preacher, I'm going to do what I want to do." These are people who refuse to give up their hold on the worldly way of life. They want to be a part of the church and ride the fence to be acceptable by friends. They won't make up their mind. . .

Jebusite people have a spirit that treads or "stomps" on other people. If your heart is "infected" by a Jebusite spirit you will tend to constantly put down and humiliate others. By stomping on people, Jebusites make an effort to prevent them from growing taller. They like to make people feel small, and deliberately put them down any time they see these "small" people trying to establish their authority. Jebusites believe that certain people are inherently inferior, without a right to have any kind of authority. According to Jebusites, "small" people should just shut up and concede, because they are nobodies who will never amount to much.
www.sermoncentral.com

TEXT: Judges 3:7-31

TITLE: HEROES ARE NOT ONE SIZE FITS ALL

BIG IDEA:
GOD CAN TRANSFORM DIFFERENT TYPES OF PEOPLE INTO COURAGEOUS AND EFFECTIVE LEADERS

INTRODUCTION:
You are already familiar with many of the heroes sprinkled throughout the history of the nation of Israel. Starting with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph and moving through Moses and Joshua and then right down the line of the few righteous kings like David and Solomon and the various prophets like Elijah and Elisha and Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, the list goes on.

But in the book of Judges we are introduced to some heroes that were lesser lights on the panorama of history. You probably did not consider naming your children Othniel, Ehud or Shamgar – you still have a shot with your grandchildren. These are the heroes we will be considering today. What characterized these very different types of leaders? What types of weapons did they use? How did they seize the opportunity before them by faith and take the decisive action needed to rescue God's people from oppression? What can we learn from their stories? How can God use me – despite my limitations and unique challenges? In addition, the mercy and faithfulness of the sovereign, covenant-keeping God is highlighted against the backdrop of the repeated unfaithfulness and spiritual adultery of His people.

Last week we saw from a theological perspective THE CYCLE OF SIN AND DELIVERANCE INTRODUCED – now we see the accounts of the first three judges and that cycle is no longer just theoretical but it has concrete expression.

SIN / SERVITUDE / SUPPLICATION / SALVATION / SLIPPAGE (REST)

These three historical examples are very different

- **Othniel – The Cycle Summarized and Idealized** – just what you would expect; a very crisp account with no color commentary – the emphasis is on the divine role rather than the individual exploits of the particular judge
- **Ehud – The Cycle Expanded** – we will spend the bulk of our time here – everything that happens is unexpected and shocking – we are presented with such graphic detail of gore and human excrement that our refined spirits cry out: "Too much information!" But you have to love the humor and the irony of how the obese enemy of God's people meets his demise.
- Then in a complete reversal we see **The Cycle Minimized** with a short one verse reference to **Shamgar** – What is that all about??

I. (:7-11) THE CYCLE SUMMARIZED AND IDEALIZED – PRIVILEGED OTHNIEL (another mighty man from the family of Caleb) – GOD CAN USE A MAN CONTROLLED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

A. (:7) Sin

"*And the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served the Baals and the Asheroth.*"

B. (:8) Servitude – King Cushan-rishathaim of Mesopotamia – 8 years

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

Inrig: Rishathaim means "*double-wickedness*" which suggests that he was a cruel and powerful man.

Probably a pejorative term ascribed to him by his enemies – if you can't defeat him, at least you can call him names behind his back … "Double evil from double river" …

Block: Arameans, one of the most important ethnic groups in the late second and early first millennia. The territory extended from northeast of the Sea of Galilee to the Taurus mountains in the north and eastward beyond the Habur tributary of the upper Euphrates River. . . He was the most powerful of all the enemies of Israel named in the book. For him to have extended his tentacles as far as Judah in southern Canaan meant he was a world-class emperor, who held Canaan in his grip for at least eight years. . .

C. (:9a) Supplication

"*And when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD,*"

Davis: *za'aq* does not necessarily connote repentance but a crying for help out of deep distress or because of some unbearable circumstance; a cry of anguish

Emphasis is on the suffering and the misery and the need for help and deliverance

D. (:9b-10) Salvation

"*the LORD raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand, so that he prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim.*"

Judges 1:11-15 – introduced to Othniel; proven courageous warrior
Great spiritual family heritage -- Half brother of Caleb?? Or his nephew

Num. 14:24 "*he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully*"
A man used mightily by the Holy Spirit

Othniel has been presented as a **model judge**; this is how one is supposed to operate – swiftly and decisively; but as we look at the other judges that follow, this idealized pattern will be hard to duplicate

E. Rest / Slippage – 40 Years

"*Then the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.*"

Davis: There are nothing but bare essentials here – and those are about what Yahweh had done. The problem with Othniel is that he is so colorless. There is no flash and dash about Othniel – nothing about being left-handed and making a dagger (so Ehud), no snazzy motto like Jael's

(Step softly but carry a big hammer.) Probably with good reason. It is likely that we have this first episode in such stripped-down style precisely so that we will see clearly what is most essential – the activity of Yahweh. Sometimes interesting people can obscure that, and we end up watching these fascinating folks but never see what our God is doing.

II. (:12-30) THE CYCLE EXPANDED –- LIMITED EHUD –- GOD CAN USE A MAN WHO ALLOWS HIS WEAKNESS TO BE CONVERTED TO A STRENGTH

A. (:12a) Sin

"*Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD.*"

B. (:12b-14) Servitude – King Eglon / Moabites / Ammonites / Amalekites – 18 years

"*So the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD. And he gathered to himself the sons of Ammon and Amalek; and he went and defeated Israel, and they possessed the city of the palm trees. And the sons of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.*"

Eglon = fat calf

Inrig: a very coarse man, gathered together his people, linked the Ammonites and Amalekites with him, and swept through the Transjordan where the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh were. Then they crossed the Jordan, established their capital at Jericho, and began to spread their influence through the areas of Benjamin and Ephraim.

Brensinger: OT typically depicts tension between Moabites and Israelites [despite connection between Abraham and Lot]. The Moabites, for example, refused to allow the wandering Israelites to pass through their territory while en route to Canaan (Judg. 11:17). In fact, the Moabite king Balak hired Balaam, a Mesopotamian diviner, to curse the Israelites in an attempt to thwart their advances (Num. 22-24). In later years, occasional biblical references indicate that relations fared no better (2 Kings 3; 13:20; 24:2). As a result, various Israelite prophets denounced their Moabite neighbors on more than one occasion (Isa. 15:16; Jer. 48; Zeph. 2:8-11).

James Jordan: Moab and Ammon were descendants of Lot by incestuous breeding with his daughters. The daughters learned such morality from their lives in Sodom and Gomorrah, and Moab and Ammon are, in Scripture, seen as historical extensions of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Wiersbe: Jericho was under a curse (Josh 6:26), and there's no evidence that the city had been rebuilt; but the location was ideal for directing military operations, and there was an abundance of water there.

C. (:15a) Supplication

"*But when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD,*"

D. (:15b-30a) Salvation – Killed 10,000

1. (:15b) Source of Salvation
   a. Salvation from the Lord

"*the LORD raised up a deliverer for them,*"

b. Salvation from the tribe of Benjamin
"*Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite,*"
Name means "*strong*"

c. Salvation from the Left Hand
"*a left-handed man.*"

Who here is left handed? Did you have any struggles with this?

Inrig: an ironic situation in a man from the tribe of Benjamin, which means "son of my right hand." A man who is awkward is called *gauche*, a French word meaning left-handed. Something that is wicked or evil we call *sinister*, the Latin word for the left hand. But someone with skill and ability is *dexterous*, which means right-handed in Latin. . . in Ehud's time, it was considered to be a defect. . . Why am I left-handed in a world of right-handers?

Motyer: positive references in Scripture (check a concordance) to the Lord's right hand – by it he swears to bless his people, and with it he destroys their enemies. At his right hand are pleasures for evermore, and there his Chosen One sits. It is the hand of power, glory, and blessing . . .

Othniel, the first judge, has set the pattern of the classic, readily-recognizable hero-deliverer – and the mold is at once broken by his immediate successor, this unlikely southpaw. . .

He therefore is the one chosen for a task totally different. So far from a crusade of liberation, this is a mission which sums up the abject humiliation of a defeated people – the conveying of tribute payment. It expresses not revolt but submission. A probe behind the English translations reveals a point which nearly all of them miss it is not simply "by him" that Israel sends the tribute to Eglon, but "by his hand." Which hand? His left hand, which he alone knows will be bringing something very different? No, his right, which is good for nothing else; a withered hand, fitly representative of a conquered people.

2. (:15c-25) Story of Salvation – a secret message from God for Eglon
"*And the sons of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab. And Ehud made himself a sword which had two edges, a cubit in length; and he bound it on his right thigh under his cloak. And he presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man. And it came about when he had finished presenting the tribute, that he sent away the people who had carried the tribute. But he himself turned back from the idols which were at Gilgal, and said, 'I have a secret message for you, O king.' And he said, 'Keep silence.' And all who attended him left him. And Ehud came to him while he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber. And Ehud said, 'I have a message from God for you.' And he arose from his seat. And Ehud stretched out his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh and thrust it into his belly. The handle also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the sword out of his belly; and the refuse came out. Then Ehud went out into the vestibule and shut the doors of the roof chamber behind him, and locked them. When he had gone out, his servants came and looked, and* ***behold****, the doors of the roof chamber were locked; and they said, 'He is only relieving himself in the cool room.' And they waited until they became anxious; but* ***behold****, he did not open the doors of the*

*roof chamber. Therefore they took the key and opened them, and **behold**, their master had fallen to the floor dead.*"

"*message from God*" – Balaam's prophecy to Balak, king of Moab – Num. 24:8

Davis: "*behold*" – the Hebrew particle *hinneh* appears three times in vv. 24-25. Traditional English versions frequently render it "behold," which drains the life out of it. It is a particle that usually indicates something at least a bit unexpected.

Brensinger: Palaces such as the one envisioned here consisted of two floors: a lower audience hall and an upper chamber. Included in the upper chamber was a toilet that emptied into a latrine-like closet on the lower level.

Eglon:

- A Fat King – look at how the account makes fun of this obese leader; he struggles just to get out of his chair and stand up – kings were supposed to be exemplary military leaders

- A Gullible King
  - Sees Ehud as no threat to him because of his natural deformity

- A Humiliated King
  Jordan: In death, the muscles of the colon relax, and sometimes excrement issues from the body.

- A Dead King

Block: Taken as a whole, this literary cartoon of Eglon and his countrymen is not only aimed at the Moabites but is ironical as well. The man whom God had strengthened will eventually be reduced to a heap of fat and excrement. The author's deliberate satirizing of Eglon in particular and the Moabites in general should not blind the reader to the ridicule he is casting upon his own people. After all, the Book of Judges was not written primarily to mock foreigners; it challenges the Israelites to reflect on their own condition. Far from being the noble people they claim to be, in their Canaanized state they have been reduced to less than the Moabites.

Ehud:

- A Trusted Leader – chosen to take the tribute to Eglon

- An Opportunistic Warrior

- A Courageous Hero

- A Master Schemer

3. (:26-30a) Slaughter of Salvation – finish off the Moabites

"*Now Ehud escaped while they were delaying, and he passed by the idols and escaped to Seirah. And it came about when he had arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel went down with him*

from the hill country, and he was in front of them. And he said to them, 'Pursue them, for the LORD has given your enemies the Moabites into your hands.' So they went down after him and seized the fords of the Jordan opposite Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross. And they struck down at that time about ten thousand Moabites, all robust and valiant men; and no one escaped. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel."

Gilgal had been defiled by idols having been set up there by the Moabites under Eglon – taking the memorial of the stones that Joshua had set up and creating a counter-memorial to idols

Let's blow the trumpet and engage the enemy – Victory belongs to the Lord

James Jordan: First Ehud went to Gilgal, the place where shame was removed, to rally the detachment he had left there. Then he went north, and backtracked somewhat to rally his forces in Ephraim. As the Israelite forces swept down out of the hills, Ehud was in front of them. They joined their fellows at Gilgal and took possession of the crossing place of the Jordan. The Moabites, in disarray at the death of their leader, and a long way from home, began a hurried retreat toward the Jordan. All were slain by Ehud's men.

E. (:30b) Rest / Slippage – 80- years

"*And the land was undisturbed for eighty years.*"

Now we have essentially two generations – quite an impact

III. (:31) THE CYCLE MINIMIZED – RESOURCEFUL SHAMGAR – GOD CAN USE A MAN WHO DEDICATES ALL HE HAS TO THE CAUSE OF THE LORD

A. Sin
B. Servitude
C. Supplication

D. Salvation – Killed 600

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

Inrig: lived at a time when the Philistines were beginning to exert their power in the southwest corner of the land. . . First, Shamgar was a man with a very confused family background. Shamgar was not a Hebrew name. It was Canaanite. His father's name, Anath, is the name of the Canaanite god of sex and war. . . his family had completely capitulated to the paganism all around them. . . Second, Shamgar was a peasant. We know that from his weapon, an oxgoad. An oxgoad was a long wooden stick tipped with metal at one end, and a blade on the other for cleaning the plow. Third, Shamgar was a man of courage.

E. Rest / Slippage

Matthew Henry:
(1) That God can make those eminently serviceable to his glory and his church's good whose extraction, education, and employment, are very mean and obscure. He that has the residue of

the Spirit could, when he pleased, make ploughmen judges and generals, and fishermen apostles. (2) it is no matter how weak the weapon is if God direct and strengthen the arm. An ox-goad, when God pleases, shall do more than Goliath's sword. And sometimes he chooses to work by such unlikely means that the excellency of the power may appear to be of God.

Brensinger: It has often been said that you can be too big for God to use, but you can never be too small. The overwhelming majority of people who make up the church today are, as always, ordinary. The Lord, however, can use ordinary people to do extraordinary things. . . can become the often-unnoticed and perhaps modestly equipped servants who faithfully carry out the work of God's kingdom today.

CONCLUSION:

Inrig: God uses people who step out in faith and trust Him. Shamgar, Ehud, and Othniel were different in many ways, but they had one thing in common. They had the courage to take a risk, to step out in faith for God. They were bold enough to take God at His word and confront the enemy.

1 Cor. 1:26-29

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What do you consider your greatest weakness or limitation? How can God use that for His glory?

2) When was the last time you stepped out in faith and attempted something challenging for the sake of the kingdom?

3) Do you think God demonstrates a sense of humor in passages such as this?

4) What are some of the common-place tools of your profession that could be used for advancing the kingdom of God?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Motyer: Othniel presents us with all of the elements of the <u>basic pattern</u>:
1. Israel sins
2. Israel angers the Lord
3. Israel is subjected to an oppressor
4. Israel cries to the Lord
5. A deliverer is raised up
6. The deliverer is described
7. The deliverer is empowered

8. The deliverer judges Israel
9. The deliverer rescues Israel
10. The deliverer gives rest to Israel
11. The deliverer dies

If the judges are drawn from all twelve tribes, here is a speculative list –

Othniel	Judah (1:9 with Nu. 13:6)
Ehud	Benjamin (3:15)
Shamgar	Simeon ??
Deborah	Naphtali ??
Gideon	Manasseh (6:15)
Tola	Issachar (10:1)
Jair	Reuben ??
Jephthah	Gad ??
Ibzan	Asher ??
Elon	Zebulun (12:11)
Abdon	Ephraim (12:15)
Samson	Dan (13:2)

Story of Ehud:
1. An unexpected misery (:12-14)
   Moabites descended from Lot and not an expected enemy
2. An unexpected man (:15a)
   A man who cannot use his right hand; bound or restricted in the use of his hand
3. An unexpected mission (:15b)
4. An unexpected message (:16-22)
5. An unexpected method (:23-26)
6. An unexpected mandate (:27-30)

Joel Santos: Illustration: A father was discussing with his son why the young man should do everything he can and should not quit. Think of all the great leaders of history who did their best. Abraham Lincoln, didn't quit, Tomas Edison, didn't quit, Douglas Mc Arthur, didn't quit, Elmo Mc Limbo.. Who is that father? Said the son. See you don't remember him. He quit. www.sermoncentral.com

James Buchanan: There are some people who will look at you and say that you can never do anything for God. Remember Ehud. Remember his example. God doesn't use perfect people; there aren't any. He takes the improbable, and accomplishes the impossible. www.sermoncentral.com

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **Here Comes the Judge**
Introduction: We're going to look at these three judges. We're going to look at each of them and then we're going to look at how they point to Jesus Christ who is the perfect deliverer. why were these judges necessary? Well, because of Israel's sin. And so, however, again, regardless of all that, what we see is this next generation, they failed. And so God has to punish them. And that's why there's the need for these judges, because of this **cycle of sin** that we talked about. They would go into sin, God would send an oppressor, a stronger nation to oppress them, they would repent, God would send a deliverer, everything would be great, they would go right back into sin. and then another deliverer would come. So we see this cycle again and again. And what we see

here in chapter three is three unique people that God raises up. We could call these men unlikely heroes, and I want us to look at each one of them as we're looking at our chapter here.

I. Othniel -- God's deliverance through a faithful servant.

It just says that here's the thing you need to know about Othniel. He was a man who was yielded to the Spirit. The Spirit of the God came upon him, and through the power of God, he was able to overcome this wicked king, the most formidable of all the oppressors that Israel had ever faced. and he did it by the power of the Spirit.

Among the Jewish rabbis, Othniel is ranked first among the judges. Now, unfortunately, no Israelite warrior would fully measure up to that ideal. The rest of the judges, they don't measure up to him. And really, we don't see anyone like him until David comes onto the scene hundreds of years later. But the lesson here is that God uses faithful servants who are yielded to him, who trust not in their own strength, but trust in the Lord. And that's one way you can win your battles. It doesn't matter how wicked or formidable the enemy is that you have. If you trust in God, he through his power will help you to overcome it.

II. Ehud -- God's deliverance through a flawed servant.

Now, here's the left-handed guy. You say, why does he bring that detail out? That's very interesting, isn't it? He was an **unorthodox person**. This is in a society that where most of the warriors, in fact, you know, pretty much all the warriors were right-handed. But here comes along a guy who is left-handed. He has an unorthodox strategy. The way he's going to defeat this oppressor, Eglon, King of Moab, is he's going to get a private audience with him, and he's going to hide a dagger, hide a big, long, 18-inch blade, and he's going to pull it out, and he's going to stab him. Kind of a little assassination thing going on there with this guy. This is an unlikely judge. I mean, God is gonna use him, but it doesn't necessarily mean that God approves the way in which he did what he did. I call Ehud the sinister minister. He's kind of a mysterious guy. He's kind of a controversial figure. Some scholars see him as a noble person, a hero. Others see him, I really think he's more of a deceptive kind of assassin.

Left-handed in the Old Testament in this culture always had a bad connotation to it. And so some people, scholars say, well, he was probably left-handed because he had a deformity with his right hand. They look at the Hebrew word there and they kind of pull that out. But I don't think that that's the case here. I just think that what he's trying to point out was that he was very sneaky and he was very deceptive. You know, normally, a warrior would place a dagger, if you're right-handed, you would place your dagger on your left thigh, right, to reach it. It's a lot easier. But here, he's left-handed, and he hides a dagger on his right thigh. The Bible tells us that, okay? Look down in verse number 16. But Ehud made him a dagger which had two edges of a cubit length, and he did gird it upon his raiment upon his right thigh.

So, now what I want you to see here in this, this kind of a literary thing that I want you to see is that these two guys, Othniel and Ehud, are placed side by side for a purpose, all right? There's a **purposeful contrast** between these two judges.

- Othniel is from the tribe of Judah. Remember that, I'm gonna come back to it. Ehud is from the tribe of Benjamin.
- Othniel faced a great king. Ehud kind of faced a king that was not so great, kind of an indulgent king who wasn't very wise.
- Othniel defeated his enemy by the spirit of the Lord. He depended upon God, and God helped him to overcome. Ehud used human deception and human scheming.

- Othniel's victory was noble. Ehud's victory, kind of like his name, where's the honor? There's no nobility in this. There's no honor in this.
- Othniel was courageous. Ehud was more of a coward.
- Othniel was a man of faith. Ehud was a man of deception.

Now, the principle we need to draw from this is that God doesn't use us because of us, **he uses us in spite of us a lot of times**. I believe the writer here is showing us He's preparing the audience, the readers, for this one idea, that God's true deliverer is not gonna be a guy from the tribe of Benjamin. He's gonna be someone from the tribe of Judah, okay? Now, ultimately, who would that be? We know who that is, right? But for the immediate audience back there, who was the first king of Israel and what tribe was he from? Well, the first king of Israel was Saul, and where was he from? He was from the tribe of Benjamin. And so you have to remember this writer, who I think is Samuel, is writing to an audience that now has David as their king, and there are some people that are reluctant to accept David as God's true king. And so the writer's kind of saying, oh, you have to remember, you know, Saul is from the tribe of Benjamin, David is from the tribe of Judah.

So what we see is the writer's bias against the tribe of Benjamin and his exaltation of the tribe of Judah. And we see this really all throughout the book of Judges. For example, look in Judges chapter one, look at verse number two, and the Lord said, Judah shall go up. So Judah is the lead tribe. But by the time you get to the end of the book of Judges, you're gonna find out that the tribe of Benjamin is almost wiped out because of their sin.

All right, so Judah took over Jerusalem. Now, the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem and they had taken it and smitten it. But in chapter one, verse 21, the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem. So the tribe of Judah is able to conquer Jerusalem. Those from the tribe of Benjamin are unable to conquer Jerusalem. So again, that's the contrast. Judah slays giants. In the beginning of the book of Judges, at the end of the book of Judges, Benjamin, they're only killing their own people.

And there's another story in the book of Judges that you'll see if you stay with me, and that is there's a story in chapter 19 of a woman who is raped and dismembered. It's a horrible, sordid story of how bad things have gotten in Israel. Israel's more like Sodom and Gomorrah than the people of God. And here's this one woman, and she's raped, and she's dismembered. and she's from the tribe of Judah. And where does it happen? It happens in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin in the city of Gibeah. That's the city where Saul's from. That's the city where Saul set up his headquarters. So it's like the writer's trying to show why the right deliverer is gonna come from Judah, not Benjamin.

And again, we look at the first two kings of Israel. Saul failed, whereas David was a man after God's own heart. And so, this is the whole point of the book. The writer is encouraging people to accept God's king, David. And yet, even David, as great as he was, he failed, but there is coming another king out of the tribe of Judah who will not fail. He'll be the perfect king. He'll be the perfect deliverer. And all of this points to that. All of this kind of tells you that this is yet to come. The true deliverer, the great deliverer, he will come. He will be **the lion of the tribe of Judah**, as the Bible will reveal later on.

III. Shamgar – vs. 31 – God's deliverance through a simple tool

He delivers Israel by killing 600 Philistines with an ox goad, a farming tool. You say, what's an

ox goad? It's a big, long pole with a point on the end of it, and it was used to prod oxen on stubborn animals that refused to walk. You would just kind of prod them on. And that's what they would use. It could be a formidable weapon.

But Shamgar was not a warrior. He was a farmer. God can use the simplest tools in the hands of a surrendered person to accomplish great things. God sometimes wants just what's in your hand. And so there's a great lesson in here that Here's this man who God used to be a deliverer, who used something very simple in his hand.

Each story, each judge's story ends with moral or spiritual decline or some failure. in their life, or some temporary deliverance that's not complete, it's not ultimate. And again, what does that all point to? It points to the fact that there's only one true deliverer, and that's Jesus Christ. And He will not fail in any way. He will not in any way make your deliverance partial. practices perfect obedience, unlike the judges. He'll live in complete obedience to the Father. He will give final deliverance, not just from foreign enemies, but from sin and death itself.

TEXT: Judges 4:1-24

TITLE: It's All About the Lord -- The Role of Women in Nailing God's Enemies -- The HoneyBee (Deborah) and the Mountain Goat (Jael)

BIG IDEA:
GOD USES UNCONVENTIONAL MEANS -- INCLUDING THE LEADERSHIP ROLE OF WOMEN (DEBORAH AND JAEL) -- TO ENSURE THAT THE GLORY FOR SALVATION BELONGS ULTIMATELY TO HIM ALONE

INTRODUCTION:

We know that God is a jealous God and will not share His glory with another. When it comes to our eternal salvation, His supreme work of deliverance and redemption, God certainly does not want man to be able to boast in having any type of meritorious role. So we humbly bow the knee before God and thankfully acknowledge that "*by grace we have been saved through faith*" – not of our own doing but entirely the work of God.

Here in the Book of Judges we see snapshots of lesser types of deliverances that God sovereignly engineers for His oppressed people. Each of these have some contribution as a partial type or foreshadowing of the salvation to come that will be accomplished by God's ultimate Warrior and Judge – His beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. There are unique features in each account where we must try to understand the reason for such emphasis – in our account today we see the surprising leadership role of women highlighted as we see how God used Deborah and then even a non-Israelite woman, Jael.

Inrig: [Uniqueness of Deborah] – an exceptional leader. She is the only woman in biblical history who has a major, God-given leadership role. That immediately marks her out as a uniquely gifted individual, a leader of distinction from whom we can learn a great deal. . . In the entire Old Testament only three women are said to have the gift of a prophetess. There was Miriam, the sister of Moses (**Exod. 15:20**); Huldah, a woman who spoke for God in the time of Josiah (**2 Kings 22:14-20**); and Deborah.

Many people get off track at this point and think that this historical account should lead us down the path of lobbying for an expanded role for women in places of spiritual leadership. But the NT is clear that elders in the church are required to be men; that women are not to usurp the role of men in the authoritative teaching and leading functions of the public gatherings of the local church. There remains a distinction in roles between how God wants men and women to function in different spheres – in the sphere of the home where the husband is to be the head, and in the sphere of the church. So why this emphasis on female leadership in our passage this morning?

GOD USES UNCONVENTIONAL MEANS -- INCLUDING THE OXGOAD OF SHAMGAR AND THE LEADERSHIP ROLE OF WOMEN (DEBORAH AND JAEL) -- TO ENSURE THAT THE GLORY FOR SALVATION BELONGS ULTIMATELY TO HIM ALONE

Interesting juxtaposition in chapters 4 and 5 of a historical narrative account of events over against a poetic celebration of the same events.

Block: While feminist approaches offer many fresh insights into the biblical text, too often modern agendas are imposed upon these ancient documents, overriding and obscuring the original intention of the narrator/song writer. In their enthusiasm to celebrate the subversion of patriarchy, such interpretations subvert the authority of God and obscure the message he seeks to communicate through this text. The biblical author was obviously interested in women's affairs and achievement, but in the final analysis Deborah and Jael are not heroic figures because of their revisionist challenges to prevailing social structures; they are heroines because of what they accomplish as agents of the divine agenda, which in this instance has less to do with overthrowing oppressive patriarchy than the role they play in Yahweh's overthrowing oppressive Canaanites. The entire account is deliberately crafted to highlight the salvation provided by God. He is the chief Operator, pulling the strings, raising generals, deploying armies, dictating strategy, and effecting victory. In the end both narrative and song celebrate the saving work of Yahweh.

I. (:1) SIN – THE LORD'S CHARACTER MUST BE REVERED

"*Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died.*"

Slippage merges into sin and the beginning of another negative cycle in the deteriorating picture of how God's children become absorbed into the culture and even religion of the world **Romans 12:1-2** speaks of having our minds transformed so that we live holy and separate lives in loyal allegiance to the Lord who is our righteousness; but too often the pattern is that of compromise and corruption as we become friends of the world and enemies of God

God is holy and sin is a denial of His intrinsic character; He wants us to fear Him and be holy because He is holy; sin separates us from fellowship with our Creator

Inrig: the sensual, corrupt, depraved worship of the Canaanites

Davis: [this cycle] tells us something about sin. It is difficult to be creative in sin; there's a certain monotony about it; most all of it has been done before; it is simply that we do the same thing again (v. 1). Sin is a boring routine, not a fresh excitement. The fast lane becomes an old rut. Evil never lends itself to originality. Hence there are two problems: the slavery and staleness of sin.

Robert Watson: During the peace that followed Ehud's triumph over Moab the Hebrews, busy with worldly affairs, failed to estimate a danger which year by year became more definite and pressing –the rise of the ancient strongholds of Canaan and their chiefs to new activity and power. Little by little the cities Joshua destroyed were rebuilt, re-fortified and made centres of warlike preparation. The old inhabitants of the land recovered spirit, while Israel lapsed into foolish confidence.

II. (:2) SUFFERING – THE LORD'S NAME MUST NOT BE DISHONORED

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

John 8:34 "*Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.*"

Jabin = a dynastic name applied to the kings of this region of Canaan (like Pharoah in Egypt) rather than a personal name

Inrig: This time it was a king who headed up an alliance of northern kings, from the area around the Sea of Galilee. Under Joshua, 150 years earlier, when the people trusted God, they had burned the city of Hazor and killed its king, Jabin (**Josh. 11:13**). But now another king named Jabin, aided by a brilliant general named Sisera, swept down to dominate the northern tribes of Israel.

Look at how these ancient enemies **re-invent themselves** and pop back up to trouble Israel. It takes vigilance to fight God's enemies. Complacency and slippage might seem like the easy path to take to a comfortable life – but it just means more hardship and difficulty for the future.

Brensinger: So great was **Sisera's reputation** that Jewish legend describes him as follows:

> When he was thirty years old, he had conquered the whole world. At the sound of his voice the strongest of walls fell in a heap;, and the wild animals in the woods were chained to the spot by fear. The proportions of his body were vast beyond description. If he took a bath in the river, and dived beneath the surface, enough fish were caught in the beard to lead a multitude, and it required no less than nine hundred horses to draw the chariot in which he rode. (Ginzberg)

Harosheth-hagoyim – cultivated field of the Gentiles

Alan Carr: When Israel rebelled against God, He responded by giving them over to their enemies for punishment. The Bible says He "*sold*" them. This words means to "turn over; to give up". In other words, God abandoned them to the life they chose for themselves. They paid a terrible price for their rebellion. The condition of the nation is described in **Judges 5:6-7**. They were literally driven from their highways and their homes.

III. (:3) SUPPLICATION – THE LORD'S MERCY MUST BE SOLICITED

> "*And the sons of Israel cried to the LORD; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years.*"

Inrig: The chariots made it impossible for Israel to defend the valleys and plains. Their military position was nothing less than appalling. Israel was outmanned, outgunned, and out-positioned.

Ps. 20:7 *"Some boast in chariots and some in horses, but we will boat in the name of the Lord, our God."*

Chapter 5 references the severe military deficiency of the Israelites – they did not even have shields or spears (**5:8**)

We take our liberty in this country for granted; we do not have much empathy for those in other parts of the world who are living in terror and oppressed by cruel enemies that drive them from their homes and force them into some type of refugee existence; such fear and terror

IV. (:4-24) SALVATION – THE LORD'S SALVATION EXPLOITS MUST GLORIFY HIM

A. (:4-5) <u>Prominence of Deborah</u> – Exalted Role for a Woman – God Raises Up an Amazing Lady Leader

> "*Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. And she used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment.*"

Name Deborah means "HoneyBee" -- dispensing sweet nuggets of wisdom, but packing a sting when necessary – Mohammad Ali – "float like a butterfly, sting like a bee"

Surprising, given the biblical roles of men and women as well as the custom of the times
Is. 3:12 – to some degree the failure of male leadership is being highlighted here – "*As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them*"

Role as a prophetess – received revelation directly from God and communicated it to the people; raised up by God; was not usurping the role of others but had been divinely commissioned to serve in this capacity – a civil and judicial governing role – not a priestly role; NT – in the foundation of the church when God was speaking through prophets we saw that He used various women as prophetesses as well

Very respected by all the people

James Jordan: Thus, the palm tree is a fitting symbol for Deborah herself. She constituted a gat to heaven for her people, rendering judgments for them, and raising up a godly generation. As a picture of the True Judge, she provided leaves for healing, the fruit of the Word for eating, and shade for protection.

Herbert Wolf: The reference to a palm tree may allude to the stateliness and gracefulness of women (S of Songs 7:7-8). The palm is associated with prosperity in Psalm 92:12 and leadership in Isaiah 9:14.

Block: With her seat centrally located in the hill country of Ephraim, Deborah was accessible to the entire nation of Israel, and so they came up to her for "*judgment*."

B. (:6-9a) <u>Partnership with Barak</u> – Unwilling to Engage the Enemy Without Deborah – God Alone Gives the Victory – so He Secures the Ultimate Glory and Distributes the Derived Honor

> "*Now she sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali, and said to him, 'Behold, the LORD, the God of Israel, has commanded, Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun. And I will draw out to you Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his many troops to the river Kishon; and I will give him into your hand.' Then Barak said to her, 'If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.' And she said, 'I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the honor shall not be yours on the journey that you are about to take, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman.'*"

Name Barak means "*lightning*" --

Remember that Barak is listed in **Heb. 11:32** as a hero of faith: right along with Gideon and Samson
"*Hands of Iron, Feet of Clay*" – book by Inrig
Judges 5:23 – speaks to the cowardice of Israel's tribes who were unwilling to come to aid and fight in this time of crisis; four and a half tribes singled out for their hesitation …

James Jordan: Barak with his ten thousand men ascending to the top of Tabor put everything at stake. From Mount Tabor there was no escape. Once on the mountain, Barak and his men had no choice. They had to meet the enemy. They had to fight and gain the victory, or die.

Motyer: In this connection we cannot help hearing in the conversation an echo from the first great deliverance of the people of God in the time of Moses. In **Exodus 33:12-17** we find the same kind of command, the same kind of reaction, and the same kind of response. . .
So what are we witnessing when Barak refuses to set out without this woman? Not cowardice – far from it – but faith: faith, that is, which is the glorious combination of a humble confession of his own inadequacy and a sure confidence in the grace of God, known in this case through his mouthpiece Deborah.

Block: at a deeper level the objection reflects a recognition of Deborah's status. The request to be accompanied by the prophet is a plea for the presence of God.

The glory will be the Lord's!
Davis: As he displays his glory in delivering his people, God takes pains to keep anyone from obscuring that glory. No warrior in Israel must place the Warrior of Israel in the shadows. Perhaps for personal application we could take over Deborah's words to Barak: "*The road on which you are going will not lead to your glory*" (v. 9 RSV). That is a necessary reminder for us – it is Yahweh who brings victory and we should not care which human instrument seems to shine the most therein. This word may touch some of us pastors, who, quite naturally, and perhaps idolatrously, want to have "successful" churches.

Wiersbe: If Barak would lead the Israelite army toward Mount Tabor, God would draw Sisera and his troops toward the Kishon River, where God would give Barak the victory. When God wants to glorify Himself through His people, He always has a perfect plan for us to follow. God chose the leader of His army, the place for the battle, and the plan for His army to follow. God also guaranteed the victory. It was like the "good old days" of Joshua again!

C. (:9b-16) <u>Providential Rout</u> of Sisera's Troops by Barak and Deborah – Despite the Superior Weaponry of 900 Iron Chariots – God Brings About Miraculous Victory Through Obedient Faith – that Initially May Look Like Suicide

> "*Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali together to Kedesh, and ten thousand men went up with him; Deborah also went up with him. Now Heber the Kenite had separated himself from the Kenites, from the sons of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaanannim, which is near Kedesh. Then they told Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor. And Sisera called together all his chariots, nine hundred iron chariots, and all the people who were with him, from Harosheth-hagoyim to*

the river Kishon. And Deborah said to Barak, 'Arise! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hands; behold, the LORD has gone out before you.' So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. ***And the LORD routed Sisera*** *and all his chariots and all his army, with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot. But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not even one was left.*"

Inrig: [Key to Victory} – **Judges 5:21** "*The torrent of Kishon swept them away, the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon*." At this time of year, Kishon was a dried-up creek bed. How could it be called a torrent? The answer is that, suddenly, at exactly the right time, in the middle of the dry season, God caused a violent storm to sweep through the area. The downpour turned the ground into a muddy quagmire, and the chariots bogged down. Sisera's major weapon had become a handicap, and, as a result, Sisera's armies panicked and broke ranks, and the Israelites pursued and defeated them. . .

Barak did not have to twist arms or plead or trick men into a commitment. There was no draft or a series of TV ads saying how wonderful life in the army was. There was a challenge from the heart of God and a free, spontaneous, unhesitating response to that challenge. **Judges 5:2, 9**

Davis: The battlefield in general was the Plain of Esdraelon, a triangular plain southwest of the Sea of Galilee, drained by the unpretentious Wadi Kishon, and guarded at its northeast apex by Mount Tabor (located ten miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee).

Wiersbe: The word translated "*routed*" (4:15) means "confused, thrown into panic" . . . When you remember that the Canaanite god Baal was the god of storms, you can see how the sudden change of weather could have affected the superstitious Canaanites. Had their own god Baal turned against them? Was the God of Israel stronger than Baal? If so, then the battle was already lost, and the wisest thing the soldiers could do was flee.

Ron Daniel: The Kenites were a people that lived in the land of Canaan, yet were accepting of the Israelites. This may be because Moses' father-in-law was a Kenite.. . I think that the Kenites were kind of like Switzerland - trying to be friends with everyone. On one hand, 1Sam. 15:6 Saul said to the Kenites, "*Go, depart, go down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them; for you showed kindness to all the sons of Israel when they came up from Egypt*." So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. But on the other hand, Judg. 4:17 ...*There was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.* Remember that these are the people that have enslaved the Israelites. So Heber, whose name means "comrade," had separated himself from the Kenites, and went to live in Tsah-an-an-NEEM, by KEH-desh, where Deborah and Ba-RAWK are headed for battle.

D. (:17-22) <u>Prophetic Judgment Fulfilled</u> – Sisera Killed in Humiliating Fashion by a Woman – Jael – God Secures the Glory for Himself by Using Unconventional Means

"*Now Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite, for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, 'Turn aside, my master, turn aside to me! Do not be afraid.' And he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug.*

And he said to her, 'Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.' So she opened a bottle of milk and gave him a drink; then she covered him. And he said to her, 'Stand in the doorway of the tent, and it shall be if anyone comes and inquires of you, and says, Is there anyone here? that you shall say, No.' But Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and seized a hammer in her hand, and went secretly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went through into the ground; for he was sound asleep and exhausted. So he died. And behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him and said to him, 'Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.' And he entered with her, and behold Sisera was lying dead with the tent peg in his temple."

Jael means mountain goat
Maybe gave him a little warm milk to help him fall asleep more easily

Jordan: To go into the tent of another man's wife was the same thing as adultery. Practically speaking, there was no other reason why a man would go into a woman's tent. . . Christ has crushed Satan's head definitively, in His victory n the cross. Christ's people are called to join with Him in this victory, and the promise is that we too shall crush Satan's head, in union with Christ (Rom. 16:20). . . Jael, then, is a prophetic picture of Christ, the ultimate Seed of the Woman. . . Clear approval by God of Jael's actions (5:26-27)

Brensinger: Jael proceeds to drive (*taqa'*) a tent peg through the skull of the unsuspecting and sleeping commander in a manner strangely reminiscent of Ehud's thrusting (*taqa'*) his sword through Eglon's enormous belly.

Alan Carr: In that culture, it was the woman's responsibility to put up and take down the tents. So, Jael was used to swinging that hammer. This woman was not stupid! When she saw Sisera come to her tent on foot, she knew that he had been defeated in battle. She also knew that if she was caught hiding him in her tent, she might be put to death with him when Barak found them. She saw that Israel had come out on top in the battle and she wanted to be found on the right side when the dust settled. Jael was a wise woman!

E. (:23-24) <u>Postscript Relating Complete Victory</u> – King Jabin Destroyed by God – God Finishes Off the Wicked Enemies

"*So **God subdued on that day Jabin** the king of Canaan before the sons of Israel. And the hand of the sons of Israel pressed heavier and heavier upon Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin the king of Canaan.*"

Jabin was the one operating behind the scenes – but the all powerful king pulling the strings while his commander Sisera did the work in the field
Cf. Satan operating in the invisible realm to coordinate all of the attacks against God's children

God's people released from bondage and eventually will experience their hand pressing heavier and heavier upon Satan and his forces until the final vanquishing of the enemy is realized

Block: This is a story about God, who is the real hero, and his people Israel, and their enemies the Canaanites, represented by Jabin their King. The conclusion reminds the reader that the conflict in Book of Judges is not between patriarchy and egalitarianism, between men and women, or even between Israelite leaders and the rulers of the nations. The conflict is between

the divine King and the kingdom of Light on the one hand and the forces of the kingdom of darkness on the other.
The narrator's commentary in vv. 23-24 reflects his perception of the synergy between the divine hand and human effort in historical events.

CONCLUSION:
The message here is that **God can deliver His people**. He can save by many or by few. He can use chariots and sophisticated weapons or He can use an oxgoad and a slingshot. He can raise up mighty warriors or work in surprising ways through women in positions of leadership. He can use a single woman like Jael to finish off the enemy and drive a stake through his head. God is sovereign and He controls all of nature. Despite overwhelming odds, He can call upon a severe storm and a raging flood to send confusion and panic through superior enemy troops. He wants us to obey Him by faith and allow Him to give us the victory by His right hand. He wants us to praise and glorify Him alone for His amazing salvation. Whatever is troubling you, whether you are wrestling with the ultimate question of the salvation of your soul – **Can God really save me** from my bondage to sin; or whether you are struggling with some particular sin problem, God wants you to **call upon Him for mercy** and truly repent and place your faith in His delivering power. There are no iron chariots that are strong enough to force you to continue to live in fear and hopelessness and oppression**. It's all about the Lord and He is able to rout any enemy we face**.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Why was Barak hesitant to obey the Lord's direct command and yet he is listed in Hebrews 11 as a hero of faith?

2) What is the significance of the men who are missing in action in this story (husband of Deborah and husband of Jael)?

3) Name some specific women whose ministries you respect and benefit from?

4) What greater victory does the Lord want to give to you that requires you to expand your faith?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Block: whereas the prose version provides a self-contained logical and chronological account leading up to a climax (4:23-24), the poetic version consists of a collage of more or less independent scenes, with little or no effort on the part of the composer to create a coherent plot line. Indeed, if the narrative account were not available, it would be difficult to reconstruct the course of the battle from the ode alone.

Motyer: For all is the work of God. It is he who plans a home for his people, who condemns the

corrupt nations that have long occupied it, and who brings in Israel to replace them. It is he who allows Canaanite influence to linger and to test his people, he who when they fail the test allows their enemies to oppress them, and he who each time finally raises up a rescuer for them. It is he who has determined to use the entire process as a means of instruction for Israel. Everything is in accordance with his decisions: in a word, he is Judge.

Dale Ralph Davis: **Literary structure**;
The sons of Israel (oppressed), 1-2
Deborah, the prophetess, 4-9
Barak and Sisera '*call out*' (*za'aq*), 10-12/13
Yahweh the Warrior, 14a
Barak and Sisera '*go down*' (*yarad*), 14b/15-16
Jael, wife of Heber, 17-22
Jabin, king of Canaan (subdued), 23-24

I would add the following notes on this structure: (1) The "sons of Israel" are mentioned three times in the first section; similarly, "Jabin, king of Canaan" is mentioned three times in the last section; (2) the second and sixth sections, the longest segments, pair the two women, Deborah and Jael; (3) the two captains, Barak and Sisera, carry out similar activities in sections three and five; (4) the command of Deborah in verse 14a becomes the hinge or focal point of the chapter, and (5) there is doubtless a pun in section seven, verses 23-34, when "Jabin, king of Canaan" (kena'an) is now "subdued" (kana').

Wiersbe: Barak enlisted 10,000 men from his own tribe of Naphtali and the neighboring tribe of Zebulun (Judg. 4:6, 10; 5:14, 18). Later, volunteers from the tribes of Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh west (v. 14), and Issachar (v. 15), joined these men, and the army grew to 40,000 men (v. 8). It's possible that the original 10,000 soldiers initiated the campaign that lured Sisera into the trap, and then the other 30,000 joined them for the actual battle and "mopping up" operation. The tribes that were summoned but refused to come were Reuben, Dan, Asher, and Manasseh east (vv. 15-17).

Ron Daniel: The second thing we're told about Deborah is that she was married to a man named Lap-pee-DOTH. Lap-pee-DOTH is not mentioned in the entire Bible except for right here. Apparently, he didn't have much to do with serving the Lord - he left that for his wife. Does that sound similar to much of the church today? Why is it that more wives come to church without their husbands than husbands without their wives? Why is it that ladies' Bible studies and prayer meetings are always more full than the men's? Why is it that more women always volunteer to serve at the church than men?

God has commanded that men be the spiritual heads of their households.
Eph. 5:23-27 *For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself {being} the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives {ought to be} to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.*

Forget for a moment the dogma of women's lib that has rejected this teaching, and look at it in context of God knowing that women generally tend to be more spiritual and more devoted to the

Lord. God is saying, "Hey husbands! Wake up and be more spiritually driven than your wives! Learn of Me so you can imitate Me and be a blessing to your wife instead of a weight! Set your wife apart by teaching her and encouraging her in the Word of God!"

Ladies, God is trying to bless you by telling your husbands that they are the spiritual authority. Men, God is kicking you in the pants and telling you to get spiritual! It would appear that Deborah's husband Lap-pee-DOTH wasn't tuned in to that. Are you?

TEXT: Judges 5:1-31

TITLE: SONG OF CELEBRATION AND PRAISE

BIG IDEA:
THE LORD BRINGS VICTORY WHEN LEADERS LEAD AND PEOPLE COMMIT THEMSELVES TO FIGHT THE BATTLE

INTRODUCTION:

Characterized as a heroic poem, a war ballad, a victory hymn

I. (:1-5) CELEBRATING THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

> "*Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying, That the leaders led in Israel, That the people volunteered, Bless the LORD! Hear, O kings; give ear, O rulers! I-- to the LORD, I will sing, I will sing praise to the LORD, the God of Israel. LORD, when Thou didst go out from Seir, When Thou didst march from the field of Edom, The earth quaked, the heavens also dripped, Even the clouds dripped water. The mountains quaked at the presence of the LORD, This Sinai, at the presence of the LORD, the God of Israel.*"

- The Leaders (Deborah and Barak) commended for leading
- The People commended for volunteering
- The Lord is to be Praised

Brensinger: Using imagery of the Sinai theophany (cf. Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:8; Hab. 3:3), emphasis is now placed upon the fact that God's presence has brought victory rather than either Israel's own capabilities or Deborah's personal leadership skills. In addition, such imagery anticipates the actual storm that plays so important a role in the battle itself (5:20-21). By linking the Sinai experience to the present events, Israel testifies that the Lord marches out on their behalf not merely in a recollection of the past, but also as a remarkable ongoing occurrence.

II. (:6-11) CELEBRATING THE LEADERSHIP OF DEBORAH TO BE THE LORD'S INSTRUMENT TO BRING ABOUT VICTORY AND DELIVERANCE FROM THE ENEMY OPPRESSORS

A. (:6-8) Deprivation of Israel Motivating the Compassion and Leadership of Deborah

> "*In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, In the days of Jael, the highways were deserted, And travelers went by roundabout ways. The peasantry ceased, they ceased in Israel, Until I, Deborah, arose, Until I arose, a mother in Israel. New gods were chosen; Then war was in the gates. Not a shield or a spear was seen Among forty thousand in Israel.*"

Brensinger: Apparently, the Canaanites' exploitation of Israel has resulted in severe economic hardships. Trading has become virtually impossible, and everyday travel is curtailed or diverted, no doubt by the threat of thievery. Even the least-significant and secluded of villages has failed

to escape the crisis. People no longer feel safe to leave their homes. As a result of such oppression – oppression rooted in Israelite idolatry . . . – Israel has been reduced to a state of utter defenselessness.

B. (:9) Delight in Victory

"*My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel, The volunteers among the people; Bless the LORD!*"

- Victory ascribed to the leaders who led
- Victory ascribed to the people who willingly volunteered and followed
- Victory ultimately ascribed the Lord who accomplished it

C. (:10-11) Deeds of the Lord Observed and Recounted

"*You who ride on white donkeys, You who sit on rich carpets, And you who travel on the road-- sing! At the sound of those who divide flocks among the watering places, There they shall recount the righteous deeds of the LORD, The righteous deeds for His peasantry in Israel. Then the people of the LORD went down to the gates.*"

Wiersbe: Deborah and Barak summoned the wealthy nobles and the common travelers to join the singers at the wells and praise the Lord for what He did to Jabin's army. Now it was safe to walk the roads, gather at the wells, and leisurely talk together. The people could leave the walled cities where they had run for protection and could return to their villages in peace. It was time for all Israel to praise God for His mercies to them.

Peter Pett: To ride on an ass was a position of prestige (Judges 10.4), and a white ass was seen as even more prestigious, the ride of princes. But they rode on asses when riding in peace. Thus those who ride on white asses are those who are important and distinguished, yet live in peace. They know nothing of war. The carpet was used for sitting on, and rich carpets were lush and comfortable. Thus those who sit on rich carpets are those who are wealthy and loll around at ease.

'You who walk by the way.' These are the ordinary people, the wayfarers, who can use the ordinary paths openly, unlike the previous furtiveness of captive Israel (verse 6). They should be grateful for their freedom.

The idea of all three descriptions is that Deborah is declaring that those who are at ease, far away and untroubled by war, will see what Yahweh will do for Israel, miserable in its captivity, revealing His rule over them, and it will be the talking point among them. All the world is called on to notice what God is doing.

III. (:12-18) CELEBRATING THE BRAVERY OF THE TRIBES WHO VOLUNTEERED TO JOIN IN THE FIGHT VS THOSE WHO SAT ON THE SIDELINES IN SHAME

A. (:12-15a) Willing Warriors

"*Awake, awake, Deborah; Awake, awake, sing a song! Arise, Barak, and take away your captives, O son of Abinoam. Then survivors came down to the nobles; The people of the LORD came down to me as warriors. From Ephraim those whose root is in Amalek came down, Following you, Benjamin, with your peoples; From Machir commanders came*

down, And from Zebulun those who wield the staff of office. And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; As was Issachar, so was Barak; Into the valley they rushed at his heels;"

Brensinger: those tribes who take active part in the struggle are those concentrated within the central and north-central regions of the land. Clearly, they are the ones most affected by such an "internal" Canaanite coalition, not to mention the ones least affected by surrounding forces causing problems elsewhere.

B. (:15b-18) Sideline Sitters

"*Among the divisions of Reuben There were great resolves of heart. Why did you sit among the sheepfolds, To hear the piping for the flocks? Among the divisions of Reuben There were great searchings of heart. Gilead remained across the Jordan; And why did Dan stay in ships? Asher sat at the seashore, And remained by its landings. Zebulun was a people who despised their lives even to death, And Naphtali also, on the high places of the field.*"

Inrig: characterizes the tribes singled out for a reluctant spirit:

- Reuben: the tribe who would not act
  - They were moved by sentiment, but not to sacrifice.
- Gilead: the tribes which lacked fellowship
  - Gilead isn't the name of one tribe but two – Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh which had never crossed the Jordan River . . . A voluntary lack of fellowship with other believers will inevitably produce a lack of enthusiasm for God's work.
- Dan: the tribe which lacked growth
  - The first tribe to go into apostasy; never realized their potential
- Asher: the tribe which lacked vision
  - Focused on their work and their business

IV. (:19-23) CELEBRATING THE MIRACULOUS VICTORY OF THE LORD OVER THE POWERFUL PAGAN WARRIORS

A. (:19) Futility of Pagan Kings

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

B. (:20-22) Invincibility of Divine Forces

"*The stars fought from heaven, From their courses they fought against Sisera. The torrent of Kishon swept them away, The ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon. O my soul, march on with strength. Then the horses' hoofs beat From the dashing, the dashing of his valiant steeds.*"

C. (:23) Cursing of Uncommitted Bystanders

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

Brensinger: both its character or makeup as well as its location are unknown. However, the

scathing condemnation directed against it, condemnation that far exceeds in severity the earlier criticism of various tribes, implies that it was in a superior position to be of help Of importance here is the fact that Meroz's failure to assist in the cause is not so much an affront to the people of Israel as a rejection of God himself and the responsibilities that he assigns. Such rejection, even in threatening situations involving holy war, is despised and condemned (cf. Jer. 48:10).

F B Meyer: The cooperation of God and man is clearly revealed throughout the Bible. We are His fellow-workers, "fellow-helpers with the truth:' It is well worth our notice that some of the strongest denunciations in the Bible are against those that do nothing. It is a sin not to do, not to come against might to the help of the Lord. "Curse ye Meroz." O my soul, dost thou rightly fulfil all the opportunities of thy life? The virgins that slept without oil: the man that hid the talent: the nations that did it not to the least of the king's brethren; these are held up by Christ to the most terrible denunciations that His gentle lips could frame.

V. (:24-30) CELEBRATING THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE BOLD EXPLOITS OF THE HEROINE JAEL AND THE DESPAIRING LAMENT OF THE MOTHER OF SISERA

A. (:24-27) The Bold Exploits of the Heroine Jael

"*Most blessed of women is Jael, The wife of Heber the Kenite; Most blessed is she of women in the tent. He asked for water and she gave him milk; In a magnificent bowl she brought him curds. She reached out her hand for the tent peg, And her right hand for the workmen's hammer. Then she struck Sisera, she smashed his head; And she shattered and pierced his temple. Between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay; Between her feet he bowed, he fell; Where he bowed, there he fell dead.*"

B. (:28-30) The Despairing Lament of the Mother of Sisera

"*Out of the window she looked and lamented, The mother of Sisera through the lattice, 'Why does his chariot delay in coming? Why do the hoofbeats of his chariots tarry?' Her wise princesses would answer her, Indeed she repeats her words to herself, 'Are they not finding, are they not dividing the spoil? A maiden, two maidens for every warrior; To Sisera a spoil of dyed work, A spoil of dyed work embroidered, Dyed work of double embroidery on the neck of the spoiler?'*

Dale Ralph Davis: The picture of Sisera's mother is simply dripping with holy sarcasm. Here she is, peering anxiously through the upstairs window, squinting into the distance, demanding in suppressed fear the reason for Sisera's delay. Why hadn't she heard the clatter of his chariot horses yet? Where is her boy?

The suave princesses who attend Sisera's mother reassure her . . .: You know it takes time to divide up all the spoil; and they'll likely rape some girls, and think of how many lovely additions to your wardrobe Sisera will be collecting!

(:31) SUMMARY:

A. Benediction – Cursing and Blessing

"*Thus let all Thine enemies perish, O LORD; But let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might.*"

Inrig: Two reasons that motivated such exemplary volunteer service:
1) Their attitude toward God – (:31) knew what it was to love God
2) Their attitude toward service – (:23) knew what it was to help the Lord

Motyer: a central theme of the entire book. The poem's opening words (5:2-5) tell us that for those who have the eyes to see, there is the never-failing confidence of true Israelites in a Judge who goes forth in majesty to direct all their ways. Its closing words (5:28-31) tell us that for those who cannot or will not see there is only the "Canaanite" confidence which is, in the end, illusion. The latter must "*perish*"; the former will be "*like the sun as he rises in his might*".

Block: In ancient Near Eastern thought the sun was worshiped as a deity who rode triumphantly in his chariot each day. The association of the sun with a chariot derives from the sun's disclike appearance. The ancients perceived it as a chariot wheel turning through the heavens. Indeed the present image may have been suggested to Deborah by the earlier references to Sisera's chariots. If this interpretation is correct, the prayer not only wishes for Yahweh's people continued triumph against their enemies; this military nuance also creates a fitting inclusion with the opening vision of Yahweh coming forth from Sinai ahead of his people (v. 4). No earthly chariots can stand against those who are covenantally committed to God.

B. Rest and Slippage

"*And the land was undisturbed for forty years.*"

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Are you responding to the Lord's challenge to lead or to volunteer in His service?

2) Are you quick to bless the Lord and sing His praises when He gives the victory?

3) Why is there no emphasis here on repentance over the sin of Israel "*choosing new gods*"?

4) Is this incantation of cursing and blessing appropriate for the church age?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Inrig: Two themes run through the psalm and we meet both of them in the first verse. "*That the leaders led in Israel, that the people volunteered, bless the Lord!*" The first theme is the greatness of God displayed in the victory He accomplished . . . But God does not work in a vacuum. He uses men and women, and in this case He used a group of people who responded to Him willingly, eagerly, and unhesitatingly. That is the second theme of the psalm – the response of God's people to God's challenge . . .

Block: as history, it informs; as a ballad it entertains; as a heroic ode it inspires; as a hymn it calls for celebration. As a poetic recital of historical events, this ode offers the reader/hearer a glimpse into the early history of Israel. Because it offers a nearly contemporary picture of premonarchic Israel, some would argue that the picture it paints of Israel's formative years is more reliable than the surrounding prose narrative. It characterizes these early decades as troubled times. Not only was the nation at the mercy of outsiders with whom they competed for control of the land (control of the Jezreel Valley seems to have been a key element in this conflict), internally the tribes found it difficult to work in concert. To be sure, Israel's sense of a national community consisting of at least nine (or ten) tribes antedated the monarchy, but internal tensions were created by varying levels of tribal loyalty to the confederate ideal. The ode also offers a picture of the economy of the Israelites, who made their living by trading, herding sheep, and supporting the maritime trade of the Phoenicians.

Block: As for Deborah, this remarkable woman is without doubt the most honorable human figure in the Book of Judges and one of the most remarkable characters in the entire Old Testament. . . She sits not at Bethel or Shiloh, where the ark is, but outside the town, receiving the pleas of the Israelites on Yahweh's behalf. . . She does not displace men in officially established positions of leadership, but her gender does not disqualify her from significant service for God. And so it will be in any age. God's call to service often catches his people by surprise, but when he calls, we must respond to his command, even when it appears to run counter to convention.

Dr. Peter Pett:
The greatness of Yahweh was now described in terms of natural phenomenon. The connection of Seir with Sinai suggests that we have here a picture of Yahweh marching with His people out of the wilderness to capture the land of Canaan for Himself. 'Seir, the field of Edom', was connected with the old Edom (Genesis 32.3) and that stretched right back into the wilderness. The quaking earth was a reminder of God's revelation of Himself at Sinai (Exodus 19.18), while the waters flooding down were particularly appropriate in view of the way in which He destroyed the Canaanites at the Kishon. The thought is of a mighty storm which she may reasonably have connected with the phenomena at Sinai (Exodus 19.16), while linking Sinai with what he had done at Kishon. For this is poetry. Compare Psalm 68.7-9 which clearly has the song of Deborah in view. Thus the God of the covenant fulfilled His part in the covenant at Kishon. The floods of water from the skies flowed down 'from Mount Sinai'.

She may also have had in mind the blessing of Moses. There Moses had said, 'Yahweh came from Sinai, And rose from Mount Seir to them, He shone forth from Paran, and He came from ten thousands of holy ones' (Deuteronomy 33.2 compare Psalm 68.17). It is clear reference to the fact that their mighty covenant God, with Whom they had dealt at Sinai, had come with them. He was not a far off God in a holy mountain, He was One Who was with them, the 'I am'.

Deffinbaugh:
Let me mention one last thing as I close. In those dark days of the judges, the leaders shrunk back, and there were few who were willing to follow. The bottom line was that there seemed to be no one to fight the enemy, the Canaanites. Through the ministry of this great woman, Deborah, leaders and followers emerged, and the battle was fought and won. Today, it is very little different than in Deborah's day. There is a great deal that needs to be done in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

TEXT: Judges 6:1-24

TITLE: THE CALL OF GIDEON – THE LORD IS PEACE

BIG IDEA:
THE CALL OF GOD SHOULD TRANSFORM OUR SENSE OF INADEQUACY INTO A MINDSET OF PEACE AND CONFIDENCE AS WE FOCUS ON THE LORD'S ENABLING PRESENCE

INTRODUCTION:

You might be familiar with a series of TV commercials where different well known personalities recount some challenges in their life and conclude with the pronouncement: "**I am so-and-so and I am confident in my own skin**." The humanistic mindset of our culture wants to loudly proclaim personal sufficiency. I can do it. I can be comfortable with who I am. I can be successful because of my innate abilities and personality. I can handle whatever the world might throw at me. No challenge can defeat me. I am comfortable in my own skin.

As we begin a series of messages on the role of Gideon as one of the most prominent in the line of judges in this chaotic time period of Israel's up and down struggles with idolatry and apostasy, we see that God wants His leaders to have a totally different mindset. As God calls Gideon to a supremely challenging task of rescuing the Jews from the oppressive Midianites, He wants Gideon to recognize his own inadequacy, but put his confidence in God's presence and enablement. He wants Gideon to be comfortable in living in the divine presence where God's favor can accomplish the impossible. This requires a process. It doesn't happen all at once. We are going to see that it is a struggle for Gideon to take on this new leadership role.

But the dominant attribute of God that will help Gideon make this transition in mindset and confidence is that the Lord is Peace. We know from other passages that the Lord is everything to us. He is our Savior; He is Love; He is Holy; He is Just; He is Compassionate. But to be comfortable in the divine presence we must know God as our Peace.

THE CALL OF GOD SHOULD TRANSFORM OUR SENSE OF INADEQUACY INTO A MINDSET OF PEACE AND CONFIDENCE AS WE FOCUS ON THE LORD'S ENABLING PRESENCE

We start this new cycle in Israel's history where the Book of Judges starts each cycle, with the recurring sin of God's people. What a sad commentary on man's wandering heart and conflicting loyalties – yet the Lord remains faithful.

I. (:1a) SIN – FORGETTING THE SOURCE OF BLESSING

"*Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD;*"

This is not making reference to just one or two dramatic occurrences of rebellion. It is a characterization of overall apostasy and idolatry. We are going to see that the family of the hero in this passage has actually set up a center of Baal worship – an altar that the Lord will require be torn down. There has been a major departure from covenant obedience, despite the previous deliverances which the people have experienced; despite the forty years of peace and prosperity after the success of Deborah and Barak over Jabin and Sisera and the Canaanite forces.

II. (:1b-6a) SUFFERING – BEING BROUGHT LOW BY ENEMY OPPRESSION

"*and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years. And the power of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds. For it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites would come up with the Amalekites and the sons of the east and go against them. So they would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, they would come in like locusts for number, both they and their camels were innumerable; and they came into the land to devastate it. So Israel was brought very low because of Midian,*"

The Midianites had a **history** of tripping up the Israelites in the past and continued to be a constant source of aggravation.
Remember back in **Numbers 25** – God warned His people about the Midianites.
Numbers 31:1-18 – God had Moses take full vengeance on the Midianites – but they were not utterly destroyed;
Here they become the toughest enemy which Israel has faced yet and they repeatedly ravage their villages and crops for a seven year period that must have seemed like an eternity.

Once again the **sovereignty of God** is emphasized – He was using the Midianites to wake His people up from their spiritual backsliding and rebellion.

Inrig: This time God used a group of desert people, led by the people of Midian. The Midianites had discovered a devastating new military weapon – the camel! Their main benefit was in giving the Midianites a mobile, long-range, swift, attack-capability against the Hebrews, who were entirely dependent on foot soldiers. A camel can travel for three or four days, with a heavy load on its back, and cover about 300 miles, without food or water.

Motyer: What is stressed is how many times they invaded (note the word "*whenever*", and the tenses of the verbs: they would come, they would attack, they would destroy, *whenever* the Israelites had crops to be plundered); how many miles they covered (as far as Gaza, in the deep south, having presumably crossed Jordan a very long way to the north of that, to judge by 6:33); and above all, how many men their host comprised (they were "*like locusts*" not just for destructiveness, which is what locusts usually mean, but here specifically "*for number; . . . they . . . could not be counted*"). Too many! Too many! And it is into the hand of this "too-many" enemy that the Lord has given His people.

Dale Ralph Davis: covenant breakers should expect this type of scourge from Yahweh – **Deut. 28:29, 31**

Block: The narrator highlights the intensity of their fright by citing a triad of refuges: *minharot*, "*mountain clefts*"; *mearot*, "*caves*"; and *mesadot*, "*strongholds*." . . . "*Israel became small*"

Result: Israel was brought very low

III. (:6b-10) SUPPLICATION – GETTING THE LORD'S ATTENTION

"*and the sons of Israel cried to the LORD. Now it came about when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD on account of Midian, that the LORD sent a prophet to the sons of Israel, and he said to them, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, It was I who brought you up from Egypt, and brought you out from the house of slavery. And I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hands of all your oppressors, and dispossessed them before you and gave you their land, and I said to you, I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But you have not obeyed Me.*'"

Interesting how when you read a number of commentators you see the same illustration repeated … you never know its origin; it just takes on a life of its own and becomes wedded to the particular passage; I will adapt it some based on my current business experience

Illustration: At Johnson and Towers, we repair trucks and buses that break down. Our special expertise has been in Detroit engines and Allison transmissions; but we have expanded our services to work on everything on the truck. Imagine the reaction of a customer – say MTA or Greyhound – who has a bus broken down on the Baltimore Beltway. They call for our road service and we send out a philosopher to lecture them on proper preventive maintenance practices. They would not be too pleased. They want a mechanic dispatched to fix their bus and want it fixed NOW!

Dale Ralph Davis: Israel cries for relief, and Yahweh "*sent a prophet to the sons of Israel*" (v. 8). That would be like a stranded motorist calling a garage for assistance and the garage sending a philosopher instead of a mechanic. Israel needs deliverance and Yahweh sends a prophet; Israel asks for an act of God's power and he sends them a proclaimer of his word who rehearses Yahweh's grace (vv. 8b-9), repeats Yahweh's demand (v. 10a), and levels Yahweh's accusation (v. 10b). Hence Yahweh sends a prophet because Israel needs more than immediate relief; they need to understand why they are oppressed.

The guts of the story relate to this all important stage in the cycle – the stage of salvation and deliverance – we will be focusing today on the Call of Gideon

III. (:11-24) SALVATION – THE CALLING OF GIDEON – THE VALIANT WARRIOR

8 Aspects of This Divine Calling:

A. (:11) The Circumstances of the Calling -- Called by the Angel of the Lord while in Hiding

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

Inrig: The name Gideon means "hewer," so he was apparently a man of physical strength. [hewer of wood or of rock]. . His father owned land in Ophrah, which normally was a very fertile part of the country. But when we meet Gideon, he was threshing wheat by beating it with a stick in a winepress. Normally, a man would thresh wheat on a wooden threshing floor, using a threshing sledge pulled by oxen. The floor would be by a wheat field, in an exposed place, so that the wind would carry away the chaff.

Brensinger: A winepress, typically a large vat carved out of the rock and connected to a lower,

smaller vat by a channel, could be located almost anyplace grapes were available. The grapes were simply placed in the large vat and trampled underfoot until the juice flowed into the lower vat.

Dale Ralph Davis: I have called this section "the grace that holds us." How like the God of the Bible whose covenant love is so "*mighty*" over us (Ps. 103:11, in the Hebrew)! When he "*ought*" to destroy he delivers yet again; when he has every right to shatter he nevertheless prepares to save. How "*slow to anger*" (Exod. 34:6) indeed! How loath he is to strike his people (Lam. 3:33) even when justice begs for it. That is why Ephesians 2:4 grips us so.

Block: grain was threshed by first beating the heads of the cut stalks with a flail, discarding the straw, and then tossing the mixture of chaff and grain in the air, allowing the wind to blow away the chaff while the heavier kernels of grain fell to the floor.

B. (:12) <u>The Celebration of the Calling</u> to be a Valiant Warrior because of God's Presence and Favor

"*And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, 'The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior.*"'

Did not look like there was much to celebrate, given the circumstances … but the Lord talks in language of ultimate victory and celebration

Not mocking Gideon – but viewing him in light of the possibilities due to God's transforming power and enablement – just like the Savior came to Simon and noted "*You are Simon, the son of Jonah. You shall be called a Rock – Peter*."

Promise of the presence of the Lord should be all that we need; should answer all of our questions and objections – but God is patient with us – understands that it is a process as we grow in our maturity and our ability to live in light of God's presence with us

C. (:13) <u>The Climate of Discouragement and Defeat</u> Despite the Calling

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

Inrig: A little girl was listening to her mother tell some Bible stories about great people like Moses, Joshua, Samson, and Daniel. Finally, she turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, you know, God was much more exciting back then."

D. (:14) <u>The Commissioning of the Calling</u> -- Called by the Power of God to Deliver Israel

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

go in the strength associated with confidence in the Lord's enabling presence with you; the divine commissioning brings with it implied strength for the task at hand

Inrig: Hudson Taylor once said, “All of God’s great men have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on His being with them; they counted on His faithfulness.” That is the divine solution to discouragement – the truth of the omnipresence and adequacy of God.

E. (:15) <u>The Criticism of the Calling</u> -- Excuses and Objections

“*And he said to Him, ‘O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house.’*”

Certain degree of humility is appropriate

Gideon had to come to an end of himself where he saw himself as bankrupt and unable to accomplish anything for God; but too often we take that mindset and transfer it over to God as if He cannot use us to accomplish anything

Important Principle: God’s Power is best seen through accomplishing the impossible through the transformed weakness of men – He likes working with a few rather than many – we will see God instructing Gideon to cut down the number of his forces – it will be obvious that the Lord gives the victory

F. (:16) <u>The Comforting Words of Reassurance</u> to Support the Calling

“*But the LORD said to him, ‘Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man.’*”

Lord keeps coming back to this fundamental theme of **the Enabling Presence of the Lord**

Does this mean defeat Midian as if it were only one man rather than a multitude?

Ritchie: He says very clearly that he can't do it," but the Lord says to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man." It is the whole principle of "I in you and you in me."
There is a beautiful principle here: We were never meant to live our lives hopelessly, for ourselves We are meant to die to ourselves so that Christ can live' his life in and through us. That is how we get meaning out of life. We are meant to have Christ live through us, as Lord and Savior. Then our life takes on beautiful meaning.

G. (:17-21) <u>The Confirmation of the Calling</u> by a Miraculous Sign

“*So Gideon said to Him, ‘If now I have found favor in Thy sight, then show me a sign that it is Thou who speakest with me. Please do not depart from here, until I come back to Thee, and bring out my offering and lay it before Thee.’ And He said, 'I will remain until you return.’ Then Gideon went in and prepared a kid and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour; he put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, and brought them out to him under the oak, and presented them. And the angel of God said to him, ‘Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth.’ And he did so. Then the angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire sprang up from the rock and*

consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight.'"

Preparing a feast in time of famine; a feast that became a sacrifice

Wiersbe: Gideon prepared a sacrifice, which was a costly thing to do at a time when food was scarce. An ephah of flour was about a half a bushel, enough to make bread for a family for several days. It probably took him an hour to dress the meat and prepare the unleavened cakes, but God waited for him to return and then consume the offering by bringing fire from the rock.

H. (:22-24) <u>The Conclusion of the Calling</u> – Mindset of Peace and Confidence Rather Than Fear

"*When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the LORD, he said, 'Alas, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face And the LORD said to him, 'Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die.' Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it* ***The LORD is Peace****. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.*"

Dale Ralph Davis: He must have assurance but there is a problem with the assurance. This assurance does not settle but alarms him.

Wiersbe: The Hebrew word for "*peace*" (*shalom*) means much more than a cessation of hostilities but carries with it the ideas of well-being, health, and prosperity.

- Fear of Death – of God's Destructive Power and Judgment
- Fear of the Enemy
- Fear of the Future
- Fear of My Own Inadequacies
- Fear of Failure
- Fear of What Others Will Think or Say or Do

Combat Fear with Worship and Thanksgiving and Service

Ultimately we are not comfortable in our own skin but in the Lord.

Gal. 2:20 "*I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me*."

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How has the Lord on some occasion brought you low so that you would turn to Him for deliverance?

2) What types of questions and doubts do you express to the Lord from time to time?

3) Under what circumstances do you have the greatest sense of the Lord's enabling presence?

4) What types of fears give you the most problem?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Inrig: One of the great truths of Scripture is that when God looks at us, He does not see us for what we are, but for what we can become, as He works in our lives. He is in the business of taking weak, insignificant people, and transforming them by His presence in their lies. He begins with us where we are, as we are. He knows our weaknesses, failures, discouragements, doubts, and inadequacies, but He does not say, 'You get rid of those, and then I can use you.' Rather, He comes to us in our weakness with the promise of His presence that will transform our inadequacy into His strength.

Motyer: the message of Gideon clearly has something to do with the weakness of God's people and the apparently overwhelming strength of the enemy, and with God's methods of perfecting his own strength in weakness.

S. Lewis Johnson: The lesson of the Book of Judges is failure though compromise. Israel failed to make a complete conquering of the land as God had told her to do. So then she made military leagues with the unbelievers thinking that thereby she would be helped. That's always a mistake. The military leagues led to intermarriage and deeper entanglement with the forces of opposition to the Lord God. And the intermarriage led to idolatry. And the idolatry led to apostasy. And apostasy led to divine discipline in captivity. And like a cycle, this went on over a lengthy period of time. And God, after the children of Israel were reduced in their captivity to the place where they cried out to him, then he would answer and give them deliverance though a judge. . .

Now I want to stress the fact that this came to Gideon by the grace of God. It was the angel who appeared to Gideon. It was God who moved out. The initiative comes with God. But Gideon was responsible. And we're responsible. We're responsible to know the Lord, to seek the Lord. And I urge you as Christian men and women to set aside some time and go into your bedroom or wherever your closet may be, to use the biblical term, and seek the face of God. And if you don't get any answer for some time, continue to seek him until the experience of the presence of God grips you and your life will be different once the touch of God has come upon it. That's the important thing. That's the start of the work of God in Gideon, the relationship with the Lord that makes everything different thereafter.

Alistair Begg: **Gideon – the Weakest and the Least**
The story of the Book of Judges makes for depressing reading; judges were a great sign of God's grace but not an adequate solution to their problem; the power of weakness is the principle at work here; God works His purposes out in the lives of those who recognize that they are helpless; victory against insurmountable odds;

1. Deep Trouble! Oppression under Midianites; marauding forces from the east; they were impoverished; overwhelmed; overrun; wishing they could thresh the wheat normally out in the open; write down everything that comes into your mind as you read the text; "All I want is a

room somewhere …" line from My Fair Lady – just longs for the essentials of life; their circumstances were directly related to their disobedience; God wants them to call out to Him for help; everything does not go rosy for believers; we come up against circumstances we do not like; we cannot change; and we do not understand; God sends them a prophet (when your car is broken down you want the garage to send a mechanic); what they needed first and foremost was an explanation as to why they were in this predicament in the first place; God turns His people to His Word; people deserved judgment but God sent His grace and mercy in the person of the angel of the Lord (changes to address this person as the Lord Himself; enigmatic disclosure of the Lord – a theophany of Yahweh himself)

2. Good Question! Gideon is a microcosm of what God is doing with His people overall; dramatic and surprising greeting; **"If the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?"** We all experience this If … Why scenario; this question addressed frequently in the Psalms; why do the wicked prosper while the righteous experience seemingly disastrous circumstances? Encouraging for those who think it is wrong to ask any questions; "If I were God I would remove all pain … I would make things simpler …." It seems like we have been abandoned by God; recognizes the sovereignty of God; that is exactly what makes it hard for me; I am totally inadequate; God says, OK, this is good, now we are making progress; self assured people don't pray; we are used so little because we think we are so useful; God delights in using the useless; Angel doesn't say you have a strong clan and you can do it; it is pervasive in our culture to try to convince people they can do it; "*I will be with you*" is the ultimate answer; should be enough for Gideon, but it was not; he asked for a sign; those who make fun of Gideon have not spent enough time looking in the mirror

3. Big Challenge! (:25) Built an altar and the Lord came and gave him a challenge; tear down another altar – good job on the building; let's see how you do on the demolition; wreck your father's altar; you cannot have 2 altar at the same time; you must choose your allegiance; no man can serve two masters; took ten of his friends with him; nail our colors to the mast; how long halt ye between two masters; I do want to serve you … but not just yet; obedience was essential and heroism was optional – did it fearfully and in darkness, but he did it

4. Great Patience! (:36) wet fleece with dry ground; dry fleece with wet ground – God patiently does both because that is the kind of God He is; stoops to our weakness; God is not in need of Gideon but uses him in such a mighty way

The greatest detriment to spiritual progress is our thinking we can do it

Steve Zeisler: The prophet is making an essential point. Verse 7 says that the sons of Israel cried to the Lord on account of Midian, the yearly invaders from the desert to the south. They said their problem was Midian, but the prophet said their problem was their worship of Baal. The reason that they are weakened before their enemies and unable to deal with their problems is that they have chosen to worship and put their faith in something other than the true God. As a result, they have become hollow and ineffective and are easily overwhelmed.

Gil Rugh: **God Calls Gideon**
100 verses over 3 chapters dedicated to Gideon; more than on any other judge; Samson has 96 verses over 4 chapters; Gideon is a very important person; listed in heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11 = a great honor; a time of chaos when everyone did what was right in their own eyes; no central authority; judges are raised as local deliverers; God is a faithful God; He does

not abandon His people; difficult for God's people to stay focused spiritually in times of rest and prosperity; they have become actively involved in the pagan worship of the Canaanites; his father is a worshipper of Baal and maintains a center of worship; not just a single act of disobedience; not an overnight change but over time; people settled into a pattern of idolatry and unfaithfulness; just south of the Sea of Galilee in the northern part of the land; Midianites across the Jordan on the east; so bad that the Israelites made caves and dens so that they could leave their homes and hide; coalition of enemies to subjugate the Jews; they would take the crops and livestock and everything of value and return back to their area; can't get any food – on the verge of starvation; overwhelming multitude; they have the little bit of food they were able to hide away; load up the camels and the wagons and haul everything away; Israel needed a prophet to remind them of their sinfulness; these people have had remarkable opportunities for God to directly appear to them and communicate to them; Gideon marked out by the Lord for a special mission; a man of great courage and great faith; Angel of the Lord does not give a direct response to the questions (If, Why, Where); speaks with authority; there's a place for proper humility; don't project our weakness to God and say He cannot do the impossible; authority of the Lord and the presence of the Lord; **Heb. 13:5**; I will never under any circumstances desert you – ou me construction; be content with what you have; in Him we have everything we need; this is a significant offering; fire sprang up from the rock, not from the staff; the angel of the Lord vanishes; **Ex. 33:20** "nobody can see my face and live" – Is this a voice from heaven? Did the angel of the Lord reappear? Surprising context for the Lord to reveal Himself as Peace; nothing has changed yet in terms of the circumstances

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **God's Strength in Our Weakness**
Introduction: The Midianites were ravaging the land and Israel was hiding in caves, they were paralyzed by fear, and in the midst of this crisis, God will raise up another judge. He's not gonna be a formidable man, he's gonna be a very fearful farmer, not necessarily a fearless warrior. But the chapter reminds us that God specializes in using ordinary weak people. In fact, that's all God has to choose from. He has weak people, hesitant people, but yet people that are willing to trust God even in their weakness.

Big Idea: **Five crucial steps that God takes to overcome our weakness and use us for his glory**

I. God confronts us in our weakness – vs. 1-10
The Midianites are the descendants of Abraham through his second wife, Keterah. And the Midianites were the one that sold Joseph into Egypt, as you might remember that story. But they were looked upon as a positive light in the book of Exodus because Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, was a Midianite. And it was from Midian that Moses received the call.

However, that relationship with the Midianites deteriorates because in Numbers chapter 25, Balaam uses the Midianites to draw the people of Israel away from God. And then in Numbers 31, there's an all-out war against them. And so from that point on, there was animosity between Midian and Israel.

Now, at this point, the Midianites grow to be strong, and now they're oppressing Israel, so much so that the children of Israel are hiding in caves and in dens and in the mountains. They're fleeing from these people. And how did they oppress them? We'll look at verse number three. So whenever the Israelites would plant their crops, the Midianites, along with the Amalekites, another group from the east, another group that hated Israel, they would get together, they would

come, and they would invade the land, and they would steal the harvest, they would steal the produce.

The bible compares the Midianites to locusts. And what do locusts do? They strip the land bare. They're numerous, they're destructive, and they would also use kind of a new weapon in that time. In verse number five says, they had camels with them, for they came up with their cattle and their tents. They came as grasshoppers for multitude, for both they and their camels were without number.

This was the first time used for an organized military raid. They use these animals. Camels possess endurance and speed. They could travel 100 miles per day and without food and water, they could carry heavy loads. And so they would come in with these animals. They would take their produce, take their harvests. And Israel was terrified.

God has to confront our idols before he strengthens our hands.
God has to remove those idols out of your heart

II. God calls us in spite of our weakness – vs. 11-16

Gideon is threshing wheat in a winepress. When you normally thresh wheat, where would you be? You would be high on a hill. Why? Because when you throw the wheat up into the air, you want the wind to blow the chaff away so that the wheat would fall down. When they would build these winepresses, they would cut them out of rock, normally on the side of a hill. The rock was cut out. And so to be in a winepress meant he was down in it deep, a few feet down. So that means he was hidden. While he's stretching wheat, he's hiding in this wine press. The reason they would cut these into slopes or into the hilltops is because the gravity would help the juice flow down and grapes would grow on these terraced hillsides there in Israel. And here he is, he's hiding inside this sunken rock that was used for the wine press.

And what is this a picture of? It's a picture of fear, it's a picture of weakness. And this is purposeful on the part of the writer. He wants us to see that Gideon is not a brave man. He's a weak, cowardly person. And the grapes in the wine press, normally trampled on and crushed. I think, again, there's some imagery there. This is a picture of the spirit of the people of Israel. They were trampled under the foot by the Midianites. They were crushed. They were weak.

Appearance of the preincarnate Christ. "*The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor*."
He's incredibly gracious and kind. And he comes to Gideon as he is. He doesn't say, why are you hiding? He doesn't say, repent. He doesn't say, wow, you're a weakling. He says, the Lord is with you. What an incredible promise in the midst of fear. This is not a rebuke. This is a comforting word. Gideon is a mighty man of valor, not because of his bravery, but because the Lord is with him.

God doesn't call us because we're strong. He calls us because He is strong. He is strong and we're the weak ones. He sees us not as we are, but as we will be when his grace takes hold of us. God doesn't call the equipped, he equips the called. And so God confronts us in our weakness. God calls us despite our weakness.

III. God confirms His presence in our weakness – vs. 17-24

The writer's gonna show us that Gideon's faith is weak. Not only is he cowardly and hiding and a weak man, but his faith is weak as well. Gideon's going to ask for a sign. He wanted to make sure it was really God talking to him. God graciously condescends to human weakness.

God's presence turns his fear into peace. Now this whole encounter that Gideon has with God, it changes him. It doesn't remove his fear completely, but it does reorient it some. He's no longer afraid of the Midianites like he was. Now he has a fear of God. And that's what God wants. We need to fear God and not man. We need to keep our eyes on the Lord and not worry about the fear of man. Gideon was still fearing God, but he didn't fear the Midianites like he did before. And so Gideon has this newfound fear of the Lord.

IV. God commands obedience in our weakness – vs. 25-32

He's going to give him a task, and he's going to test Gideon's dedication. And God's first assignment for Gideon was not to face the Midianites, but to tear down his father's altar that was devoted to Baal, and to build an altar to the Lord. But even more than that, he was supposed to sacrifice his father's special bull. You see, the problem really was not the Midianites, but the real problem was idolatry in Israel. That was the problem.

Military victory is meaningless. Reform is superficial. unless you get your idols out of your home. You get rid of them. You see, God insists there is no salvation without true repentance, no deliverance without loyalty. Even trembling obedience is still obedience.

You know, whenever you take a stand for the Lord, it's going to have both a negative impact and a positive impact. You understand that? Whenever you take a stand for God, you have to be willing to pay the consequences for it.

Gideon's name is changed. Look in verse number 32. Therefore, on that day, he called him Jeroboam, saying, let Baal plead against him, because he has thrown down his altar. So this is a derisive name. This is why Gideon is renamed this, let Baal contend his own case. He never answers for himself. And so really this whole name was a mockery. It was a public ridicule. He's a God who doesn't respond. He's a God who can't defend himself. So this wasn't a flattering name. It was constantly a challenge and a ridicule against Baal.

V. God confirms faith in our weakness – vs. 33-40

The fleece was weak faith tolerated by God. And I think that's the correct idea here. Gideon is wavering. This fleece is an act of fearful faith. God answers without approving his method which shows what? The patience of God, the grace of God dealing with us. And so really this should cause us to just thank the Lord for his patience and kindness and loving kindness to us when we don't deserve it. and God encouraging us when we at times really don't deserve it. So the fleece does not teach us how to discern God's will, it teaches us how wonderful and patient God is. That's really the whole lesson behind this thing here. And so God does not rebuke him for asking, he meets him right where he is because our God is merciful.

TEXT: Judges 6: 25-32

TITLE: CONSECRATION OF GIDEON AND HIS FAMILY

BIG IDEA:
CONSECRATION IS THE PREREQUISITE TO EFFECTIVE SPIRITUAL SERVICE –

INTRODUCTION:

We have some strange new ideas that have taken root in the soil of American government. These are principles that are fundamentally opposed to those that our founding fathers would have advocated. One of those perversions that bothers me the most is articulated by William Bennett in his book: Death of Outrage: Bill Clinton and the Assault on American Ideals:

"It is said that private character has virtually no impact on governing character"

Think about the ramifications of that statement. Look at how it has impacted the business world and all realms of leadership. This past week we had Arkansas University agonizing over whether they would be forced to fire their popular 51 year old head football coach Bobby Petrino after his motorcycle accident with a female passenger wrapped around his waist exposed his inappropriate sexual relationship with a 25 year old he had recently hired on as a $56,000 a year assistant to the football program. Was this really a difficult decision? Does nothing shock us anymore? At least the Athletic Director did the right thing. In many instances today, the discipline amounts to nothing more than a slap on the wrist.

That is certainly not the position of the Lord who maintains that **consecration must precede effective ministry**. We saw last week the **Calling of Gideon**. But before he can engage the enemy in battle, he must deal decisively with the moral and spiritual demons in his own family closet. It turns out his father had sponsored a very prominent center for idol worship. But victory over Israel's oppressors would not be granted until repentance was evidenced by the purging of this sinful practice and the return to biblical worship of the one true God. Remember the good report the Apostle Paul rendered about the conversion of the believers at Thessalonica:
1 Thess. 1:9-10 *"For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come."*

Consecration is probably an outdated sounding concept in our modern culture. Who uses such terminology anymore? Didn't that type of vocabulary get forgotten along with the Puritans and the Reformers? Not talking about a leap to sinless perfection …
Definition: the setting apart for the service of God

Must first understand the **nature of Idolatry:**
An idol is an object, idea or relationship that shifts our focus from God.
What is it that has slowly crept into your life and your home, which takes the place of God?

CONSECRATION IS THE PREREQUISITE TO EFFECTIVE SPIRITUAL SERVICE

I. (:25-27) CONSECRATION DEMANDS A COMPLETE PURGING OF IDOLATRY

A. (:25a) The Urgency of Consecration – Revelation of the Divine Command

"*Now the same night it came about that the LORD said to him,*"

Gideon immediately was confronted with specific divine expectations – being assigned a task that must be carried out in the context of his own home before God would bless him in the larger public calling involving rescuing the nation from the Midianites

Privilege of revelation – how quickly God spoke to him again; yet revelation brings accountability

When God is ready to act things happen quickly

B. (:25b) The Cost of Consecration

"*Take your father's bull and a second bull seven years old,*"

Some confusion over whether one or two bulls were involved … seems that the event focuses on the second bull = a choice bull [or possibly viewed in apposition and translated "full grown"]; some think that this second bull was more of a community possession – certainly they did not have large flocks … just the few animals they could conceal from the marauding attacks every year by the Midianites; sacred animal of the fertility cult
Seven years – for the seven years of oppression by the Midianites

Jordan: The Levitical law required that a national sin be atoned for by a bull (**Lev. 4:13-21**).

Remember they were in the midst of a famine; it had been a sacrifice just to prepare a good meal; then the angel of the Lord went and poured out the gravy!

C. (:25c) The Finality of Consecration -- No Turning Back – You step over the line and you are committed

The Break From One's Sinful Past Involved in Consecration

"*and pull down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it;*"

Requires some extreme measures – not playing around with sin here
The altar of God cannot co-exist with altars to idols
Gideon had worshipped at this sanctuary
a pagan altar unearthed at Megiddo not far from Ophrah was 26' square & 4.5' high made with stones cemented by mud. Joash's altar was likely of similar size

Block: Pagan gods may tolerate the simultaneous worship of more than one deity, but Yahweh will brook no rivals. A fundamental tenet of covenant relationship in orthodox Yahwism is "*You shall have no other gods besides me.*"

Inriq: In Gideon's backyard was a vivid example of the reason God had allowed Midian to overwhelm and enslave Israel. Joash, Gideon's father, had apparently built an altar to Bal on his own property and with it an Asherah, a wooden pillar representing the Canaanite goddess of fertility. However, it was not only a personal idol, for the family's private use. Obviously it

served as the village shrine, with Joash probably acting as the supervisor of pagan worship in the area.

Brensinger: In addition to the standard altar, Canaanite shrines typically include a standing stone symbolizing the male deity as well as a pole symbolizing the female deity. The law of Moses specifically commanded that the Israelites should destroy these things (Exod. 34:13; Deut. 7:5).

Example from ministry in Ephesus – **Acts 19:18-19**
Isaiah 30:21-22

D. (:26) The New Expression of Genuine Worship Involved in Consecration

"*and build an altar to the LORD your God on the top of this stronghold in an orderly manner, and take a second bull and offer a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you shall cut down.*"

Baptism is important step of consecration – can't go back; you have identified publicly with the Lord Jesus and committed yourself to a life of discipleship
Like drawing a line in the sand and stepping over it in total commitment

* * *

J. R. Miller: **In His Steps: Consecration** –
It is not enough to cut loose from the old life: the young Christian must enter the new life. Leaving the service of one master, he must enlist in that of another. Withdrawing his heart's affections from one class of objects, he must fix them upon another class. Ceasing to do evil, he must also learn to do well. No longer a servant of sin, he must become a servant of righteousness. Mere repentance is not enough: giving up one's wicked ways is but half of conversion: there must also be a devotement of the life to Christ. The heart cannot be left empty.

"When St. Boniface had hewn down the sacred oak worshiped by the savages in the tangled forests of Germany, he did not stop with destroying it, but when it was felled built out of its fallen and splintered fragments the chapel of St. Peter, and in the room of the worship of Thor the Thunderer left the worship of Christ the crucified. 'To replace is to conquer;' and the theology of the forests fled back abashed before the theology of the cross."

When we break with the world, we must straightway bow before Christ; indeed, we can be freed from the dominion of the old master only by the coming into our hearts of the new. The only way we can turn from sin is by turning to Christ. He then becomes first, Deliverer and Saviour; afterwards, King and Lord. As such he must be accepted, and the whole allegiance of the life should instantly be transferred to him.
* * *

E. (:27) The Trembling Obedience of Consecration

"*Then Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had spoken to him; and it came about, because he was too afraid of his father's household and the men of the city to do it by day, that he did it by night.*"

Hardest battle to fight is to identify with Jesus Christ before your family and closest friends

Open Identification with godliness
You can't always be fearless – even though the angel of the Lord had just commanded Gideon not to fear; but you can simply obey by faith even in the midst of fear

Davis: Obedience was essential and heroism optional

Don Jones: Many Medal of Honor winners, those still alive, have been interviewed about their feats of courage. Most say they were just doing their job they were trained to do. Almost to a man they admit to being scared, fearful during the combat situation. They go so far as to say if someone says they were not afraid they are either a liar or crazy. Faith overcomes fear.

Jordan: We see God continuing to encourage Gideon's weak faith. What an encouragement to see his father Joash, an old Baal follower, coming around to the side of the Lord! God makes Gideon's fearful yet faithful action gloriously successful.

Why didn't people hear the sounds of this destructive activity"?

II. (:28-30) CONSECRATION INFURIATES GOD'S ENEMIES WHO SEEK RETRIBUTION

A. (:28) Discovery of the Dastardly Deed

> "*When the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was torn down, and the Asherah which was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar which had been built.'*

Pagans have no problem rising early to worship their worthless idols
Shocking discovery – someone had violated their sacred sanctuary – this could anger the gods and cause the village great harm – of course things had not been going that well for them anyway

If that second bull had belonged to the group, they would have been especially angered

B. (:29) Detection of the Perpetrator

> "*And they said to one another, 'Who did this thing?' And when they searched about and inquired, they said, 'Gideon the son of Joash did this thing.'"*

They use their best detective abilities to track down who did the deed;
Conjecture is that one of Gideon's ten servants must have turned him in; hard to keep a secret with that large of a group

C. (:30) Demand for Retribution

> "*Then the men of the city said to Joash, 'Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has torn down the altar of Baal, and indeed, he has cut down the Asherah which was beside it.'"*

Gideon living under the roof of his father – they held Joash responsible; required him to deliver up his son; how ironic that God had instructed that such idolaters should be put to death and they were trying to execute God's servant

Cf. **Gen. 19:8** and response of Lot to the men of Sodom

III. (:31-32) CONSECRATION REFUSES TO BACK DOWN BECAUSE FALSE RELIGION PROVES TO BE POWERLESS

A. (:31) Bold Stand by Joash in Defense of His Son – Exposing the Impotency of Idolatry

> "*But Joash said to all who stood against him, 'Will you contend for Baal, or will you deliver him? Whoever will plead for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because someone has torn down his altar.''*

Looks like the conscience of Joash has been awakened and he is now ready to take a stand – certainly his motivation is to protect his son; but it looks like he no longer fears the wrath of Baal or the need to appease him; Repentance has kicked in and Gideon's family has returned to the one true God

B. (:32) New Name for Gideon – Exposing the Impotency of Idolatry

> "*Therefore on that day he named him Jerubbaal, that is to say, 'Let Baal contend against him,' because he had torn down his altar.*"

Cf. **1 Kings 18:27** incident

Let's just step back and observe; give Baal space to operate; the fact that he is a phony will show itself quickly

Inriq: *Jerubbaal* literally means "*Let Baal contend*," based on Joash's challenge. It came to mean "*Baal-fighter*" or "*Baal-conqueror*." Every time men looked at Gideon, they had visible proof of the weakness of Baal and the power of God. . .

There was a strikingly similar event in the life of John Knox, the great Scottish Reformer. In 1548, he was a prisoner on a French slave ship, chained to a rowing bench and lashed constantly by the guards. He was there because of his preaching of the Word of God and his refusal to submit to Catholicism. One day the lieutenant brought aboard a wooden image of the virgin Mary and demanded that the slaves kiss it. Knox refused, and they pushed it violently against his face. He grabbed it and threw it overboard, shouting, "Let our Lady now save herself; she is light enough; let her learn to swim."

When no divine judgment fell on Knox, two things happened. Never again were believers required to engage in Catholic exercises against their wishes, and men began to look to Knox as their leader. Eventually, the Scottish Reformation was the result.

Brensinger: the name is an invitation, no doubt sarcastic in tone, for Baal to right the wrong committed by Gideon

CONCLUSION:

Living for Jesus a life that is true, Striving to please Him in all that I do;
Yielding allegiance, glad-hearted and free, This is the pathway of blessing for me.
O Jesus, Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee,
For Thou, in Thy atonenment, Didst give Thyself for me;
I own no other Master, My heart shall be Thy throne;
My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ, for Thee alone.

Unknown Quote: The mark of a saint is not perfection, but consecration. A saint is not a man without faults, but a man who has given himself without reserve to God.

J. C. Ryle: Gradual growth in grace, growth in knowledge, growth in faith, growth in love, growth in holiness, growth in humility, growth in spiritual-mindedness - all this I see clearly taught and urged in Scripture, and clearly exemplified in the lives of many of God's saints. But sudden, instantaneous leaps from conversion to consecration I fail to see in the Bible.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Where in the media do you see the debate over what relationship there is between private character and suitability for public leadership?

2) How was Gideon able to have such a positive impact on his father?

3) When have you obeyed the Lord despite fear of the consequences from others?

4) Is there an area of sin in your life that needs purging and needs to be replaced with godliness?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Inrig: God is reminding us that it is not enough to answer God's call in the privacy of our own lives, no matter how sincere that response might be. Private commitment must produce public discipleship. God calls us to identify ourselves publicly and radically with the Lord Jesus, in a way from which there is no turning back, and once we step across that line, God pours His power into our lives.

Motyer: The gods have not changed, for human nature has not changed, and these are the gods that humanity regularly re-creates for itself. What does it want? If it is modest, security and comfort and reasonable enjoyment; if ambitious, power and wealth and unbridled self-indulgence. In every age there are forces at work which promise to meet our desires – political programmes, economic theories, philosophical movements, entertainment industries – all having one feature in common: they are big enough to do things for us that we cannot do for ourselves, yet at the same time amenable to our manipulating them so as to get from them what we want.

Don Jones: It was extremely appealing to people just as it is today. Pornography, prostitution, deviance of all kinds pervades our nation. It appeals to the base instincts of mankind. Abortion, our legalized child sacrifice, is rampant in our country as well. You might say Baal worship is alive and well in our country. We have become a nation of Baal worshippers.

Thomas Bowen: **House Cleaning**
Whenever, someone points out the foolishness of IDOL worship, people get offended. People get

angry. People get aggressive and sometimes violent. When people are involved in idol worship they can never be changed from the outside. They can only be changed when life rearranges their values.

George Macaskill: **Gideon's 1st Assignment**
God prefers trembling obedience despite probable consequences;
Before Gideon can destroy the Midianites publicly, he must destroy problems in his own back garden first; lived with his father; something had to be put right in his private capacity; society might think that what goes on in private has no relevance to public service; not so to God; God puts emphasis on households and families; Gideon has to put things right at home; God blesses households

A. What made Gideon obey when he was so terrified?
1. Conviction of God's Calling -- He had conviction that God had called and sent him; for most things we do not need a special call to obey God's requirements – they are clear in His Word
2. The Assurance of God's Presence – starts with obedience before he would experience God's presence
3. A Sense of God's Peace – *Jehovah Shalom* – not just absence of war; sense of wholeness, well-being
4. Conscious of God's Power – despite his own weakness and inadequacy
Obedience is the mark of God's people even when they are trembling

B. What was Gideon required to do in this first assignment
1. Destroy the altar of Baal and wooden image (not just removed)
More likely to be in our back closet than in our front yard; but certain things have to be destroyed if we are to do great things for God; what gets you excited?? That could be an idol;
2. Build an altar to God – our God is the true God; He is the good God;
3. Offer sacrifices on the new altar – an altar is for sacrificing; not for just admiring; offering expressed total commitment to God
Pagans arise early in morning to worship their gods; Gideon's father restored from backsliding
www.sermonaudio.com

Sylvester Onyemalechi: **3 Steps to a Transformed Life -- #1 Consecration**
To consecrate is to set apart, dedicate or devote oneself to the service of God. It is to live a life of total surrender to the will and purpose of God for one's life.

Rom 12:1 -- *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship.* NIV

Consecration starts with a firm decision to live for God cost what it may. It starts with a decision and is sustained by a resolute decision to be faithful till the end. Consecration is the result of the understanding that God through Jesus Christ has shown great mercy and love to mankind, and must be appreciated with total dedication of our lives. Apostle Paul in the above passage reveals that the reasonable and spiritual thing to do in response to God's love and mercy through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is to make a full, total, and loving surrender of our lives as an act of appreciation to God.

2 Cor 5:14-15 *And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.* NIV

Jesus died, so that those who live in Him will no longer live for themselves – fulfilling their own desires and will – but for Jesus who died for them. The believer is not to live out his own will but God's will. It is important that we abandon our own visions, plans, will and ambitions, and surrender to live for God and fulfill His will and purpose for our lives. To continue to live as though your life is yours is wrong. You are saved in Christ to live for God. You are saved not to continue going your own way, but God's way. It is God's plan for the saved to surrender to His will in all things and at all times.

To live a transformed life, one needs to consciously make a full dedication of one's life to God as a living (active) sacrifice. As long as the believer lives, God expects him to serve Him sacrificially. We serve God when it is convenient and when it is not convenient. When you let go of your will and personal program for God's, you are living a sacrificial life to God. When you cut off from your old and ungodly friends to enable you serve God well, that is living a sacrificial life to God. When you distance yourself from immoral partners to help you stay clean and holy, you are living a sacrificial life to God. When it is painful and not convenient, and contrary to the life you are used to and would have loved to live, it is a sacrifice to God. Do not only serve, give to God or attend church when it is convenient, the blessing is more in the sacrifice you make to please and honour God in your life.

Love God enough to consecrate your life to Him. Consecration is the foundation to a transformed life. Without it, you can't give yourself to renewing your mind which leads to transformation. So, the starting point of a transformed life is consecration. Make that decision now and set the ball rolling for your glorious transformation to the fullness of Christ. Decide today, be determined and resolute about it, and be loyal to the end. As long as you live, be a sacrifice to Jesus Christ your Saviour and Lord.
http://www.jfoutreach.org/archives/archives/threestepstoatransformedlife.pdf

F. B. Meyer: Jesus Christ has bought us with His blood, but, alas, He has not had His money's worth! He paid for ALL, and He has had but a fragment of our energy, time and earnings. By an act of consecration, let us ask Him to forgive the robbery of the past, and let us profess our desire to be henceforth utterly and only for Him - His slaves, owning no master other than Himself.

J. Sidlow Baxter: Gideon...became consecrated. He yielded his own will to the will of God. Read verses 25-27. We only need to think our way back into the circumstances a little, to appreciate what an acute challenge to Gideon's new faith and obedience this test was. The command that he should "throw down the altar of Baal" reminds us at once that Gideon lived in a time of widespread religious apostasy. Israel's religious leaders were "modernists," and had caused the people to err. To wreck Baal's altar was to run counter to the popular will, and to invite death. But Gideon did it. And how remarkable was the result! Read again verses 28-32. Gideon's father became converted too! Maybe the old man had secretly sighed for the "good old ways" and had longed for some brave champion of the old-time faith to arise and call his fellow-countrymen back to Jehovah; and now, when his son stood up for the old-time faith Joash was immediately by his side. We may apply this to ourselves. In nine cases out of ten, the reason we have so little influence for Christ among our own kith and kin is that we ourselves are not prepared to go the length of full consecration to the will of God.

TEXT: Judges 6:33-40

TITLE: CONFIRMATION OF GIDEON'S CALLING

BIG IDEA:
THE PATIENCE OF GOD TRANSFORMS THE HESITANCY OF OUR WEAK FAITH INTO BOLD ACTION EMPOWERED BY HIS SPIRIT

INTRODUCTION:

Contrary to how this text is commonly preached, it has nothing to do with how God's people should discern God's will; it is not intended to give insights into the decision making process for those major life choices that confront each of us. Gideon knew what God wanted him to do. He was just struggling to believe that God's Promises and God's Power were sufficient for the challenge ahead of him. That is why I love studying Gideon. We are so much like him. Think how the Lord Jesus had to constantly review the same lessons with His disciples and reprimand them for their hesitancy to fully trust Him. Yet He remained patient and kind in moving them along through the process of discipleship.

Look at all of the information that Gideon already had to help him take action on his divine commission. We looked previously at the **Calling of Gideon** and then the **Consecration of Gideon**. He received a personal visitation from the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Himself, the angel of the Lord. He had been addressed as "valiant warrior" in anticipation of how God would work through him. He experienced the miracle of his sacrificial meal being devoured by fire sent from heaven as well as the miracle of the disappearance of the angel of the Lord. He heard God's voice reassuring him that Jehovah shalom (the Lord is Peace) meant that Gideon should not be afraid. He had seen how the Lord had enabled him to take the risk of tearing down the altar of Baal while protecting him from his angry neighbors. In fact his name had been changed to indicate the Lord's superiority over Baal and the invincibility of Gideon. Yet when called to act at the moment of crisis, he still hesitated. His request for signs is not a sign of faith but of hesitation. But the Lord is abundantly patient so that today we will study the Confirmation of Gideon's Calling.

Block: Despite being clear about the will of God, being empowered by the Spirit of God, and being confirmed as a divinely chosen leader by the overwhelming response of his countrymen to his own summons to battle, he uses every means available to try to get out of the mission to which he has been called.

Look at all of the revelation we have of God's promises and God's instructions. We have 66 books full of God's Word – bearing the same authority and weight as if we heard the voice of God from heaven or had the angel of the Lord sitting across from us at our kitchen table instructing us personally. Look at all of the miracles we have access to. Can there be any doubt about God's faithfulness to His promises or the sufficiency of His power to work on our behalf? Yet we hesitate. Our faith is often weak and we seek assurances from God.

THE PATIENCE OF GOD TRANSFORMS THE HESITANCY OF OUR WEAK FAITH INTO BOLD ACTION EMPOWERED BY HIS SPIRIT

(:33) SETTING: THE TIME FOR ACTION IS NOW

"Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the sons of the east assembled themselves; and they crossed over and camped in the valley of Jezreel."

Enemies have crossed the Jordan River and are preparing to attack
More than 135,000 men (8:10; 7:12) Why did they bring so many? Not because they were needed for the success of the military mission but because they wanted to participate in bringing home all of the loot. They anticipated this would be another simple mission of taking whatever they felt like carrying home. Easy to get men to sign up for this cakewalk.
This would be the 8th annual invasion during time of wheat harvest in May or June

Brensinger: This valley, separating the central region of Samaria from the northern tribal territories, provides both fertile soil and great maneuverability for travel and assaults.

When the time comes for action there can be no delay. We don't pick the time when our faith needs to engage and step out with boldness. That is why we must always be on the alert and growing in our faith. We can't hit the pause button and say, let me go take a seminar on faith and get back to you.

2 CONTRASTING RESPONSES TO GOD'S CALL FOR ACTION:

I. (:34-35) SPIRIT POWERED LEADERSHIP GALVANIZES A LOYAL, UNITED FOLLOWING – BOLDLY BLOW THE TRUMPET

A. (:34a) Spirit Powered Leadership Depends on God's Initiative

"*So the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon*"

Inrig: The word is used elsewhere to describe a man putting on his clothes (**Gen. 28:20**), or a warrior putting on a suit of armor (**Isa. 59:17**). What a delightful picture! The Holy Spirit wore Gideon the way a man puts on a suit of clothes. It is a vivid way of saying that God the Holy Spirit took possession of Gideon, indwelling and controlling him. Two other times we have this phrase in the Old Testament. In **1 Chronicles 12:18** we read of Amasai, one of David's brave soldiers, being so empowered, and in **2 Chronicles 24:20** the phrase is used of Zechariah the priest who, with great boldness, charged a sinful people with apostasy, and as a result lay down his life as a martyr.

Zech. 4:6 "*Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit*"

We should desire to function as the Lord's mouthpiece, the Lord's arms, the Lord's feet so that He can carry out His will.

Inrig: The Holy Spirit does not destroy our **individuality** . . . We see an obvious illustration of this every day. In my kitchen, I have all kinds of electrical appliances. I can take an electric light, or a radio, or an electric can opener, or an electric dishwasher, or a toaster and plug them one by one into exactly the same outlet. But they do not all do the same function. In fact, that power enables them to function individualistically. Until they are plugged in, they are all the same, none of this is doing anything. . .

One of my seminary professors, Howard Hendricks, was fond of telling us, "Men, every morning I pray, 'Lord, here I am. I want to by Your suit of clothes today. I want You to take me

and use me. Lord, just walk around in me today.'" I have not forgotten that.

Wiersbe: When a group of British pastors was discussing the advisability of inviting evangelist D.L. Moody to their city for a crusade, one man asked, "Why must it be Moody? Does D.I. Moody have a monopoly on the Holy Spirit?" Quietly one of the other pastors replied, "No, but it's evident that the Holy Spirit has a monopoly on D.I. Moody."

Midianites are going to discover to their surprise that they are not fighting against a mere man, Gideon, but against the all powerful God of the universe

At this beginning of the confrontation, the emphasis is not on the faith of Gideon but on the sovereign initiative of the Lord in working through Gideon.

Ministry of the Holy Spirit is different today. We have the permanent indwelling of the Spirit so that at all times we should be yielding to His control. We have the permanent blessing of spiritual gifts that we need to exercise for the evangelization of the lost and the edification of the church.

B. (:34b) The Response to the Spirit's Initiative Should be to Boldly Blow the Trumpet

"*and he blew a trumpet,*"

A ram's horn; a call to arms

This was the call to his countrymen to take up arms. Nothing done in secret here. This was out in the open, from the mountaintop – calling upon the Israelites to step up to the plate and defend their land and the their people and their possessions;

It was a call to take a stand for the name of the Lord God against the pagan forces that had been mocking their God. It was a call to faith in their privileged position as the circumcised of God who should never be defeated by the uncircumcised enemies of God.

The issues of idolatry and rebellion had been dealt with. They had repented and turned back to the Lord. Now they needed to trust once again in His covenant faithfulness.

The question for us is Are we going to cower in fear or boldly step out in faith and blow the trumpet of joining in the Christian warfare? Are we going to function as soldiers of Jesus Christ or sit on the sidelines? Last week where did you have the opportunity to blow the trumpet of faith and dependence upon the power of the resurrected Lord Jesus? Remember we studied over Easter how the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in us today.

Blow the trumpet!

C. (:34c-35) Faithful Followers Respond to God's Sovereign Call

"*and the Abiezrites were called together to follow him. And he sent messengers throughout Manasseh, and they also were called together to follow him; and he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they came up to meet them.*"

Calls his fellow Abiezrites (just the other day they had been Baal worshippers) and then the northern tribes surrounding the Jezreel Valley; 7:3 suggests that 32,000 men assemble

Response based more on the moving of the Holy Spirit then on people being impressed with Gideon?? Some mixture of both. That is why God had put his stamp of approval on Gideon and his leadership in the incident of the destruction of the altar of Baal.

This was an impressive response.

Herbert Wolf: Ephraim was not invited, perhaps because Gideon feared that this powerful brother tribe would not accept his leadership (cf. 1:22; 8:1-3).

Transition: We would expect to immediately see the battle joined. The enemy is prepared and waiting. God's troops have shown up and are looking to Gideon for leadership. How surprising is it to find that Gideon is still not ready himself.

II. (:36-40) HESITANT LEADERSHIP STRUGGLES WITH BELIEVING THE POWER AND PROMISES OF GOD – TIMIDLY TEST GOD'S PATIENCE

A. (:36-38) Fleece Test #1

> "*Then Gideon said to God, 'If Thou wilt deliver Israel through me, as Thou hast spoken, behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that Thou wilt deliver Israel through me, as Thou hast spoken.' And it was so. When he arose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he drained the dew from the fleece, a bowl full of water.*"

God could have upbraided Gideon here. Are not my instructions clear? Crystal clear (Tom Cruise in *A Few Good Men*)

Brensinger: Testing (*nasah*) God in the OT is prohibited (Deut. 6:16), both because it calls into question God's faithfulness and because it reflects great disdain on the part of the one testing; it is normally an attempt to force God to do something (Exod. 17:7; Num. 14:22; Ps. 78:18). Here, however, the Lord accepts the idea, no doubt because it grows out of Gideon's fluctuating sense of security ad his continuing need for assurance. God's patience and mercy, therefore, pierce legal expectations and allow for honest searching. . . But wool absorbs more dew than stone …

A bowl full of water – no doubt involved in the outcome of this test – graciousness of God

B. (:39-40) Fleece Test #2

> "*Then Gideon said to God, 'Do not let Thine anger burn against me that I may speak once more; please let me make a test once more with the fleece, let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on all the ground.' And God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground.*"

Look at the apologetic tone of Gideon here – he knows he is on thin ice; look at Job debating with the Lord until finally the Lord tells him to shut up; cf. David pouring out his heart in the Psalms; difficult to judge when you have crossed over the line and the Lord just responds, that is enough

Garry Friesen – **Decision Making and the Will of God – The Fleece that wasn't a Fleece**
At a number of points, this event fails to authenticate the contemporary practice of "putting out a

fleece." In the first place, Gideon's fleece was not simply a circumstantial sign, but rather a miraculous display of supernatural power. Gideon's request for the fleece sign would hardly be less than an insistence on a miracle since he had already received several supernatural demonstrations: the angel claimed to be God (6:21); his offering was consumed by fire from the rock (6:21); God spoke to him (6:23-26); and the Spirit of God came upon him giving him enablement (6:34). After such supernatural manifestations, it is inconceivable that Gideon would ask for a sign that was merely "circumstantial." The reversal of the fleece sign completely precludes such a possibility.

Second, Gideon was not employing the fleece to ascertain guidance, but to gain confirmation of guidance already given. And the guidance already given came by means of supernatural revelation. So Gideon was not seeking the right decision, but enough faith to believe that God's deliverance would come through him. . .

Third, rather than being an example of a proper approach to receiving guidance, Gideon's demand for further signs was really an expression of doubt and unbelief. God's instructions to Gideon were clear, as he himself indicated (6:37). Apparently, God graciously acceded to Gideon's lack of faith because of the severe circumstances which tested him. As understandable as his fears might have been, Gideon's perpetual testing of the Lord was not appropriate. For God's attitude toward those who demand signs in unbelief is expressed in Christ's rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 12:38-39) and demonstrated in the silencing of the priest, Zacharias (Luke 1:11-20). Gideon's apologetic tone in asking for the second fleece sign shows that even to him "it looked so like a peevish humorsome distrust of God and dissatisfaction with the many assurances he had already given him. . .

There is, however, a practical question that needs to be answered, If the practice of putting out a fleece is improper, why does it sometimes bring good results? The answer, quite simply, is that on some occasions the fleece that is chosen is really wisdom in disguise.
[Illustration: purchase of yellow Volkswagen Rabbit – setting a price that would be our upper limit]

How to Grow in Faith – 7 Practical Suggestions:

1) Immerse yourself in the Word of God – Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Look at the Promises and Power of God

2) See Answers to Prayer in your own experience – Share those with others – Blow the Trumpet

3) Exercise your spiritual muscles – take little steps of faith – Book of James gives practical tests to show that your faith is genuine

4) Spend time with people who are good examples of strong faith; read biographies of men and women of faith

5) Focus on eternal, immaterial, unseen realm – avoid materialism trap – 1 Peter

6) Increase your Giving – causes you to depend on the Lord

7) Be honest with God – knowing He is patient and long-suffering; like Job and David; this is transition to points made in the conclusion

CONCLUSION:

This story is more important for what it reveals to us about God then what it teaches us about Gideon:

Ex. 34:6-7 *Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished"*

Baxter:

Doubt sees the obstacles,
Faith sees the way.
Doubt sees the darksome night,
Faith sees the day.
Doubt dreads to take the step,
Faith soars on high.
Doubt whispers, "Who believes?"
Faith answers – "I."

"*Lord I believe; help my unbelief*!"

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What are some examples where you felt the Lord calling you to action but you hesitated?

2) Give a recent example of boldly blowing your trumpet in spiritual warfare.

3) Have you had any fleece type experiences?

4) How can we develop more patience and long suffering with our children and with new converts to the faith?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Constable: **Judges 6:33—7:18** is arranged in the following concentric pattern:

"A The Spirit-endowed Gideon mobilized four tribes against the Midianites, though lacking confidence in God's promise (6:33-35).

B Gideon sought a sign from God with the fleece to confirm the promise that the Lord would give Midian into his hand (6:36-40).

C. With the fearful Israelites having departed, God directed Gideon to go down to the water for the further reduction of his force (7:1-8).

C' With fear still in Gideon himself, God directed Gideon to go down to the

enemy camp to overhear the enemy (7:9-11).

B' God provided a sign to Gideon with the dream of the Midianite to confirm the promise that the Lord would give Midian into his hand (7:12-14).

A' The worshiping Gideon mobilized his force of 300 for a surprise attack against the Midianites, fully confident in God's promise (7:15-18).

Note four things that God used to prepare Gideon in this chapter. First, Gideon met the preincarnate Christ. Second, he committed himself to following Yahweh. Third, he obeyed the Lord by taking a public stand for Him, relying on His promises. Fourth, the Holy Spirit gave Gideon supernatural power. When the people God calls to Himself respond positively by committing themselves to Him and standing up for Him, He strengthens their faith so He can use them in greater ways. His ability can overcome the inability of His servants if they rely on His promises, even though their faith may be weak.

Inrig: Concept of fleece setting is very simple: "Father, I have two options. If You want me to follow Plan A, then please do this by Tuesday. Then I will know that is what You want me to do. If You do not, I will follow Plan B."

Why is fleece-setting not God's way of directing His children:
1. Gideon was not ignorant of God's will.
2. Fleece setting is an evidence of doubt, not faith.
3. Fleece setting is dictating to God. Please alter the whole course of nature because I tell you to.
4. Fleece setting does not really solve the problem. It does not produce certainty and it puts God in our little box.

Biblical Principles of Guidance:
1. God does not give us guidance, as much as He gives us a Guide.
Imagine you are driving in a strange city. Which would you rather have with you – a road map and a list of addresses, or someone who knows the city intimately, knows where you want to go and how to get there?
2. Guidance is based on the principles and precepts of the Word of God.
    - direct commands
    - general principles
3. Guidance is confirmed through the indwelling peace of God.
    Col. 3:15
    Phil. 4:6-7
4. Guidance is communicated through the desires God gives us.
    Ps. 37:3-4
5. Guidance comes through the counsel of other believers.
Psalm 73:23-24

Scott Grant: If you ever doubt that the Lord is patient with you, just read the gospels and observe how Jesus never leaves his disciples, though they never seem to get it. At one point, He asks, "You unbelieving generation, how long shall I stay with you?" How long? As long as it takes.

Steve Zeisler: During his two days of struggling to believe, Gideon developed an increased fear of God. By the end of the process, he's more afraid to affront God one more time than he is to face the Midianites. And his faith has grown as a result. Faith is expressed by our unwillingness to displease the Lord. In asking for help, Gideon has learned to fear God, and it is this fear of God that makes him willing to act. His unwillingness to ask God another time made him realize that he really did trust, fear, and know God.

TEXT: Judges 7:1-8

TITLE: STRENGTH THROUGH WEAKNESS –
CUTTING GIDEON'S ARMY DOWN TO THE LORD'S SIZE

BIG IDEA:
ONLY DESPERATE ODDS ENSURE THAT THE LORD GETS THE GLORY FOR GIVING THE VICTORY

INTRODUCTION:

This is one of my favorite OT stories because it is the best illustration of a key biblical principle: **God demonstrates His strength in our weakness**. We always want to be as strong as possible in facing any challenge; we prefer to have as many resources as possible at our disposal. We have no problem if the odds are on our side; in fact we prefer that to be the case. But God has a different perspective.

Look at all of the furor stirred up over our country's defense budget cuts – anything that would weaken our military advantage; we already have such a decisive advantage due to technology; but we hate to see our forces reduced or any steps taken that would put us at risk. At the same time the military (and every other part of our government culture) is being pressured to remove any vestige of "**In God we trust**."

We have seen in earlier weeks how the Lord called Gideon to be the military deliverer from the oppression of the Midianites. God was ready for Gideon to move forward and then Gideon hit the Pause button to seek confirmation of his calling. Gideon said to the Lord, "Not so fast – my faith is flickering; I need to be sure that I can trust your power to come through for me. Now the tables are turned; Gideon seems ready to move forward and engage the enemy, and the Lord says, "Not so fast. I can't have you going into a battle where the victory is solely going to be based on my grace and power with any possibility of you looking back and taking credit because of some contribution of strength on your part." You have to be at the point of **desperation in weakness** to ensure that God gets all of the glory.

Desperation in weakness is not a comfortable starting point. It is not intended to be comfortable. Think of our personal salvation from the bondage of sin. What did we contribute in our own strength to deliver us from the domain of darkness? "*Jesus paid it all … All to Him I owe … sin had left a crimson stain .. He washed it white as snow*." We need to live out that same **gospel message** of God's grace and power in our ongoing battles each week.

ONLY DESPERATE ODDS ENSURE THAT THE LORD GETS THE GLORY FOR GIVING THE VICTORY

(:1) SETTING -- PREPARING TO ENGAGE THE ENEMY

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

Started with **32,000 troops** who had answered the battle cry and had assembled to follow the leadership of Gideon; they were at least somewhat **willing to enter into battle** against terrible odds of 135,000 (**8:10**)

"*Rose early*" – shows their willingness to obey God and get things started; amazing that God had rallied this many troops behind the leadership of Gideon; what an encouragement that must have been to him – these people were "*with him*" ready to follow his direction

PreceptAustin: His new name was a constant reminder of the futility and impotence of their beloved Baal! It was like every time they heard his name it was in their face!

Name **Harod** means "*trembling*" or "*terrified*" – good place for them to assemble

Inrig: between the two armies was a valley, containing the spring of Harod. That was the only water available for Gideon's men, and it made getting a drink a rather interesting adventure.

Probably not in immediate view of the enemy .. but ambush was a distinct possibility

Maybe you could overlook the valley from some vantage point and get a sense of the vast number of enemy encampments with their camels and their weaponry – all being staged to advance against your homeland.

TWO CUTS TO GET GIDEON'S ARMY DOWN TO DESPERATE ODDS:

I. (:2-3) FIRST CUT – ELIMINATING THE DOUBTERS (22,000) – FAITH IN THE LORD ESSENTIAL FOR VICTORY

A. The Problem – The Situation is Not Desperate Enough

> "*And the LORD said to Gideon, 'The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, lest Israel become boastful, saying, My own power has delivered me.'*"

The Lord's thinking is so different from our thinking – we would never fear having too many resources or too great odds in our favor; but the Lord is concerned that He alone receive the glory

Our propensity towards pride and self confidence and boasting is so far greater than we can even imagine

Where do we become boastful … claiming "*My own power has delivered me*"

- Maybe when we do well in a test in school – I really nailed that one
- Maybe when we figure out the answer to a challenging situation at work
- Certainly this is why some Christian athletes are always careful to verbalize their reliance on the Lord – since the spectators want to give them hero status and all the credit
- Maybe when we resist a particular temptation we are tempted to think that our own regimen of spiritual discipline and will power has protected us

Gary Inrig: **Judges 7:2** is one of the most important verses in the Bible for understanding God's principles of spiritual warfare. God is not interested in simply giving His people victory. He is

concerned with teaching us *trust*. In fact, if our victories make us self-reliant, they are ultimately more disastrous than defeat.

So sometimes smaller is better. God says not many strong, not many wise, not many rich have been called; He loves to show His strength through our weakness

B. The Test – Look for Faith – <u>Deut. 20:1-4, 8</u>

"*Now therefore come, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying,*
'Whoever is afraid and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead.' "

[Mount Gilboa instead of the problematic Gilead which is located on the east side of the Jordan River]
Adam Clarke: Dr. Hales endeavours to reconcile the whole, by the supposition that there were in Gideon's army many of the eastern Manassites, who came from Mount Gilead; and that these probably were more afraid of their neighbours, the Midianites, than the western tribes were; and therefore proposes to read the text thus: *Whosoever from Mount Gilead is fearful and afraid, let him return (home) and depart early. So there returned (home) twenty-two thousand of the people.* Perhaps this is on the whole the best method of solving this difficulty.

What is the problem with Fear in a military setting?
Fear Paralyzes
Fear is Contagious

But remember how God used Gideon even when he was fearful … but God cannot use us when our fear causes us to take opportunity to run away from the conflict – Never Give Up!

Problem is not so much fear but doubting the power of the Lord to give them the victory; lack of faith; these were the doubters – certainly God did not really mean what He said; How could He be calling us to take on such a superior enemy; this looks like a suicide mission; "As for me and my house … we are heading home"

Cf. witnessing – Don't make judgments about who might respond or who would never respond

C. The Results – Trimming the Troops to 10,000

"*So 22,000 people returned, but 10,000 remained.*"

Gideon shocked and dismayed when he saw how many turned back at this invitation and fled the camp to return to their villages – how disheartening!

Warren Wiersbe: A faith that can't be tested can't be trusted. Too often, what people think is faith is really only a "warm fuzzy feeling" about faith or perhaps just "faith in faith." J. G. Stipe said that faith is like a toothbrush: Everybody should have one and use it regularly, but it isn't safe to use somebody else's. We can sing loudly about the "Faith of Our Fathers," but we can't exercise the faith of our fathers. We can follow men and women of faith and share in their exploits, but we can't succeed in our own personal lives by depending on somebody else's faith. God tests our faith for at least two reasons: first, to show us whether our faith is real or counterfeit, and second, to strengthen our faith for the tasks He's set before us. Spurgeon was right when he said that the promises of God shine brightest in the furnace of affliction, and it is in claiming those promises that we gain the victory. Victories won because of faith bring glory to

God because nobody can explain how they happened. "If you can explain what's going on in your ministry," Dr. Bob Cook used to remind us, "then God didn't do it." Too often, we're like King Uzziah who was "marvelously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction" (**2Ch 26:15–16**). People who live by faith know their own weakness more and more as they depend on God's strength. Testimony of Apostle Paul: "*For when I am weak, then am I strong*" (**2Co 12:7-10**)

Surely the Lord will allow Gideon to move forward with this reduced force of only 10,000 men.

II. (:4-8) SECOND CUT – ELIMINATING THE DISTRACTED (9,700) -- FOCUS ON THE TASK AT HAND ESSENTIAL FOR VICTORY = ALERT OBEDIENCE

[Although really the only thing essential is the sovereign activity of the Lord on their behalf]

A. (:4a) The Problem – The Situation is Not Desperate Enough

"*Then the LORD said to Gideon, 'The people are still too many;*"

PreceptAustin: He doubtless knew the tales of Barak's army of 10,000 (**Judges 4:6** – precedent for using this number of troops) and how God had used them to route Sisera's invincible forces. So Gideon must have reasoned 'If 10,000 are good enough for Barak, then it's good enough for me.' But he was unprepared for the next command of God (v4).

You cannot be too small for God to use but you can be too big. If you want the credit for what God is doing, God will not use you. He says that He alone is Lord and there is no other and that He will not give His glory to another. And so we often see God working powerfully in the lives of some very weak people. They are the ones who know that only He could get the glory and they are careful to give it to Him

Application: don't bemoan your weak state; glory in your weakness

B. (:4b-5) The Test – Look for Focus – Kneeling lappers like dogs vs hand to mouth lappers who only crouch down instead of kneeling [we get confused here]

"'*bring them down to the water and I will test them for you there. Therefore it shall be that he of whom I say to you, This one shall go with you, he shall go with you; but everyone of whom I say to you, This one shall not go with you, he shall not go.' So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, 'You shall separate everyone who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, as well as everyone who kneels to drink.*'"

Obviously 2 groups involved here – but the language in the text is confusing – God is using this exercise to demonstrate His sovereign choice of who He wants to send into battle with Gideon; do they **drink like a dog** who is driven only by satisfying physical needs or **like an alert soldier** who is conscious of the danger surrounding him

Block: you could treat the conjunction at the beginning of the second condition as an epexegetical waw, that is, if clause B is intended to **clarify clause A**, then the picture becomes perfectly clear. When these men go down to the spring and try to lap water like a dog, they must get down on their knees… others lap by bringing the water up to their mouths with their cupped hands [they both lap in some sense; so verse 5 only describes one of the two groups]

Inrig: The spring was in plain view of the Midianites, and there was always the possibility of an ambush. Gideon was to watch how the men drank. Some of the people would scoop up water in one hand, holding their spear in the other, and then lap it like a dog. Others would fall flat on their faces, forgetting about everything else and drink to their heart's content.

Adam Clarke: The original word *yalok* is precisely the sound which a dog makes when he is drinking.

You never know when the Lord is testing you – need to be alert; sober minded; in one sense, all of life is a test

Rich Cathers: This was taken out of Duke University's Staff newsletter.
At Duke University, there were four sophomores taking Organic Chemistry. They did so well on all the quizzes, midterms and labs, etc., that each had an "A" so far for the semester. These four friends were so confident that the weekend before finals, they decided to go up to University of Virginia and party with some friends up there. They had a great time. However, after all the partying, they slept all day Sunday and didn't make it back to Duke until early Monday morning. Rather than taking the final then, they decided to find their professor after the final and explain to him why they missed it. They explained that they had gone to UVA for the weekend with the plan to come to study, but, unfortunately, they had a flat tire on the way back, didn't have a spare, and couldn't get help for a long time. As a result, they missed the final. The Professor thought it over and then agreed they could make up the final the following day. The guys were elated and relieved. They studied that night and went in the next day at the time the professor had told them. He placed them in separate rooms and handed each of them a test booklet, and told them to begin. They looked at the first problem, worth 5 points. It was something simple about free radical formation. "Cool," they thought at the same time, each one in his separate room, "this is going to be easy." Each finished the problem and then turned the page. On the second page was written: (For 95 points): **Which tire?**

C. (:6-8) The Results – Trimming the Troops to 300

> "*Now the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was 300 men; but all the rest of the people kneeled to drink water. And the LORD said to Gideon, 'I will deliver you with the 300 men who lapped and will give the Midianites into your hands; so let all the other people go, each man to his home.' So the 300 men took the people's provisions and their trumpets into their hands. And Gideon sent all the other men of Israel, each to his tent, but retained the 300 men; and the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.*"

Here we see both groups contrasted side by side –

- the good lappers vs
- the kneelers who are the bad lappers like dogs

Rich Cathers: **God uses vigilant people**:
I believe the significance is that these men weren't the ones who bowed down with their face in the water. Instead, they were the ones who were aware of their surroundings. They would be the first ones to see the enemy approaching.

These guys were aware that they were in a war. They were aware that the enemy was just around the corner.
As you're going to see, Gideon was going to need people who had their eyes opened and were paying attention.
In regards to our flesh and temptation, Jesus said to Peter,
(**Mat 26:41** KJV) *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*
In regards to the Second Coming, Jesus said,
(**Mark 13:32-33** KJV) *But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. {33} Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.*
In regards to our enemy in the battle, Peter writes,
(**1 Pet 5:8** KJV) *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:*

Alexander Maclaren:
God required but few men, but He required that these should be fit. The first test had sifted out the brave and willing. The liquor was none the less, though so much froth had been blown off. As Thomas Fuller says, there were 'fewer persons, but not fewer men,' after the poltroons had disappeared. The second test, 'a purgatory of water,' as the same wise and witty author calls it, was still more stringent. The dwindled ranks were led down from their camp on the slopes to the fountain and brook which lay in the valley near the Midianites' camp. Gideon alone seems to have known that a test was to be applied there; but he did not know what it was to be till they reached the spring, and the soldiers did not know that they were determining their fate when they drank. The two ways of drinking clearly indicated a difference in the men. Those who glued their lips to the stream and swilled till they were full, were plainly more self-indulgent, less engrossed with their work, less patient of fatigue and thirst, than those who caught up enough in their curved palms to moisten their lips without stopping in their stride or breaking rank. The former test was self-applied, and consciously so. This is no less self-applied, though unconsciously. God shuts out no man from His army, but men shut themselves out; sometimes knowingly, by avowed disinclination for the warfare, sometimes unknowingly, by self-indulgent habits, which proclaim their unfitness.

Dale Ralph Davis: It is amazing how virtuous the lappers become in the view of expositors. They are heralded as the vigilant, watchful ones who lean down, scoop a little water, always with their eyes on the enemy (which may yet have been several miles to the north!), while the kneelers are the careless, who think only of their thirst. For example, one expositor (who shall remain anonymous, concludes:

> God saw how untrustworthy would be those thousands who carelessly indulged under the lure of the flesh, over against the three hundred who exemplified a spirit of vigilance [sic] and disciplined life in the Spirit. Thus were selected the strong and resolute, the men who could be trusted under rigorous conditions, those who did not think of themselves before the enemy's unexpected assault. This is ever the divine principle of selection for service.

The problem with this kind of exposition is that it has no basis in the text. The text does not hint at any virtue or vice in how one guzzles water. The water-drinking episode was simply Yahweh's mechanism for further reducing Gideon's army …God's strength made perfect in weakness

But God clearly says He is testing the people here – so just as the first test chose out those with a positive characteristic of faith, this second test differentiated those who were more inclined to a focused and alert sense that would lend itself to obedience

Motyer: The object was to reduce Gideon's army to a force not of a particular kind, but of a particular number. A small corps of crack troops is precisely what God does not want. The three hundred are meant to be not an elite, but a group so inadequate that when the battle is won (God declares) it cannot be a case of Israel's saying "*My own hand has delivered me*." Until the numbers are reduced to the level at which it is clearly the Lord and not Israel who wins the battle, they are *too many*.

But faith and obedience are compatible with giving God the glory rather than relying on the skill and strength of man – so there is no problem here.

CONCLUSION:

Need to be **strong in Faith** and **strong in Focus**

Outnumbered 450 to 1 – those are the kind of desperate odds that the Lord loves!

Inrig: That is the first part of God's preparation. Gideon's army had been reduced to such proportions that they had no alternative. They could either depend totally upon God, or they could perish. Their only hope lay in God. Now comes the second stage of preparation. With their self-confidence destroyed, they were not prepared to learn the lesson of confidence in God.

Brensinger: Acts of reduction and self-denial repeatedly prepare people for spiritual service. The Bible makes plain that power, pride, and possessions often obstruct divine activity. Yet genuine human weakness provides God with fertile soil in which to perform his mighty works. In all divine-human partnerships, God alone brings victory....

"**Trust** and **Obey** because there is no other way to be happy in Jesus"

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What is an area of weakness for you that the Lord uses to demonstrate His power?

2) When do you feel overwhelmed and helpless and desperate?

3) How can you be more alert and watchful in your Christian service?

4) In what ways has the Lord tested you recently and how have you demonstrated your faith or seen your faith strengthened?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Inrig:
Little ditty:

He tackled the thing that couldn't be done
With a will he went right to it.
He tackled the thing that couldn't be done
And he found he couldn't do it.

It is interesting to see the way God prepares His men for the battles they will face. The Coues, the Churchills, and the Vince Lombardis of the world seek to prepare us by building our self-confidence and stiffening our backbone. God does something entirely different. He does not build our self-confidence, but our dependence upon Him. It is a process that is repeated many times in the Word of God. When God wants a man or a woman to do great things for Him, He builds into that man or woman not self-confidence but God-confidence.

Gil Rugh: **Gideon as Judge**
Quite a sizeable force assembled … until you compare it to the Midianite army; just a fraction; How gracious God is; answering their cry for help; but knows their heart; does not want Israel swelled up in pride; reducing the size of the army; testimony to the faith of Gideon that we don't find him arguing here; If you are afraid, go home; God is not going to use those who don't trust Him; "Lord, have you counted the Midianites lately?" We have eliminated those who were afraid; Now we eliminate the careless; The 300 can be trusted to do what God says; they don't get preoccupied with their own physical needs; No problem really; the Lord is promising that He will deliver … who cares what the number is; Later in Israel's history He will slay 180,000 Syrians with no Israelites lifting a sword against them; I am a great man of faith when I am studying the life of someone else; is there anything in life that confronts me that has the potential to overwhelm God? We don't even understand fully what we are facing; doesn't matter;

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **Victory by God's Power, Not Ours**
Introduction: this is an example of what God can do with the weakness of men. You see, it's not a bunch of brave soldiers that we're going to look at tonight. In fact, it's going to be a bunch of fearful soldiers. And God was able to use them. You know why? Because they were able to put their trust in God despite their fears. It was God who gave the victory.

Big Idea: **Three steps to victory when facing overwhelming odds**

I. God reduces our strength – vs. 1
You know, the problem with many people is not that they're too weak, but that they're too strong. That is a lot of times our problem. We're too self-reliant, we're too independent, and we're trusting in our own strength. There are a lot of people that are like the King Uzziah in the Bible. The Bible says of him, he was marvelously helped, he was strong, but when he was strong, his heart was lifted up unto his destruction. And so a lot of times the problem that we have is not our weakness but our strength and the pride that comes from our own strength.

And so God has to reveal to us how truly weak that we are. And sometimes God has to put in us a circumstance, put before us a circumstance that's literally impossible for us to deal with. It's something from a human perspective that we're completely unable to get victory over. And he does that to show us how weak we are so that we will trust in his strength alone.

A. The Place of reduction – **vs. 1**

Gideon's army encamps beside a spring. It's called the Spring of *Harad*. Now, strategically, this was very wise because an army has to have water. A refreshed force can stand a better chance in a battle. But the name of the spring is very meaningful here. It's called the spring of *harad*, which comes from the Hebrew word meaning to tremble, or to quake, or to be afraid. So literally we could say it like this, **the spring of trembling**. Matthew Henry says this, when God designs to magnify his own power, he first makes us sensible of our weakness.

Fear is not the opposite of faith, self-reliance is. Self-reliance is the opposite of faith. And God brings us to places where we cannot trust ourself. It's Martin Lloyd-Jones that said, the Christian life is a life of utter dependence upon God. And so, *Harad* teaches us that God is not alarmed by your trembling.

B. The Purpose for the reduction – **vs 2**

God was not concerned about Midian's size. He was concerned about the state of Israel's heart. And God knows Israel. He knows the pride that they had in their hearts.

They had a pattern. They would cry out in distress when a burden came. They would receive deliverance. And then somehow in their own mind, they would think that they were the ones that gave them the victory. It was their ability that was able to overcome that situation. And they would drift into pride, and they would fall back into idolatry. God is going to make sure that they understand that their victory comes from God and God alone.

This reduction is not punishment, it's **protection**. You see, the weakness is not the enemy, the weakness is pride. And scripture gives a lot of warnings against pride. Martin Lloyd-Jones said, the greatest enemy of the Christian life is self-sufficiency. Sometimes God will shrink the attendance, the manpower, the influence. Sometimes God will shrink the options, the comfort, the certainty. And what is our response normally? Well, we panic, but heaven says, no, it's perfect. *My strength is made perfect in your weakness.*

C. The Process of reduction – **vs. 3**

He'll do two tests here to thin out the army. I call this the sifting of fear.

1) Test of Fear: Look if you're afraid you just go ahead and go home – 22,000 of the 32,000 left.Why would God send away the fearful? Well, because fear spreads and fear infects, fear is contagious. The issue here is not the presence of fear, but the rule of fear. We cannot let fear get the victory over us. That's the point. We cannot be dominated and ruled by fear. Fear may visit, but fear cannot reign in us. So faith and fear can inhabit the same heart temporarily, but only one can actually sit on the throne.
2) Test of Focus: Bring them down into the water, and I will try them there. Still 10,000 is too many.Everyone will get an opportunity to drink water, to refresh themselves by the spring, and Gideon is to observe. And some men kneel down and they put their face to the water. I mean, they're just down there with their face all the way in the water. And then some will lap water with their hands. They'll bring their hand down into the water. They'll bring it back up to their mouth and they'll lap the water out of their hand, bringing it to their mouth. Only 300 men actually use their hand to bring the water to their mouth and to lap it, 300. And these were the 300 that were chosen. The rest are sent away.

   I do think, however, that it's reasonable to observe that those who lap their water with

their hand remain more ready and more alert, less absorbed, while others appear to lose awareness of the moment. These men were chosen because they were more focused on the battle, on the enemy. They were more vigilant, whereas the other men, they just kind of put their face into the water in a kind of a, you could say, a careless way, not really concerned about the battle or the enemy behind them.

So the issue is not that you have needs, the issue is whether your needs rule you. Whether your comforts rule, control you. Whether your appetites dull your readiness for what God has. This second sifting asks this question, what happens to you when your legitimate desires are put in front of you? Are you still watchful? Are you still disciplined? Are you still God-centered even when those things are put in front of you? The Bible tells us later in the New Testament that thou endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

II. God reassures his servant

Ps. 103:14

God gives Gideon an assignment. God tells him to take a visit to the enemy camp at night. Notice verse number 10. God is requiring Gideon to face his fear.

It will take courage for Gideon to go into this enemy camp, to get close enough to where he can actually overhear a conversation that's going on between these enemy soldiers, between 2 million soldiers. And this is exactly what he does. Gideon goes into the enemy camp. Providentially, he'll get there at the right time. This is God's timing.

First thing he does is he worships. This is the turning point. This is before the battle, before the trumpets, there's worship. And all his fear gives way to adoration. And this trembling leader, becomes this worshiping leader. This is true strengthening. And then now all of a sudden he's filled with courage and he rallies the 300.

III. God Reveals His strategy – vs. 16-25

<u>4 Applications:</u>

1) God uses broken people.
2) Hidden light has to be revealed.
3) Stand where God places you.
4) The battle is the Lord's.

TEXT: Judges 7:8 -8:3

TITLE: BLUEPRINT FOR VICTORIOUS WARFARE –
THE SWORD OF THE LORD AND OF GIDEON

BIG IDEA:
FOLLOWING THE DIVINE BLUEPRINT FOR WARFARE YIELDS AMAZING VICTORY OVER FORMIDABLE FOES – AS WE UNDERSTAND THE CHARACTER OF OUR COMMANDER IN CHIEF

INTRODUCTION:
Do you view yourself as a **divinely appointed fighter**? That is the mission to which we have been called as Christian soldiers. Yet too often we are more concerned with avoiding conflict, with our life of comfort and entertainment. We are too soft. We are too entangled with the things of this world. We fail to fulfill our role as watchmen on the alert. Look at how the Apostle Paul paints a picture of Christians as fighters:

2 Tim. 2:1-7 "*Suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.*"

Ephes. 6:10-20 "*Put on the full armor of God*"

2 Cor. 10:3-5 "*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the* ***weapons of our warfare*** *are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God; and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*"

These results do not just happen; we must **fight** for this outcome; the story of Gideon's victory over the Midianites teaches how to wage victorious warfare

FOLLOWING THE DIVINE BLUEPRINT FOR WARFARE YIELDS AMAZING VICTORY OVER FORMIDABLE FOES – AS WE UNDERSTAND THE CHARACTER OF OUR COMMANDER IN CHIEF

5 COMPONENTS OF THE DIVINE BLUEPRINT FOR VICTORIOUS WARFARE:

I. (:8) EQUIPPING THE TROOPS FOR BATTLE WITH DIVINELY PROVIDED RESOURCES –
APPRECIATING THE SUFFICIENCY OF GOD

A. The Selected Troops

"*So the 300 men*"

We have already seen God's selection process – two different cuts to eliminate the fearful and then to pinpoint those with focus on the task at hand – designed so that God alone would receive the glory – God is able to save by many or by few;

B. The Sufficient Provisions

"*took the people's provisions*"

Will be important in sustaining the troops as they pursue after the fleeing Midianites

C. The Surprising Weapons

"*and their trumpets into their hands.*"

We will be talking about their weaponry later – holding a trumpet (ram's horn) occupies your hands so that you are unable to use your sword and shield – a noisemaker, not a musical instrument (not like Rin Tin Tin where you play the charge melody) – this just emits a single loud blast

D. The Superfluous Troops

"*And Gideon sent all the other men of Israel, each to his tent, but retained the 300 men;*"

Did not keep them in reserve (even though he is going to call on them for the cleanup operation); was it embarrassing for them to return to their tents? A relief to go into hiding like they had been doing for seven years

E. The Self Confident Target

"*and the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.*"

They were camped out in the open; no surprise attack; confident in their numbers and military supremacy

II. (:9-15) EAVESDROPPING ON THE ENEMY FOR DIVINE ASSURANCE OF MISSION OBJECTIVES (SO YOU DON'T OVERESTIMATE YOUR ENEMY) – APPRECIATING THE GREATNESS OF GOD

A. (:9a) Restatement of the Mission

"*Now the same night it came about that the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp,*"

the objective remains clearly stated; the Lord's expectation is that Gideon should obey; yet He is still incredibly patient with his hesitation due to remaining fears

Deffinbaugh: Being curious by nature, I have to wonder what the weather was like on that fateful night. I doubt that there was a clear, star-filled sky with a full moon. I would imagine that it was one of those pitch black nights when there was little or no illumination from the heavens. This would have enabled Gideon and Purah to make their way into the camp of the Midianites, until they came upon two soldiers in conversation.

B. (:9b) Reassurance of Victory by the Grace of God

"*for I have given it into your hands.*"

Understanding the Grace of God is the key to spiritual victory; enables us to live by the Spirit instead of in the flesh

C. (:10-14) Resolving of Gideon's Fears

"*But if you are afraid to go down, go with Purah your servant down to the camp, and you will hear what they say; and afterward your hands will be strengthened that you may go down against the camp. So he went with Purah his servant down to the outposts of the army that was in the camp. Now the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the sons of the east were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. When Gideon came, behold, a man was relating a dream to his friend. And he said, 'Behold, I had a dream; a loaf of barley*

bread was tumbling into the camp of Midian, and it came to the tent and struck it so that it fell, and turned it upside down so that the tent lay flat.' And his friend answered and said, 'This is nothing less than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given Midian and all the camp into his hand.'"

Sovereign Providence of God to orchestrate all these events – taking Gideon to just the right tent at just the right time to hear just the right conversation based on a divinely given dream and its simple interpretation

Smashing, crushing defeat is what is pictured in this dream

Inrig: Barley was a food very poor people ate. It was a fitting picture of Israel. Midian had seized their wheat and turned Israel into eaters of barley, animal food. . . For the first time, Gideon had come to realize the greatness of God. In a very real sense we are never prepared for battle until we know what it is to bow in worship before God. That is why we read in **Daniel 11:32**, "*The people who know their God will display strength and take action.*"

Barley bread is what you eat when you can't afford wheat

Pagans always get it wrong – put things in the wrong order: "*sword of Gideon*" – rather than putting God first

D. (:15) Realization of the Greatness of God

"*And it came about when Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation, that he bowed in worship. He returned to the camp of Israel and said, 'Arise, for the LORD has given the camp of Midian into your hands.'"*

Importance of worship preceding service: **Joshua 5:13-15** Vision of the commander in chief – sense of God's holiness and majesty; fall at His feet in fear and worship

New sense of confidence and resolve; no more hesitancy or doubt or fear

III. (:16-22) EXECUTING THE WARFARE STRATEGY SO THAT GOD GETS THE GLORY – APPRECIATING THE WISDOM OF GOD

Look at the different points of this divinely communicated strategy:

A. (:16a) Strategy of 3 Divisions

"*And he divided the 300 men into three companies*"

This meant that Gideon had to put confidence in 2 other leaders who would take charge in concert with his own efforts

I don't think Gideon wanted to completely encircle the camp – I think he positioned these divisions on 3 sides and left one side open to force them to flee back towards the Jordan River where they would be subjected to ambush; they would be fleeing back towards their homeland and away from the vulnerable Israel cities

B. (:16b) Strategy of Surprising Weapons of Warfare

"*and he put trumpets and empty pitchers into the hands of all of them, with torches inside the pitchers.*"

Inrig: Now you get your weapons, and what are they? A horn, a torch, and a jar! No shields, no arrows, no swords. I can imagine Gideon's 300 looking at those things and wondering how they could ever win a victory with such unmilitary objects.

2 Cor. 10:3-4 "*Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.*"

Inrig: Years later, in Judah's history, King Asa was confronted with an army of over a million Ethiopians, led by 300 chariots. He could fight them with 580,000 foot soldiers, but the odds were obviously overwhelming. In response to that problem, Asa prayed one of the great prayers of Scripture. "*Lord, there is no one besides You to help in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength; so help us, O Lord our God, for we support ourselves on You, and in Your name we have come against this multitude. O Lord, You are our God; let not man prevail against You*" (**2 Chron. 14:11**). God answered that prayer with a resounding victory over the Ethiopians.

S. Lewis Johnson: Now, it's possible for us to make a great deal over this kind of equipment. Trumpet is a trumpet to sound. And that would suggest to us the word of God. The torch to shine would suggest to us the light of the testimony to the word of God or to Jesus Christ. And the breaking of the vessels in order that the light may shine does suggest to us the fact that when an individual comes to the place of a measure of surrender, it is possible for God to work through that one. And I do notice that these vessels must be broken before they shine. And these words that I've suggested to you as the meaning of these things are suggested to us by Paul's words in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 when he speaks about the testimony of believers. He says,

"*For God, who said the light shall shine out of darkness, is the one who has shown in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the supposing greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves.*"

He says,

"*We always carry about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you.*"

Herbert Wolf: The "trumpets" were the same ram's horn type used by Ehud and Gideon to summon the troops. Their value was not as musical instruments but as noise-making devices. Only the leaders would give signals on the trumpets; so three hundred trumpets normally represented a sizable army. When Joshua captured Jericho, only seven priests had trumpets (**Josh. 6:6**).

C. (:17-18) Strategy of Leader Setting the Example

"*And he said to them, 'Look at me, and do likewise. And behold, when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. When I and all who are with me blow the trumpet, then you also blow the trumpets all around the camp, and say, For the LORD and for Gideon.'*"

D. (:19a) Strategy of Timing the Attack at the Beginning of the Middle Watch

"*So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just posted the watch;*"

Deffinbaugh: the author's main interest seems to be that it is the beginning of the watch. That must have been an important detail. My friend and fellow-elder, Stan Schultz, informs me that the change of watch is the time when there is the greatest confusion. If an emergency occurs, who is now in charge? Is it the one going off his watch or the one coming on? What is clear in all this is that the "attack" (if you dare call a 300-man light and sound show an attack) took place at just the perfect time, God's time. Gideon's descent to the Midianite camp perfectly synchronized with God's schedule.

Brensinger: In ancient Israel, the night was divided into three watches, each four hours in duration . . . By the beginning of the middle watch, around ten o'clock, a sizeable portion of the Midianite army no doubt lies fast asleep. Furthermore, insofar as new guards are posted between watches, the recently positioned replacements need to adjust to nighttime duty. As a result, such transition periods are marked by increased vulnerability, regardless of the precision with which such changes are made.

E. (:19b-21a) Strategy of Carefully Orchestrated Attack

"*and they blew the trumpets and smashed the pitchers that were in their hands. When the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers, they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing, and cried, 'A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!' And each stood in his place around the camp;*"

These activities require no skill in warfare at all!

F. (:21b-22) Strategy of Causing Panic and Confusion / with resulting Bloodshed

"*and all the army ran, crying out as they fled. And when they blew 300 trumpets, the LORD set the sword of one against another even throughout the whole army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the edge of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath.*"

Block: The bedlam in the enemy camp is described in three verbs: "and they [all the camp] *ran*"; "and they *cried out* [wildly]"; "and they *fled*." This is the natural response of those who have been awakened from the deepest of sleep (at midnight) to the sound of horns blowing, jars smashing, people shouting, and the sight of three hundred blazing torches around the camp. This is psychological warfare at its best.

Head back southeast towards the Jordan River – back to their homelands

IV. (:23-25) ERADICATING THE OPPOSITION – INCLUDING THE FLEEING TROOPS IN GENERAL AND THE OPPOSITION LEADERS IN PARTICULAR – APPRECIATING THE JUSTICE OF GOD

A. Eradicating the Fleeing Troops

> "*And the men of Israel were summoned from Naphtali and Asher and all Manasseh, and they pursued Midian. And Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, 'Come down against Midian and take the waters before them, as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan.' So all the men of Ephraim were summoned, and they took the waters as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan.*"

B. Eradicating the Opposition Leaders

> "*And they captured the two leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb, and they killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and they killed Zeeb at the wine press of Zeeb, while they pursued Midian; and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon from across the Jordan.*"

Constable: *Oreb* (lit. the **Raven**) and *Zeeb* (the **Wolf**), east of the Jordan. The Midianites had acted like scavengers and predators, so these names were ironically appropriate.

Not always great to have something named after you

Wiersbe: The story of Gideon began with a man hiding in a winepress (**6:11**), but it ended with the enemy prince being slain at a winepress.

Is. 10:26 *"The Lord of hosts will arouse a scourge against him like the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb*"

V. (8:1-3) EMPHASIZING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF OTHERS TO EASE POLITICAL TENSION – APPRECIATING THE GRACE OF GOD

> "*Then the men of Ephraim said to him, 'What is this thing you have done to us, not calling us when you went to fight against Midian?' And they contended with him vigorously. But he said to them, 'What have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? God has **given** the leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb into your hands; and what was I able to do in comparison with you?' Then their anger toward him subsided when he said that.*"

Hurt feelings; bruised egos; goes back to man's pride; even at the point of victory God's people are ready to implode internally because of pride and selfishness

Constable: Gideon responded diplomatically and satisfied the Ephraimites (v. 2). The "*gleaning*" of Ephraim refers to the lives and spoils the Ephraimites took from the fleeing Midianites, and the "*vintage*" of Abiezer refers to the Midianites that Gideon and his 300 men had defeated and slain. The Ephraimites' victory was greater too in that they had killed two Midianite commanders, Oreb and Zeeb.

Brensinger: **Prominence of Ephraim**:

- Situated primarily in the central hills, among the more successful northern tribes at gaining control of and protecting its territory (1:22-26)
- The important worship centers of Bethel and Shiloh were located there
- Dominant figures came from there: Joshua, Samuel, Jeroboam

The Ephraimites, in other words, are accustomed to having a major role in Israel's undertakings. Now, however, seemingly less significant and less able tribes are admirably functioning together – without them. Resentment ensues. . . In this case, Gideon handles the Ephraimites' criticism by employing proverbial wisdom. . . he emphasizes the Ephraimites' accomplishments without drawing attention to what he and the others have done. In fact, Gideon actually downplays the significance of his own achievements. By extending a grateful "pat on the back," Gideon wisely silences criticism with praise.

Motyer: **Diplomacy of Gideon**

With the nation's enemy on the run, the tribe of Ephraim can indulge the luxury of picking a quarrel with their own victorious general. Their touchiness will surface again in the days of Jephthah, who will give them considerably shorter shrift (12:1-6). Whatever his private feelings (he may have been sorely tempted to beat them up, as Jephthah later did), Gideon reckons that for the moment he has more pressing matters on hand, and "a soft answer" which "turns away wrath" defuses the explosive situation in the Israelite ranks.

Block: To change the metaphor, the best the Abiezrites [Gideon's tribe] can produce is less than the scraps off the Ephraimite's table. The proverb has the ring of a clever political slogan. . . this episode exposes a fundamental problem with the Ephraimites that will resurface in 12:1-6. They are a self-centered and fractious lot, easily offended, and with an inflated estimation of their significance within the nation. Even in victory Israel remains her own worst enemy.

CONCLUSION:

Deffinbaugh: *this battle enabled the Israelites (particularly Gideon) to "experience God."* God left the Canaanites in the land so that the Israelites would have to go to war with them, and in so doing, they would experience His presence and power. I have to smile to myself as I think of Gideon's protest earlier in chapter 6:

> Gideon said to him, "*Pardon me, but if the Lord is with us, why has such disaster overtaken us? Where are all his miraculous deeds our ancestors told us about? They said, 'Did the Lord not bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and handed us over to Midian*" (**Judges 6:13**).

We should probably sing **Onward Christian Soldiers**!

> Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
> With the cross of Jesus going on before:
> Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe;
> Forward into battle, see His banners go.

Or how about **Soldiers of Christ Arise!**

> Soldiers of Christ, arise

And put your armor on,
Strong in the strength which God supplies
Through His eternal Son;
Strong in the Lord of hosts,
And in His mighty pow'r,
Who in the strength of Jesus trusts
Is more than conqueror.

Or maybe **Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus!**

Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
Ye soldiers of the cross,
Lift high His royal banner,
It must not suffer loss;
From victory unto victory
His army shall He lead,
Till every foe is vanquished
And Christ is Lord indeed.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What type of battles has the Lord had you fighting lately?

2) Where do you tend to overestimate the strength of the enemy and underestimate the greatness of God?

3) How can you be more consistent in putting worship before service?

4) Is God receiving the glory for the victories He performs through you?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

S. Lewis Johnson: Now think about this for just a moment. It has been said God is just as great in the microscope as he is in the telescope. That is, he is seen to be just as great. Take the telescope and look off into the heavens about us and you cannot help but feel that God who created all of this is a great God. But then take out the microscope and look at some of the creation and you feel the same way. God is truly a great God.

Now, here is a striking providence. Gideon has managed to come down near the camp of the Midianites and he happens to come at a particular camp where a man has been dreaming. And it's still night time and he's telling his dream.

Now, I say that that is rather unusual. People talk about their dreams in the morning. They don't, as a rule, talk about their dreams at night. But here is a man who is talking about his dream and Gideon is there. And furthermore, out of all of the tents of the Midianites a hundred

and thirty-five thousand men we read in the next chapter. Out of the hundred and thirty-five thousand men, Gideon happens to come to the one tent where the man has been dreaming and he's talking about his dream. And furthermore, he has come at that particular time. It just so happened, that he arrived at the time that this man speaks about his dream. So he is at a particular place at a particular time and he hears this particular dream that has to do with him. He even hears his own name. This is the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash. And God has given us into his hand. You can see that the brain of this Midianite is in the hand of the Lord. And so Gideon listens. It's astonishing. . .

You know we often overestimate the enemy. That's what Gideon had done. He had overestimated the enemy, one hundred and thirty-five thousand Midianites they are as nothing if the Lord is on our side. We overestimate the enemy because the facts are that the enemy deep down within their inmost being are scared to death of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When the word of the cross goes forth, the enemy trembles. It's just as when the children of Israel came to go in the land. And Rahab, when she received the spy, she said the fear of you has fallen upon us. And here are the Midianites, one hundred and thirty-five thousand strong and a loaf of barley bread striking the tent of the leader and knocking it over in a dream is enough to convince the Midianite that God has given them into the hands of Gideon. Isn't it an amazing thing? We do overestimate the enemies of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Constable: quoting Tanner and McCann
"The textual patterning of the Gideon narrative is carefully composed to highlight not the deliverance from Midian but the change that transpired in Gideon's heart, and it is precisely there that the greatest theological lesson in these chapters is found. The fear in Gideon's heart held him back from being able to trust the promise God had given about his delivering Israel from the Midianites. To overcome this deficiency in Gideon's life, God uniquely worked to expose the problem of fear in his life and to bring him to a point of worship and faith. Then and only then was Gideon ready to lead Israel in battle. . . . Furthermore all the struggles in the book result from a lack of faith. This struggle is most fully spelled out in the Gideon narrative, which accords with this event (his religious struggle) being put in the very center of the book.

". . . the narrator leaves the reader with a penetrating message: God must bring His servant to a moment when all human confidence is stripped away, he sits silently in humble adoration of his God as the One who is totally sufficient against all odds to accomplish His divine will. Then and only then is he ready to move forward to taste God's victory, though that victory is no more secure or certain than before."

"Even so, while it seems that Gideon has 'moved from fear to faith,' the situation may actually be more complicated. The two versions of Gideon's battle cry, 'For the LORD and for Gideon!' (v. 18) and 'A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!' (v. 20), suggest that Gideon may also be moving from fear to self-assertion. While from one perspective Gideon may simply be exercising strong military leadership, he also seems willing to take at least some of 'the credit' (7:2) for the victory. This is not a good sign."

Deffinbaugh: God produced panic in the hearts of the Midianites:
I'm also inclined (albeit through a little speculation) to believe that this Midianite's dream not only encouraged Gideon and his men, but that it demoralized and struck fear into the hearts of the Midianite host. My thoughts are not as speculative as you might suppose, because God gave this assurance to the Israelites as they were heading toward the Promised Land:

14 The nations will hear and tremble;
anguish will seize the inhabitants of Philistia.
15 Then the chiefs of Edom will be terrified,
trembling will seize the leaders of Moab,
and the inhabitants of Canaan will shake.
16 Fear and dread will fall on them;
by the greatness of your arm they will be as still as stone
until your people pass by, O Lord,
until the people whom you have bought pass by (**Exodus 15:14-16**).

"*I will send my terror before you, and I will destroy all the people whom you encounter; I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you*" (**Exodus 23:27**).

22 He, the God who leads you, will expel the nations little by little. You will not be allowed to destroy them all at once lest the wild animals overrun you. 23 The Lord your God will give them over to you; he will throw them into a great panic until they are destroyed. 24 He will hand over their kings to you and you will erase their very names from memory. Nobody will be able to resist you until you destroy them (**Deuteronomy 7:22-24**, emphasis mine).

TEXT: Judges 8: 4-21

TITLE: NO FENCE SITTING IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE

BIG IDEA:
NOT TAKING SIDES IS NOT AN OPTION WHEN THE LORD CALLS ON YOU TO SUPPORT THE RIGHTEOUS

INTRODUCTION:

Some of the biggest disappointments in the experience of those who have been blessed by God with discernment and vision and charged with carrying out a divine mission come not from God's enemies but from within the camp of God's own people. That is Gideon's frustration in this sad tale of two TransJordan cities of Gad that refused to step up to the plate and take their stand on the side of righteousness and faith.

Gideon had been called by God to deliver the Israelites from the bondage of the Midianites. After culling the troops down to just 300 men so that Gideon's troops could not take credit for the victory, the Lord routed the enemy and directed Gideon to continue to pursue the capture of the remaining two kings – Zebah and Zalmunna. In the pursuit of this mission Gideon and his men were in need of rest and physical sustenance. Gideon made request of the leaders of both Succoth and Penuel (tribe of Gad located beyond the Jordan River – closest to the enemy) but was refused on the grounds that they preferred to sit on the sidelines and not take sides until they could see which side emerged victorious in this conflict. Gideon condemned their unwillingness to provide assistance to the righteous and promised that there would be appropriate judgment upon his victorious return.

From the Lord's perspective, there is no doubt regarding which side deserves support. It should be based on **supporting righteousness** rather than trying to look into the future and from an expediency standpoint trying to anticipate the outcome and jumping on the bandwagon of the winner.

Some commentators see a shift in Gideon's outlook beginning in **8:4** where now he no longer is seeking the Lord's will but has taken control himself and is more concerned for personal vengeance, etc. I don't see anything negative in his actions until later in the chapter. He is still carrying out his divine commission with firm commitment and a faith that has grown stronger as he has seen God at work. He is more decisive and bold in his actions, but still trusting in the Lord.

Block: We are surprised to learn, however, that not only are Gideon's mopping-up operations more complicated than anticipated, but this theme also is interwoven with another: Gideon's disposition toward his fellow Israelites. In fact, these two themes alternate in the narrative in an A B A' B' pattern, with A (8:4-9) and A' (8:13-17) involving the latter issue and B (8:10-12) and B' (8:18-21) concerning the former.

NOT TAKING SIDES IS NOT AN OPTION WHEN THE LORD CALLS ON YOU TO SUPPORT THE RIGHTEOUS

I. (:4-9) SIDELINE SITTERS -- REFUSAL TO TAKE RISK TO SUPPORT THE RIGHTEOUS EVOKES THE THREAT OF RETRIBUTION

A. (:4-7) Appeal to the Leaders of Succoth for Support

1. (:4) Legitimate Need for Immediate Support

"*Then Gideon and the 300 men who were with him came to the Jordan and crossed over, weary yet pursuing.*"

- Look at who is taking the initiative to do battle with the enemy
  - didn't stop at the **obstacle** of the Jordan but crossed over to finish the deal; why have to revisit this enemy at a later date?
- Look at who has the discernment to realize what needs to be done and is actively engaged in providing deliverance from which all will benefit. Gideon fully understood the commission he had received from the Lord.
- Look at who has been taking the bulk of the risk all along and is persevering despite the difficulty and physical challenges
- Look at how complete the victory was that God was providing – Gideon still has all 300 of his men; so far they had been called to "*Stand*" – but had not had to do much actual fighting – Ephes 6 – "*be steadfast*" – don't back down

"*weary yet pursuing*" – God gives just enough strength
Illustration: heard Stan White talk about the type of training that Ray Lewis does in the off-season; takes certain younger players under his wing (Stan's son and now wider receiver draftee Streeter) to show them what it takes to be a winner; you come to a wall and then must discipline yourself to continue to push forward

If you are on the same team as these weary and starved soldiers, what would prevent you from providing assistance?

2. (:5) Urgent Request for Appropriate Assistance

"*He said to the men of Succoth, 'Please give loaves of bread to the people who are following me, for they are weary, and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian.'*"

Succoth was beyond Jordan, in the tribe of Gad. Penuel was also in the same tribe, and not far distant from Succoth.

- Gideon more concerned for his men than for himself – appreciates their loyalty "*following me*"
- Not asking for any major commitment on their part – "*loaves of bread*"
  - just asking for physical sustenance; not that they would join the fight
- Offers two very cogent reasons for such assistance:
  - **The plight of his soldiers** (their fellow countrymen) is evident – "*they are weary*"
  - **The critical nature of his mission** is evident – "*pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna*"

Adam Clarke: As Gideon was engaged in the common cause of Israel, he had a right to expect succor from the people at large. His request to the men of Succoth and Penuel was both just and reasonable.

Significance of names of these two kings: Zebah = "*victim*" or "*sacrifice*" and Zalmunna = "*protection[shade] refused [denied]*" – pointing to their ultimate fate
James Jordan: God had already appointed them for destruction

3. (:6) Expedient Response Revealing an Aversion to Taking Risk

"*The leaders of Succoth said, 'Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hands, that we should give bread to your army*?'"

- We want to sit on the fence and wait
- We look at your weak band of 300 men and have a hard time visualizing how the Lord is going to give you the victory
- We want to see which side wins the conflict – not attempting to make the decision on the basis of supporting righteousness
- We will thrown our support behind the winning horse – but they end up riding in the losing hearse

Tone is one of taunting, mocking – shows their complete lack of faith – but these are supposed to be part of the nation of Israel

Illustration from business: we want to increase sales; study the market and see there is potential opportunity; don't want to take the risk of hiring another sales rep until we have enough sales to support him – will never happen

4. (:7) Sobering Threat of Retribution from a Confident Assurance of Victory

"*Gideon said, 'All right, when the Lord has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, then I will thrash your bodies with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers.*'"

- You will suffer the consequences of your choice – sitting on the fence was not really remaining neutral but was actively supporting the enemy
- Victory is assured for the righteous
- Discipline will be painful and severe

James Jordan: Deuteronomy 23:3-4 tells us that God had cursed Moab and Ammon because they did not give bread to hungry Israel as they came out of Egypt. Jesus makes the same point in Matthew 25:34-40. It is important to realize that Midian was often allied with Moab and Amon, as in the story of Balaam and Phineas, which is in the background of the story of Gideon (Num. 22-25; Dt. 23:4). Thus, when Succoth refused to help God's people, they were identifying themselves with the Moabites, Ammonites, and Midianites.

B. (:8-9) Appeal to the Leaders of Penuel for Support

1. Intensified Legitimate Need for Immediate Support (understood)

"*He went up from there to Penuel*"
– situation keeps getting worse over time

Gen. 32:24-30 town associated with Jacob's wrestling with angel

2. Similar Urgent Request

"*and spoke similarly to them*"

3. Similar Expedient Response

"*and the men of Penuel answered him just as the men of Succoth had answered*"

4. Similar Sobering Threat of Retribution from a Confident Assurance of Victory

"*So he spoke also to the men of Penuel, saying, 'When I return safely, I will tear down this tower.*'"

The tower was where the villagers of Penuel found their security and defense; believing themselves to be safe from attack

[**ASIDE**: left unsaid how the Lord provided for the physical sustenance of Gideon's troops to enable them to defeat the enemy]

Other Biblical Examples of Call to Support Righteousness:

- Who will speak on behalf of the widows and orphans and seek justice and relief for them? How much more the necessity to speak up for the unborn babies who are being aborted each day?
- Apostle Paul wanted people to support him against the unjust accusations of the Judaizers

II. (:10-12) SURPRISED SOLDIERS -- THE VICTORY OF THE RIGHTEOUS SETS THE STAGE FOR THE PROMISED RETRIBUTION

A. (:10) Staging of the Decisive Battle

"*Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor, and their armies with them, about 15,000 men, all who were left of the entire army of the sons of the east; for the fallen were 120,000 swordsmen.*"

B. (:11) Surprise Attack

"*Gideon went up by the way of those who lived in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and attacked the camp when the camp was unsuspecting.*"

James Jordan: Geographical study shows that he went all the way around the camp to the other side, and attacked during the night from the east, the quarter they would least have expected an attack to come from.

Inrig: There is a great lesson for us in Gideon's persistence. D. L. Moody once said, "Give me a man who says 'This one thing I do' and not 'These fifty things I dabble with.'" Benjamin Disraeli declared, "The secret of success is constancy of purpose." Singleness of purpose in carrying out the will of God.

C. (:12) No Surprise Regarding the Victory – a Total Rout

"*When Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued them and captured the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and routed the whole army.*"

- Why would someone be waffling over whether or not to support the righteous when it is clear that the Lord will provide the ultimate and complete victory?

"*routed*" – Herbert Wolf – more precisely "*terrifying*" -- How fitting that it should end with a

terror-stricken Midian!. The Hiphil is also used of an exhausted, easily frightened army in 2 Sam 17:2.

III. (:13-17) SPANKED CITIES -- THE PROMISED RETRIBUTION SHOULD MOTIVATE OTHERS TO SUPPORT THE RIGHTEOUS RATHER THAN DECEIVING THEMSELVES THAT THEY CAN SAFELY SIT ON THE FENCE

A. (:13-16) Retribution on Succoth

1. (:14) Targeting the Responsible Leaders

"*Then the youth wrote down for him the princes of Succoth and its elders, seventy-seven men*."

Quite a list this youth put together for Gideon

Brensinger: The numbers seventy and seven frequently signifying completeness suggest that all of the officials have been accounted for.

[maybe our politicians would be more careful with their voting records if there was such strict accountability for the consequences of their decisions.]

2. (:15) Turning the Tables on Their Taunting

"*He came to the men of Succoth and said, 'Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, concerning whom you taunted me, saying, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your men who are weary*?'"

"No risk, no reward" – goes beyond that here; actual retribution

3. (:16) Tearing Up the Bodies of the Guilty Elders

"*He took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and he disciplined the men of Succoth with them*."

Dale Ralph Davis: Since they sided with Israel's enemies, they were treated as Israel's enemies. Here is instruction for us: sometimes the people of God are a great disappointment (if you don't know that, you may not survive in the church.) Don't allow God's people to disillusion you; at least be prepared for it.

B. (:17) Retribution on Penuel

1. Destroyed Their Pride and Protection

"*He tore down the tower of Penuel*"

2. Destroyed Their Men

"*and killed the men of the city*"

Matthew Henry: not all, perhaps not the elders or princes, but those that had affronted him, and those only. He slew some of the men of the city that were most insolent and abusive, for terror to the rest, and so he taught the men of Penuel.

IV. (:18-21) SLAIN SOVEREIGNS -- THE EXECUTION OF THE MIDIANITE KINGS REMOVES THE PAGAN DOMINATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE AND CONFIRMS THE POWER OF GIDEON

A. (:18-19) Death Sentence Pronounced

> "*Then he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, 'What kind of men were they whom you killed at Tabor?' And they said, 'They were like you, each one resembling the son of a king.' And he said, 'They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As the LORD lives, if only you had let them live, I would not kill you.*'"

This story must refer to some earlier Midianite raid where members of Gideon's family had been targeted and killed.

Has Gideon's motivation changed from carrying out national deliverance to some type of personal blood vendetta? Seems to me like the Lord still wanted them executed

James Jordan: if you were to put the best possible light on Gideon's actions here … perhaps he was saying: "As the anointed one of Israel, it is my task to be the blood avenger for my brethren. What you have done to Israel as a whole, you have done in particular to my own brethren; and what I do to you to avenge the blood of my brethren, is what God does to you to avenge all His children . . . Thus my personal vengeance is also the Lord's vengeance."

B. (:20) Execution Opportunity Offered to Jether

> "*So he said to Jether his first-born, 'Rise, kill them.' But the youth did not draw his sword, for he was afraid, because he was still a youth.*"

Trying to teach his son to follow in his footsteps and **walk by faith** – faith cannot be passed down automatically from father to son
Also Gideon desired that his son would receive honor through this symbolic deed
[other commentators criticize Gideon and say that he is taking personal vengeance here in an inappropriate fashion – I don't agree; he is still on track at this point – we will see his own slippage in the passage we study next week]

C. (:21) Execution Challenge Carried Out by Gideon

> "*Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, 'Rise up yourself, and fall on us; for as the man, so is his strength.' So Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and took the crescent ornaments which were on their camels' necks.*"

Captured kings are trying to maintain as much dignity and honor as possible – realizing that they are about to be executed; issue a challenge to Gideon

Significance of the *crescent ornaments* – associated with worship of the moon; part of their bringing shame upon the name of God by celebrating the superiority of their gods;
Cf. victory ornamentation of Preakness winning horse

Herbert Wolf: The crescent-shaped ornaments (lit. "little moons") on the camels' necks are still in common use among the Arabs. Made of silver or gold, they are mentioned again in Isaiah 3:18 among articles highly prized by women. The Midianites, along with many other Semite people, probably worshiped the moon-god.

CONCLUSION:

There is no neutral stand -- **Luke 11:23** "*He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.*"

Grady Henley -- Illustration: "**That's Not My Job**"
This is a story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody, when Nobody did, what Anybody could have done.

The call has gone out from the mouth of the Lord: "*Who will stand in the gap*," **Ezek 22:30,** between the righteous judgment of the Lord and the sinner doomed for hell? Who will tell that sinner that Jesus loves them and that one day they must give an account for their sins?
Who will stand in the gap and tell those there is only two sides, good and evil, and each must decide which side they will be on, **Exo 32:26** "*Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD'S side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him.*"

The plea went forth from the throne of God for someone to go and tell the nation that judgment was coming. Isaiah answered the call, **Isa 6:8**. He made his stand for the cause of God.

Are we going to sit on the sidelines and expect to be rewarded as part of the winning team or are we going to step out in faith and have the courage to take a stand for the Lord and His kingdom of righteousness?

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What types of temptations have we faced when we were at the end of our resources and in desperate situations? How has the Lord enabled us to persevere?

2) When have we turned to believers for assistance and been disappointed in their unwillingness to help? What was their reason for not coming to our aid?

3) What mission has God gifted us and called us to where we need to stick to the course and not let obstacles or discouragement distract us?

4) Why does the retribution on Succoth and Penuel seem so severe and harsh to us? What message is God sending here?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Inrig: In the course of his travels, he came to Succoth, one of the Israelite towns on the other side of the Jordan, and he begged them for food. They should have been excited about what God had done through Gideon. He had liberated them from Midian. Instead, he ran into a group of people who professed to be the people of God, but who had no knowledge of God at all. There was no thankfulness to God, no trust in God, no mention of God. Even the lowest level of human kindness required that they help Gideon, their fellow Israelite. Not only did they not help him, but they mocked him. "*Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hands, that we should give bread to your army*"" (v6)

Here were 300 tired, exhausted men, and even though Midian had been badly defeated, they still represented a formidable foe. They were 15,000 strong, led by two fierce kings, and they were reduced to desperation, fighting for their lives. What is more, they were in the refuge town of Karkor. The attitude of Succoth and Penuel could well have convinced Gideon to turn back. "You are right. We have already won a great victory. Why press our luck any further? There is not much chance we can do anything. Let's turn back."

Constable: The residents of these villages lived closer to the Midianites than most of the Israelites did, and they may have made an alliance with them. It is understandable that they did not want to jeopardize their security by assisting Gideon who appeared to them to be much weaker than their Midianite neighbors. . .

Gideon's severe punishment of the men of these towns was just. They had selfishly refused to assist God's appointed judge in His holy war for Yahweh's glory and His people's good. They had also shown contempt for the soldiers God had signally honored with supernatural victory. It was Gideon's duty as a judge in Israel to punish these compromising and selfish cities. The severity of his punishment doubtless impressed the other Israelites with the seriousness of their offense.

J. Clinton McCann: In these words [denying Gideon bread, v. 6] there is not only an expression of cowardice, or fear of the vengeance which the Midianites might take when they returned upon those who had supported Gideon and his host, but contempt of the small force which Gideon had, as if it were impossible for him to accomplish anything at all against the foe; and in this contempt they manifested their utter want of confidence in God.

John Gill: he did not desire them to leave their habitations and families, and join him in pursuing his and their enemies, or to furnish him and his men with arms; only to give them some provisions and that not dainties, but loaves of bread; or "morsels of bread", and broken pieces; and these he did not demand in an authoritative manner, as he might have done as a general, but in a way of entreaty.

Adam Clarke: To put a captive enemy to death no executioner was required. Gideon slays Zebah and Zalmunna with his own hand. Samuel is said to have hewn Agag in pieces, 1 Samuel 15:33. Benaiah slew Joab, 1 Kings 2:25. Saul orders his guards to slay the priests who had contributed to the escape of David, 1 Samuel 22:17; and David caused one of his attendants to slay the Amalekite who pretended to have slain Saul, 2 Samuel 1:15.

Matthew Henry: The destruction of these two kings, and that of the two princes (**Judges 7:25**) is long afterwards pleaded as a precedent in prayer for the ruin of others of the church's enemies,

Psalms 83:11, Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb, and all their princes as Zebah and Zalmunna, let them all be but off in like manner.

Grady Henley: **Followers are not Neutral**
Sometimes we believe there is no harm in taking a neutral stand. While such may be true in some cases, such is not so when it comes to the work and will of the Lord. It is a wise person that knows when to stand and when to remain neutral.

During the times of the judges in the history of the nation of Israel, there were two cities that thought they could remain neutral and their neutrality would not cost them. In reality what these two cities tried to do was play both ends against the middle so that they could win regardless of the outcome of the conflict.

Gideon made it known to these two cities that a neutral stand costs. Soldiers passed their gates; some were the chasers and some the chasees. Regardless, these two cities decided that it would be best if they missed this particular foray.

Webster's 1828 Dictionary defines neutral as: 1. Not engaged on either side; not taking an active part with either of contending parties. The definition of the word is much easier to understand than the position the person takes. The same is true for a country that tries to remain neutral in a conflict. . .

People who think that by remaining neutral they will somehow some way come out as winners are deceiving themselves. How can people who think as such be winners, when they did not fight to win? They chose no side, but yet they expect to come out on top. What these two cities wanted was for someone to give them something for nothing.

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **Finishing Well Matters**
Introduction: Finishing well matters more than how you started. You can dominate most of the season. You can win most of the battles. You can build an extraordinary record. But if you stumble at the end, That's the defining moment. That's what people remember the most.

Gideon's a man who once destroyed idols and he fashions an ephod. What's an ephod? That is a kind of a breastplate that a king would wear or sometimes a priest in the Old Testament would wear. And he kind of fashions this, and this ephod becomes an idol that the children of Israel ultimately use as an idol, and it becomes a snare.

Big Idea: **Some reasons why Gideon did not finish well.**

I. He was distracted by Pride – vs. 1-3
We're always vulnerable after a great victory. So we see the pride of Ephraim and they basically come to him and say, why didn't you call us into this battle? Why didn't you call us sooner? Now, Ephraim was one of the most prominent tribes in Israel. In fact, Joshua, the great leader of Israel, came from Ephraim. And that territory of Ephraim was right in the center of Israel. So they had a big influence, this tribe of Ephraim.

And they wanted to share in the glory. And this reveals a truth that's pretty much timeless, and that is that when God grants victory, human pride wants to come in and compete for the attention and the credit. Ephraim, they didn't volunteer at the beginning. They only joined the battle after it

was pretty much over at the end, when victory was already evident.

And however, now they come to Gideon and they want to share in the glory with Gideon. So the question here for Gideon is, will he defend God's glory or will he stroke the egos of these men? So we see here what I call the pride of Gideon. Look at his response.

The problem I have with this whole answer is notice what Gideon doesn't say. He doesn't say, well, it was actually the Lord that delivered Midian into our hands. It was God who did it. The battle was the Lord's. And if you were able to contribute to that, it's because God used you. God was able to do that through you. I mean, it was very clear in chapter 7 that God was going to give victory in a way where no man could take the credit, right? I mean, that was the whole point of why God withered down the army to 300. So they can know that only God is the one who gave the victory here.

But this is absent now from Gideon's speech. I think it's Gideon's pride that reveals his self-preservation. And there's kind of an inkling in here of him being political, wanting to have influence among this powerful tribe. And the other problem I have with this is that his answer, although diplomatic and tactful, is just really a lie. The truth of the matter is their contribution didn't matter much at all. Gideon and the 300 are the ones that really did the main work, and that was by the help of God. But he's basically trying to avoid conflict. But ultimately what he's trying to do is he's trying to secure his own leadership.

He doesn't rebuke Ephraim for their pride, which is what he should have done. Say, hey, why are you guys coming at the end of the battle wanting glory? The only one who gets the glory for this battle is Almighty God. Well, he didn't do that because the tribe of Ephraim was powerful and they were influential.

II. He was driven by Vengeance – vs. 4-21

A. <u>The retreat of Midian – **vs. 4-9**</u>

In this pursuit, he is really trying to grab hold of and capture the two Midianite kings, Zeba and Zalmunna. And his men are pursuing and they're exhausted. They need help from others. And so Gideon is gonna make a request to the town of Sukkot.

Their refusal was more about their self-preservation, and it undermines the whole pursuit, and it discourages these weary soldiers, and it shows that they're more concerned about their own self-protection than the honor of God and the victory for the whole nation of Israel. And it says in verse number 15 that they even taunted Gideon. They mocked him. They insulted him. They sided with the enemy. And so Gideon is angry about this.

B. <u>The revenge of Gideon – **vs. 10-21**</u>

God gives Gideon the victory (**vs. 10-12**). Then there is the payback tour. So he's really on a vengeful tour against these men who refuse to help him. But what stands out here in the text is the contrast between Gideon's impatience with these men, his ruthlessness with the Israelites, versus God's patience and grace with his people.

Gideon's behavior could be justified if Penuel were a Canaanite city, but these were fellow Israelites. His character has been transformed. He's acting like a general out of control, no longer bound by rules of civility, let alone national loyalty. He's acting out in vengeance and in anger. He's acting out against these people.

And now it's payback time. And now it's revenge. So he's going to kill them. But he's gonna do it in a way that humiliates them. He doesn't wanna just, he's not asking for justice now. This is not just judgment on them. He wants to humiliate them. He wants to pay back. This is now becoming more personal for Gideon. And he wants to have them die in a way that is humiliating for them (**vs. 18-19**).

The problem is not that he executes these kings. But that this execution is saturated with personal vengeance. Somewhere along the line, he forgot that he was doing the Lord's work, and all of it became personal with him. This was a personal vengeance. And then he takes the ornaments that were on the necks of the camels. These would be trophies for his victory (**vs. 21**).

You know another reason why we may not finish well at times in our Christian life is because of bitterness, revenge, rather than God's honor. If you live long enough, you're gonna be hurt and humiliated by other people. You're gonna have other people do bad things against you while you're serving the Lord, while you're trying to do the Lord's will. And if you allow yourself to be eaten up with vengeance and bitterness, I promise you, you're not gonna end well. Bitterness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.

III. He was deceived by Prosperity – vs. 22-27

They want Gideon now to be their king. He answers correctly. And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you. The Lord shall rule over you. That all sounded good. That's exactly the right answer. God is the one who is your king. But then there's Gideon's actions. And even though his words were right, his actions didn't back up his words. Because what's the first thing that he does right after that, on the heels of that? Look at **verse 24**.

Even though Gideon verbally rejected being the king, he behaves in a manner that is very kingly. He keeps all the symbols of royalty. that speaks about there in verse number 25. He keeps the amulets worn by the camels, the purple robes worn by the Midnight Kings, the neck bands worn by their camels. All these are symbols of royalty. He keeps all of this for himself. And then also he does something that's really, really bizarre. You have to say, he centralizes worship in his own city. Look down at **verse number 27**.

He sets up a shrine there in his own town. Where was the place to worship God? It was at the tabernacle in Shiloh. Why is he doing this? Why is he setting up another place of worship? He centralizes worship in his own city. He places this religious object there as if to say God's giving me revelation through this ephod here. And eventually what happens is the children of Israel begin to worship this thing and they commit idolatry with this golden ephod that he sets up there in the city.

And so basically he assumes priestly function. I mean Gideon is not from the priestly tribe of Levi. He's from the tribe of Manasseh. But by doing this, he blurs the boundaries between being a judge, a king, and a priest. He's acting like all of them. He's the judge of Israel, he's the king now, and he's also the priest.

IV. He was diminished by Compromise – vs. 28

And Gideon had three score and ten sons. That was the ideal number for a king to have. Seventy sons? And it says that his body had begotten for he had many wives. That's another thing that a king would do, multiply wives to themselves. Remember **Deuteronomy 17**, God commanded in

the future when you have kings, they should not multiply wives to himself. That was all part of the ancient Near Eastern culture. He multiplies wives.

He has many wives and in **verse 31,** his concubine that was in Shechem, she also bare him a son, whose name he called Abimelech. So Gideon has another son, and guess what he names his son? Abimelech. You know what Abimelech means in Hebrew? *My father is king*. I mean, this guy's on a real ego trip here.

He dwelt in his own house, it says in **verse 29**, which again is the idea of having a throne, a palace, a place to rule. He had many wives, verse 30. He had 70 sons. He had a concubine, **verse 31**. He names him Abimelech, and he dies a good old age. That is kind of a dynastic expression that they used about kings. So all of this, the writer's kind of saying, well, even though he denied being a king verbally, he lived as if he were a king all of that time in his life. And we see also the downfall, however, of Israel. Look at **verse number 33**. So right after Gideon dies, the Israelites play the harlot, spiritual harlot, we could say, and they committed themselves specifically to, and it says Baalim, that's many Baals. They worship many false gods.

Basically Gideon did not finish well. He left behind confusion, he left behind compromise, he left behind corruption. The man who once destroyed idols left idols standing in his own household.

TEXT: Judges 8:22-35

TITLE: THE SNARE OF HIERARCHICAL HUMAN LEADERSHIP = THE KING COMPLEX

BIG IDEA:
GOD'S PLAN FOR GOVERNANCE SHOULD NOT BE EMBRACED IN THEORY ONLY

INTRODUCTION:

Gideon had been anointed by the Spirit of God to deliver Israel from the Midianites. He is flush with success, having just seen the Lord use his tiny band of 300 soldiers defeat the vast enemy troops. He has just cleaned his sword of the blood of the two Midianite kings he captured and then executed. Now he faces the supreme test. How will he respond to the tendency of the depraved human heart to reject God's plan for governance and institute a hierarchical human system where he gets to enjoy the perks of honor and reward? This is a twofold problem: people crave a dominant, charismatic, outwardly successful personality to follow – call it the King Complex; and leaders love the attention and power and perks associated with being in charge.

The situation in Gideon's day was desperate. We have seen the degenerative cycles reflective of the vacuum of ongoing effective leadership.
Judges 21:25 "*In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*" They had a king = Almighty God; they were not submitting to His kingship

But each time God graciously raised up a human savior to temporarily relieve their misery and serve as a type of the Messiah to come, the people failed to learn the lesson that God is alive and active and desiring to reign over them as their theocratic ruler. "*We want a king like the other nations*" was the cry of the people.

In the NT church, the situation is no different. The depraved human heart still falls into the snare of hierarchical human leadership. We naturally reject the divine plan and substitute our own expedient human wisdom – thinking that we are helping God solve the crisis we see in terms of the need for effective church leadership. Jesus warned of this tendency and admonished His foundational band of key leaders to embrace the uniqueness of **God's servant model** over the hierarchical Gentile model:
Matt. 20:25-28 "*But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'*"
Mark 10:42-45

Despite such clear instruction, pastors continue to elevate themselves into the position of head of their local church and usurp the unique role reserved for the true Senior Pastor, the divinely ordained Head of the church, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus Christ. They do this with the best of intentions and with a sincere desire to see the church succeed. They do this despite embracing God's plan for governance in theory and teaching the NT model of plurality

of elder leadership. They do this because this is what the people really want. They do this because they like the perks of honor and reward associated with such unbalanced responsibility. They feel that the church will be better off if they can control the situation.

GOD'S PLAN FOR GOVERNANCE SHOULD NOT BE EMBRACED IN THEORY ONLY

How can you teach on this topic again, you might groan? That is the beauty of textually based, expositional preaching. God has placed this topic in chapters 8 and 9 at the heart of the message He wants to teach us in the book of Judges. I have invested my life in trying to implement this priority truth for the NT age – if I were basing my ministry on principles of expediency I would have rejected this truth a long time ago. I wake up from dreams at times where I find myself arguing these points of practical implementation … But here we go again. . .

Let's remember some
OT BIBLICAL BACKGROUND:

Deut. 17:8-20 *"If any case is too difficult for you to decide, between one kind of homicide or another, between one kind of lawsuit or another, and between one kind of assault or another, being cases of dispute in your courts, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God chooses. 9 "So you shall come to the Levitical priest or the judge who is in office in those days, and you shall inquire of them, and they will declare to you the verdict in the case. 10 "And you shall do according to the terms of the verdict which they declare to you from that place which the LORD chooses; and you shall be careful to observe according to all that they teach you. 11 "According to the terms of the law which they teach you, and according to the verdict which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside from the word which they declare to you, to the right or the left. 12 "And the man who acts presumptuously by not listening to the priest who stands there to serve the LORD your God, nor to the judge, that man shall die; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel. 13 "Then all the people will hear and be afraid, and will not act presumptuously again. 14 "When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, '**I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,**' 15 you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman. 16 "Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never again return that way.' 17 "Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself. 18 "Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. 19 "And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, 20 that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left; in order that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.*

1 Sam. 8:1-22 *And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel. 2 Now the name of his first-born was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judging in Beersheba. 3 His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after*

dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice. 4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; 5 and they said to him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. ***Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.****" 6 But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD. 7 And the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you,* ***but they have rejected Me from being king over them****. 8 "Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day-- in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods-- so they are doing to you also. 9 "Now then, listen to their voice; however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the procedure of the king who will reign over them." 10 So Samuel spoke all the words of the LORD to the people who had asked of him a king. 11 And he said, "This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and place them for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots. 12 "And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and of fifties, and some to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. 13 "He will also take your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 "And he will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves, and give them to his servants. 15 "And he will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards, and give to his officers and to his servants. 16 "He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys, and use them for his work. 17 "He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants. 18 "Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day." 19 Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said,* ***"No, but there shall be a king over us, 20 that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles****." 21 Now after Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the LORD's hearing. 22 And the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to their voice, and appoint them a king." So Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Go every man to his city."*

Let's work our way through the text in Judges 8:

I. (:22-23) THEORETICAL PROFESSION OF GOD'S PLAN FOR GOVERNANCE

A. (:22) Man Desires a Single, Preeminent, Visible Ruler – Advocating for the Human Kingship Model – like the Gentile World

> *"Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, 'Rule over us, both you and your son, also your son's son, for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian.'"*

Insecurity of men – need someone impressive to take the point for them; Look at who Satan is using to lay the groundwork for this temptation – it is the men of Israel – the failure of male leadership has been a chronic problem for the people of God; they just don't want all the responsibility that God has laid out for them; they don't want it in the home; they don't want it in the church of God; can we enlist someone to carry a disproportionate part of this burden? So they approach Gideon with this demand

Dynastic succession – passed down within the family

Is. 10:15 – "*Is the axe to boast itself over the one who chops with it? Is the saw to exalt itself over the one who wields it? That would be like a club wielding those who life it, or like a rod lifting him who is not wood.*"

Placing the preeminence in the visible instrument used by God rather than placing it in the invisible God Himself -- God is the one who had delivered them – Gideon should have aggressively corrected their faulty thinking here

Inrig: One of the oldest tendencies of our sinful hearts is to exalt men to the place that belongs only to God. In the history of the church, there has been a pernicious tendency to elevate men into the position that belongs only to the Lord Jesus. Men are given special titles, special powers, and special clothing and are set apart from ordinary Christians. One of the most evident patterns in the evangelical church today is for men who are pastors to take more and more power.

James Jordan: we find explicitly stated the principle that the savior is the lord. Those who separate Christ as Savior from Christ as Lord are completely out of line from Scripture at this point. Gideon's reply is sound: The Lord saved you, so the Lord must be your king.

B. (:23) God Has Ordained a Single, Preeminent, Invisible Ruler – Rejecting the Human Kingship Model --

> "*But Gideon said to them, 'I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you.'*"

- OT – a theocracy
- NT – Christ as Head of the Church

You cannot get a clearer doctrinal statement of clarity and conviction then this short response from the lips of Gideon; it would have helped if he would have clarified: Look, your request doesn't even make sense; don't you realize the deliverance you experienced was not of my doing?

Psalm 10:16 "*The Lord is king forever*"

James Jordan: Those who separate Christ as Savior from Christ as lord are completely out of line from Scripture at this point. Gideon's reply is sound: The Lord saved you, so the Lord must be your King.

Inrig: That was the high point of Gideon's life. He had not only resisted a very strong temptation, but he had stood for a great biblical truth, the truth of the kingship of God in Israel. If only the story ended there! But it does not, and the irony is that Gideon's decline began in the very moment of his affirmation of God's absolute kingship. Unfortunately, his actions were not consistent with his words.

Transition: Problem: What is taught in **theory** is often not embraced in **practice** --
Example of MacArthur's key work: <u>Answering the Key Questions About Elders</u>
"Does government by elders eliminate the role of a special leader?
Richard Swartley: Senior pastors, even those committed to church governance with elders, have curious ways of justifying their own privileged positions. The lure of being in charge and of having a title seems to prove an irresistible temptation for most church leaders. Some even say, "Yes, I believe in team leadership: I am the coach, and all the others are the players." Equality of elders does not exist in that formulation! Even Gene Getz and John MacArthur differentiate themselves from the other elders. This is despite the fact that both have written excellent treatments on elders, and are very effective in presenting the biblical argument for plurality and

equality of elders. Sadly, both men engage in special pleading for senior pastor positions, positions they hold in their own churches. Their arguments for these special positions are unsupported by all they have presented and previously concluded on the biblical mandate on elder equality. In fact, their assertions in their concluding chapters are contradictory to, and destructive of, their previous theses on elders' leadership! (To his credit, in recent years MacArthur has nuanced his position on the senior pastor title.)

Transition: Look at the close juxtaposition in this short text between Gideon's doctrinal orthodoxy and his practical compromises:

II. (:24-31) PRACTICAL COMPROMISES THAT UNDERMINE GOD'S PLAN FOR GOVERNANCE

3 Key Areas of Compromise

A. (:24-27) Realm of Ecclesiastical Authority -- Compromise of Presumptuous Usurping of Authority

> "*Yet Gideon said to them, 'I would request of you, that each of you give me an earring from his spoil.' (For they had gold earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) And they said, 'We will surely give them.' So they spread out a garment, and every one of them threw an earring there from his spoil. And the weight of the gold earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple robes which were on the kings of Midian, and besides the neck bands that were on their camels' necks. And Gideon made it into an ephod, and placed it in his city, Ophrah, and all Israel played the harlot with it there, so that it became a snare to Gideon and his household.*"

Recall that earlier Abraham had rejected the spoils of war: **Genesis 14:21-24**

Block: he requested that each of his men give him a gold earring from their share of the spoils of war. This action is doubly significant. On the one hand, by requesting gifts from each of his men, Gideon demanded a symbolic gesture of submission. Gladly surrendering a share of their loot, they confirmed their status as his vassals. On the other hand, the amount of gold Gideon received takes on the character of a royal treasure. Seventeen hundred shekels of gold amounts to 43 pounds. This is indeed a treasure fit for a king!

Recognized a legitimate problem: Israel lacked a strong high priest; how were they to discern the will of God? God's people need direction!

Must understand the **function of the ephod**:
Inrig: An ephod was simply a garment that resembled a fancy apron, but it had a very special significance. The ephod was part of the clothing of the high priest. On the front was the linen breastplate which had the two stones the high priest used to discover the will of God, the Urim and the Thummin, and in the course of time, the ephod had become the symbol of the office eof the high priest. When the high priest put on the ephod, it was because he wanted to know the will of God.

Constable: there are three possible alternatives [concerning what this ephod was]: that it was a garment after the pattern of the high-priestly ephod but with an unusual degree of gold ornamentation; that it was a replica of the high-priestly garment made of pure gold; or that it was

a free-standing image [cf. 1 Sam. 2:28; 14:3]

Block: Because this object was "*placed*" in Gideon's city and became an object of pagan worship, this meaning seems unlikely here. Gideon created some type of image and draped a garment (ephod) over it with the part standing for the whole. Before he had torn down the altar of Baal; now things have come full circle.

Provided an illegitimate human resolution: Gideon stepped in to be the **visionary** through whom God would communicate His plans and direction for His people; important for the sake of unity to have one man take up that visionary role; worship was to be centralized around the tabernacle in Shiloh – not in Ophrah; and the Levitical priesthood was ordained by God to supervise the worship and wear the ephod; very sincere objectives on the part of Gideon, but outside of God's revealed plan and contrary to God's instructions

Imagine the scene of some poor little biblical prophet who might try to step up and confront Gideon regarding his presumptuous sin:
Prophet: "You know the function of the ephod should be reserved for administration by the high priest."
Gideon: "I agree with that in theory, but we don't seem to have an effective high priest and the people need to know the will of God right now."
Prophet: "You don't want to act presumptuously here."

Gideon: "God has been working through me giving great success. This step will help unify God's people."
The poor unknown prophet would have been squashed!

James Jordan: The parallel between this incident and that of the golden calf must not be missed. As Gideon drifts into a *de facto* though not *de jure* (in fact, though not in law) humanistic kingship, the golden calf type of image worship also creeps into society. . . The ephod at Ophrah came to be regarded as a magical answer box, and people looked to it rather than to the Levites and the Lord for answers. Even Gideon lost sight of the person character of God, and came to regard the ephod with superstitious awe. It corrupted him, his family, and the community. As Gideon lost sight of the personal rule of God the Lord, he lost sight of Who Israel's true King really was, and picked up more and more of the characteristics of an oriental, humanistic king.

S. Lewis Johnson: Why is it that we as human beings are dissatisfied with the things that God has given us? He has given us himself as our guide, as our leader, as our head. We do not need any human guide, any human leader, any human head. We have the greatest head that the church could possibly have. We need his word, to hear his voice as the spirit uses it in our lives. We are to be submissive to the Scriptures. Let them be our final standard of faith and practice. And following them we shall please our head and be fruitful for him.

Aside (:28) Blessing Despite Compromise
[Proves that blessing does not legitimize compromise]

> "*So Midian was subdued before the sons of Israel, and they did not lift up their heads anymore. And the land was undisturbed for forty years in the days of Gideon.*"

Must not forget that for the most part, Gideon was a good man and an exceptional judge as the Spirit worked through him

Last period of peace and rest referenced in the book of Judges

B. (:29) Realm of Indulgent Lifestyle -- Compromise of Regal Living

"*Then Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and lived in his own house.*"

Risen from obscurity to prosperity – but forgetting to exalt the Lord in everything

Block: The statement is superfluously tautological unless the verb "*to live*" means more than "*to reside*." Naturally people reside in their own houses. But if the verb is understood mansively "*to sit* [on a throne]," that is, "*to be king, to reign,*" then the comment is sensible.

C. (:30-31) Realm of Sexual Morality -- Compromise of Fleshly Indulgence

1. (:30) Multiplying Wives with Blessing of Many Sons

"*Now Gideon had seventy sons who were his direct descendants, for he had many wives.*"

Mixed tone here; blessing of many sons; but problem of many wives
Kings had the practice of multiplying wives and thus increasing their power and influence; why should a king restrain his fleshly impulses? Certainly he deserved to grow in prominence and power

Illustration: Passages from book by Richard Swartley: A Wolf in the Pulpit – The Setup for Moral Failure and the Abuse of Power
This same successful, visible, pulpit ministry and elevated leadership position have another downside. The preacher's apparent power leads him to prideful presumptions, with the regrettable result that his inner person is corrupted. Narcissistic and arrogant, he has come to believe he is entitled to special privileges. Worse, he decides he is exempted from the rules that govern others. He has arrived progressively at an unhealthy place. Others around him – especially women – are not safe. . .

Gideon embraced his celebrity status – he liked the prestige and the royal treatment

2. (:31) Fooling Around with Concubine with Curse of Problem Son

"*And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he named him Abimelech.*"

"*Concubine*" – more of a slave status; not elevated to equal status with the wives; created situation of tension

Brensinger: In such marriages, the woman remains with her parents rather than moving in with her husband, who then visits her from time to time. Furthermore, any offspring resulting from their union remain with and belong to the mother's family, not the father's.

Name Abimelech = "*my father is king*" – Gideon has ended up in practice where he professed he would never go in theory – usurping the unique authority of God

Herbert Wolf: probably does not mean that Gideon regarded himself as monarch. In personal names "*my father*" normally refers to God, so Gideon could have been reemphasizing the

assertion of v.23. ???

III. (:32-35) DEGENERATIVE CYCLE RENEWED AND INTENSIFIED

A. (:32-33a) Turning Point is the Death of Gideon

> "*And Gideon the son of Joash died at a ripe old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. Then it came about, as soon as Gideon was dead,*"

Blessing of a long life – faithful but faulty

Herbert Wolf: To die "*at a good old age*" implies a long and full life. Elsewhere in the OT the expression is used only of Abraham (Gen. 15:15; 25:8) and David (1 Chron 29:28).

Blessing of an honored burial
Shows that he is largely regarded by God as a good and effective leader – to some degree he had been holding back the depravity of his countrymen

B. (:33b-34) Total Depravity Displayed in Idolatry and Ingratitude

1. (:33b) Idolatry

> "*that the sons of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-berith their god.*"

Obviously God was not very important to the Israelites in their everyday living; they slipped right back into idolatry; Friendship with the world is the pattern of the church today; a Christian brother at work was lamenting to me that in the church he sees very little evidence of transformed Christian lives – of those who are characterized as followers of Jesus Christ; we look just like the children of this world

2. (:34) Ingratitude

> "*Thus the sons of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side;*"

Rom. 1:21-23 "*For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.*"

Quick remedy for spiritual problems in your life; especially the spiritual blahs –
1 Thess. 5:16-18 "*Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks*"

C. (:35) Traitorous Mentality Reflected Towards Gideon's Family

> "*nor did they show kindness to the household of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon), in accord with all the good that he had done to Israel.*"

CONCLUSION:
Who is reigning as King in your life? Are you living from the perspective of doing what is right in your own eyes? Do you desire to live like the Gentiles live?

In The New Reformation, Greg Ogden observes: "A chief reason why the dependency model of ministry is still dominant is that many pastors' sense of worth and value is derived from being a benevolent lord reigning over the little fiefdom . . . Underlying the dependency model of ministry is a distorted and unhealthy means of seeking value. Pastors and people are co-conspirators denying the addiction and fostering the sickness." . . .

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What are you doing to encourage and support the genuine practice of plurality of church leadership in your local setting?

2) How should leaders respond to the praise and appreciation expressed by those under their ministry?

3) What are you doing to combat the temptation toward idolatry and ingratitude in your own life?

4) Who is really ruling over your life and your church?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Douglas Goins: {in foreword to book by Swartley] The all too common moral failure of men at the top of hierarchical church structures is disheartening to those who follow them, and injurious to the cause of Christ. In contrast to a shared New Testament leadership life of community, transparency, equality, and accountability, too many pastors find themselves isolated, alone at the top, unaccountable, a law unto themselves, set up for spiritual failure.

Swartley: In almost all cases since the third century, from the smallest church to the largest, one man has been in charge: in small churches it is the solo pastor; in large churches it is the person called the "senior pastor." The focus on one man may start innocently in a new fellowship when a church planter leads a new ministry, or when a small group starts a church with the preaching falling to one man. He alone becomes known as the pastor. Traditionally, as the body grows in size, and as more men and women are added to the staff, the original leader rises in a hierarchical structure, with himself as senior pastor. Such a superior leadership position can have very adverse consequences: the man may have put himself on the path to moral failure. . .

Keil & Delitzsch: The germs of Gideon's error, which became a snare to him and to his house, lie unquestionably deeper than this, namely, in the fact that the high-priesthood had probably lost its worth in the eyes of the people on account of the worthlessness of its representatives, so that they no longer regarded the high priest as the sole or principal medium of divine revelation; and

therefore Gideon, to whom the Lord had manifested himself directly, as He had not to any judge or leader of the people since the time of Joshua, might suppose that he was not acting in violation of the law, when he had an ephod made, and thus provided himself with a substratum or vehicle for inquiring the will of the Lord. His sin therefore consisted chiefly in his invading the prerogative of the Aaronic priesthood, drawing away the people from the one legitimate sanctuary, and thereby not only undermining the theocratic unity of Israel, but also giving an impetus to the relapse of the nation into the worship of Baal after his death. This sin became a snare to him and to his house.

David Silversides: **The Lord Does Reign**
There were faults in Gideon that affected the next generation. He declined to be king and yet he became like a king in some ways. Encouraged idolatry and idea of a monarchy after his death. Abimelech seizes power; first over his immediate family circle; pushes to be king in Israel; lot of internal strife where polygamy is practiced

Glenn Tomlinson: **The King Complex** – Loving a Harlot
You see something of the love of God for His wayward people; the bible is like a mirror is showing us what we are really like; coming off a grand deliverance that was all of God; Defiant theme of Invictus poem; the temptation to replace God as king as appealed to human nature from the very beginning; **Gen. 3:5-6** "*you will be like God*"; opposite of inferiority complex = lack self confidence; king complex is our natural bent = we want to be in control of our lives; attribute the blessings we have received from Jesus to someone else; robbing God of His rightful place;

1. See how the people evidence a King Complex
You would have expected the people to praise God in v. 22; instead they ascribe deliverance to Gideon; they exalted the instrument over the wielder of that instrument; they exalted instruments that had not even been used; honor was appropriate for a leader used by God; but this was over the top; **Is. 10:15**; when we see blessing we are only the instruments; maybe one of Gideon's sons participated in the battle – but certainly had no grandsons at this point; creating dynastic succession; the cult of personality and celebrity; removing God and putting someone else on the pedestal -- **1 Cor. 1:10-13**; read many Christian authors so you don't just idolize one

2. See how the leaders evidence a King Complex
How does Gideon respond to all that adulation and praise and honor? He gives a godly response verbally; "Thank you but may the Lord be praised … I am just the instrument;" We tend to mouth humility but practice pride; lack the Spirit's wisdom; began to take the glory back for himself; the crescent ornamentation of the Midianite kings were taken by Gideon

- See the problem in the request that Gideon made
- See the problem in the name that Gideon gave to his son Abimelech

TEXT: Judges 9:1-21

TITLE: LORDING IT OVER THE SHEEP—THE ABIMELECH/DIOTREPHES MODEL OF LEADERSHIP

BIG IDEA:
ONE MAN RULE THAT LORDS IT OVER THE SHEEP USURPS GOD'S PREEMINENT ROLE AND RESULTS IN A REIGN OF FUTILITY THAT CULMINATES IN DESTRUCTION

INTRODUCTION:

If most Christians were asked to identify the first king of Israel, I am sure that the answer would be Saul. Anointed by Samuel at the direction of the Lord, he proved to be a disappointing king in contrast to David who would come after him. But generations before in the book of Judges we have this sad tale of Abimelech, a self-made king. He stands for everything that is wrong with ambitious, one man rule. His counterpart in the NT church paradigm would be Diotrephes.

You remember John's rant against his ruthless behavior in taking over the eldership and lording it over the flock: (**vv.9-10**)
"*I wrote something to the church, but Diotrephes, who* ***loves to be first among them****, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church*." Abimelech and Diotrephes – the antithesis of the servant model of leadership advocated by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Last week's message laid the foundation for Abimelech's grasping at the throne:

OT Principle: The Invisible God wants to rule over His chosen people as a theocracy rather than appointing a visible king who will end up lording it over the people, exacting burdensome taxes, making their life miserable rather than serving under the righteous rule of God

NT Application: The Invisible Christ wants His chosen church to submit to His Headship as the Chief Shepherd with authority at the local level delegated to a plural group of godly undershepherds who function in accordance with their differing spiritual gifts rather than elevating someone to an unbiblical hierarchical position who might lord it over the flock or deflect the dependence and preeminence away from Christ. Eventually the kingship model will work – but only when the Suffering Servant, the Messiah, returns to reign in justice and righteousness.

Last week we saw the people try to make **Gideon** the first king. But he rejected their offer in theory while compromising in his behavior and in some key respects acting like a king. Now Gideon has departed from the scene. He leaves behind seventy sons from his many wives (a king type lifestyle) and Abimelech, the son of his concubine in Shechem.

James Jordan: The true godly system is one God, but many diversified human rulers. The pagan system is one statist rule, but as many idols and gods as you wish.

ONE MAN RULE THAT LORDS IT OVER THE SHEEP USURPS GOD'S PREEMINENT ROLE AND RESULTS IN A REIGN OF FUTILITY THAT CULMINATES IN DESTRUCTION

I. (9:1-6) CORONATION OF A WORTHLESS, DESTRUCTIVE KING – PREEMINENCE PURSUED FROM SELFISH AMBITION –

WRONGLY ESTABLISHING ONE MAN RULE USURPS GOD'S RIGHTFUL POSITION OF PREEMINENCE

A. (:1) Initiative for One Man Rule is Selfish Ambition

"*And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem to his mother's relatives, and spoke to them and to the whole clan of the household of his mother's father, saying,*"

Shechem = important from both a religious and economic standpoint; site where Joshua had recited the blessings and cursings of the law (**Josh. 8:30-35**); strategically located at the crossroads of important highways: east to west – from the coastal highway to the Jordan River; north to south along the central ridge from Jerusalem in the south to the northern accesses to the Jezreel Valley-- F. Duane Lindsey

Inrig: Near the city, Joshua had led the people to commit themselves to God's covenant, as they recited the blessings and cursings from Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim. But when the people refused to obey God and drive out the Canaanites, Shechem became a mixed city. Canaanites and Israelites lived side by side, and together they worshiped Baal-berith, in the house of Baal. The city was saturated with Baalism . . .

Abimelech was raised to feel like an outsider – never on an equal footing with Gideon's other sons; always with the stigma of his mother being just a concubine rather than a wife with full privileges and respect. Given is personality and desire to have the preeminence, he was always looking for an opportunity to go to the head of the class. He ended up presenting his case for leadership to his mother's relatives – a relatively easy sell! He had no concern for God's program for leadership or for discerning and implementing God's will. He was driven by selfish ambition.

B. (:2a) Rationale for One Man Rule is Human Wisdom / Expediency

"*Speak, now, in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem, 'Which is better for you, that seventy men, all the sons of Jerubbaal, rule over you, or that one man rule over you?*'"

"*Which is better for you*?" What about God's plan?? Think about how often we disappoint God because we make decisions independently of seeking His will. We decide on the basis of what we think is the best course for us.

God calls upon us to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. We must come to the Word of God and submit to His Spirit to determine His will.

Certainly Human wisdom will make sense to us. Arguments from expediency (what works) seem to be practical and productive. But God's thoughts and ways are not our thoughts and

ways. Here Gideon offers subjugation to one ruler – and a close relative at that – to being ruled by many – and those with no special ties to Shechem.

C. (:2b-3) Support for One Man Rule is Blind Loyalty

"'*Also, remember that I am your bone and your flesh.'" And his mother's relatives spoke all these words on his behalf in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem; and they were inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, 'He is our relative.'*"

What are his **qualifications for leadership**?? Family loyalty
Interesting that one of the main charges against Abimelech is going to be his lack of loyalty towards the household of his famous father. Yet he uses family loyalty as his rallying cry to gain a following in Shechem.

D. (:4-5a) Implementation of One Man Rule is Ruthless

"*And they gave him seventy pieces of silver from the house of Baal-berith with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows, and they followed him. Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah, and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one stone.*

Abimelech's campaign was financed out of the treasury of Baal money – interesting match that the seventy pieces of silver correspond to the number of sons that will be slain. This was the bounty money that would be used to entice the wicked mercenaries to carry out his mission of extermination.

Preceptaustin.org:
"Worthless" literally means empty or vain and indicates something that has nothing in it. Here it is used figuratively to describe the moral character of these men as "empty", as are all who are still in Adam. The Septuagint translates "worthless" with the Greek word "*kenos*" which conveys the idea that these men were without usefulness or success (our modern day slang term might be "losers"). They were men in whom there was nothing of truth, who could not be depended upon, whose deeds did not correspond to their words, who were boasters and imposters. These hired scoundrels were willing to do anything for silver, even murder.

"*Reckless*" (pahaz) means to be undisciplined, wild, insolent. "Reckless" and its derivatives are used elsewhere of turbulent water (Gen. 49:4) and prophets who abused their office (Jer. 23:32; Zeph. 3:4) **No fear of God**

These **worthless** and **reckless** fellows were not holding down any productive jobs in the community and were available for this campaign – an interesting point in light of the upcoming parable.

Gideon had torn down the altar to Baal; here we see human sacrifices to Baal; the sons were lined up and had to watch in horror as one by one they were dragged to the stone and decapitated. What a bloody mess – this was a horror show. Yet the rest of Israel stood by and did not respond or try to right this wrong.

E. (:5b) Opposition to One Man Rule is Precarious

"*But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, for he hid himself.*"

What could one young man do without any support against such a rabid mob of blood-thirsty thugs? Providence of God at work to preserve Jotham alive.

Lonely existence to stand in opposition to Satan's program for world dominion

F. (:6) Acceptance of One Man Rule is Widespread

"*And all the men of Shechem and all Beth-millo assembled together, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar which was in Shechem.*"

Charles Pfeiffer: It was appropriate that Abimelech be proclaimed king at a spot with religious associations. The coronation took place *by the terebinth of the pillar*. Jacob had buried the idols which his family had gathered under a tree at Shechem (Gen 35:4), and there Joshua had set up a monument as a witness to the covenant between God and Israel (**Josh 24:26**).

II. (9:7-15) CARICATURE OF A WORTHLESS, DESTRUCTIVE KING – PARABLE OF THE BRAMBLE KING --

WAVING IT OVER EVERYBODY ELSE IS ULTIMATELY A FUTILE ROLE THAT NEGATES YOUR OWN GIFTEDNESS AND STIFLES THE GIFTEDNESS OF OTHERS

A. (:7) Parable Introduced in a Bold Setting – Calling the Men of Shechem to Account

"*Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and called out. Thus he said to them, 'Listen to me, O men of Shechem, that God may listen to you.*'"

Wiersbe: Perhaps the coronation celebrations were still in progress when Jotham interrupted with his parable from Mount Gerizim, which was adjacent to Shechem at the oak of Moreh.

The people's only hope is to respond to this message of warning from Jotham and seek God's mercy and forgiveness for their reprehensible actions. They have acted in a manner that is godless and reckless and now they are going to be called to give an account.

This is the first parable recorded in Scripture – a very powerful medium for communicating a simple message.

B. (:8A) Parable Illustrates the Incongruity of the Human Initiative in Anointing a King -- What Happens When the Inmates Try to Run the Asylum

"*Once the trees went forth to anoint a king over them*"

Back to the problem of the creation trying to wrest control away from its Creator

The trees had direct accountability to their Creator … but now they want a visible ruler.

C. (:8B-13) Parable Interrogates Various Candidates for One Man Rule -- Three Examples of Leaders Who Reject the Opportunity to Lord it Over Others

not willing to forsake productivity for the allure of preeminence but the reality of futility

Matthew Henry: When they had it in their thoughts to choose a king, they did not offer the government to the stately cedar, or the lofty pine, which are only for show and shade, and not otherwise useful till they are cut down, but to the fruit-trees, the vine, and the olive. Those that bear fruit for the public good, are justly respected and honoured by all that are wise, more than they that affect to make a figure.

1. The Case of the Olive Tree

"*and they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us!' But the olive tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my fatness with which God and men are honored, and go to wave over the trees*?'"

Adam Clarke: The olive was the most useful of all the trees in the field or forest, as the bramble was the meanest and the most worthless.

John Gill: by "fatness" oil is meant, pressed out of the fruit of the olive tree, and which was much made use of both in the burning of the lamps in the tabernacle, and in many sacrifices, as the meat offerings and others, whereby God was honoured; and it was also made use of in the investiture of the greatest personages with the highest offices among men, as kings, priests, and prophets, as well as eaten with pleasure and delight by all sorts of men, and even by the greatest, and so men are honoured by it

Block: Olive oil was the most valuable agricultural product in the ancient world, being used every day as cooking oil, medicine, laxative, lubricant, leather softener, fuel in lamps, an ingredient in perfumes, and as in sacred rituals as a sacrificial offering and in anointing ceremonies. In a context involving an invitation to kingship, the olive appropriately cites its ceremonial value. The olive would rather honor others than be narcissistically anointed with its own oil.

"*wave over*" – look at how the function of one man rule is mocked here – What are **the legitimate functions of leadership?**

- To protect the godly and punish the wicked
- To stimulate productivity
- To lead and guide
- To nurture and develop

Instead leadership is presented here as an empty ritual of waving it over others – making a show while enjoying the perks of being number one

2. The Case of the Fig Tree

"*Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come reign over us!' But the fig tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to wave over the trees*?'"

Adam Clarke: The fruit of the fig tree is the sweetest or most luscious of all fruits. A full-ripe fig, in its own climate, has an indescribable sweetness; so much so that it is almost impossible to eat it, till a considerable time after it is gathered from the trees, and has gone through an artificial preparation.

3. The Case of the Fruitful Vine

"*Then the trees said to the vine, 'You come, reign over us!' But the vine said to*

them, 'Shall I leave my new wine, which cheers God and men, and go to wave over the trees?'"

You probably have heard of **The Peter Principle** in the business realm:

The Peter Principle is the principle that "**In a Hierarchy Every Employee Tends to Rise to His Level of Incompetence.**" While formulated by Dr. Laurence J. Peter and Raymond Hull in their 1968 book The Peter Principle, a humorous treatise which also introduced the "salutary science of Hierarchiology", "inadvertently founded" by Peter, the principle has real validity. It holds that in a hierarchy, members are promoted so long as they work competently. Sooner or later they are promoted to a position at which they are no longer competent (their "level of incompetence"), and there they remain. Peter's Corollary states that "in time, every post tends to be occupied by an employee who is incompetent to carry out his duties" and adds that "work is accomplished by those employees who have not yet reached their level of incompetence". (**Wikipedia**)

I don't want to necessarily take my most productive sales rep and promote him to the position of inside sales manager. Likewise I don't want to take my best technician and make him the service manager. Requires a different skill set. Just because you were successful in one realm doesn't necessarily equip you to take the next step up the ladder.

D. (:14-15) Parable Indicts the Self Promotion of the Worthless Bramble

"*Finally all the trees said to the bramble, 'You come, reign over us!' The bramble said to the trees, 'If in truth you are anointing me as king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, may fire come out from the bramble and consume the cedars of Lebanon*.'"

I'm happy to do it (since I am not all that productive anyway); but you must then be loyal to me.

Adam Clarke: The bramble or thorn, which, however useful as a hedge, is dangerous to come near; and is here the emblem of an impious, cruel, and oppressive king.

John Gill: this respects Abimelech, and describes him as a mean person, the son of a concubine, as having no goodness in him, not any good qualifications to recommend him to government, but all the reverse, cruel, tyrannical, and oppressive; and this exposes the folly of the Shechemites, and their eagerness to have a king at any rate, though ever so mean and despicable, useless and pernicious.

promising protection to them as his subjects, requiring their confidence in him, and boasting of the good they should receive from him, as is common with wicked princes at their first entering on their office; but, alas! what shadow or protection can there be in a bramble? if a man attempts: to put himself under it for shelter, he will find it will be of no use to him, but harmful, since, the nearer and closer he comes to it, the more he will be scratched and torn by it: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon;

signifying, that if they did not heartily submit to his government, and put confidence in him, and prove faithful to him, they should smart for it, and feel his wrath and vengeance, even the greatest men among them, comparable to the cedars of Lebanon; for thorns and brambles

catching fire, as they easily do, or fire being put to them, as weak as they are, and placed under the tallest and strongest cedars, will soon fetch them down to the ground

Wiersbe: Abimelech considered himself to be a stately tree of great value, but Jotham said he was nothing but a useless weed. What a blow to the new king's pride! When they chose Abimelech as their king, the men of Shechem didn't get useful olive oil, tasty figs, or cheery wine; they got only thorns – fuel for fire.

III. (9:16-21) CURSE FROM JOTHAM DIRECTED TOWARDS A WORTHLESS, DESTRUCTIVE KING AND THE MEN OF SHECHEM – PRIORITY ON TRUTH AND INTEGRITY

WARNING THE WICKED OF THEIR IMPENDING DESTRUCTION

Josh. 24:14 Serve God in truth and integrity –

A. (:16-19) Actions Based on a Life of Truth and Integrity Lead to Rejoicing

"*Now therefore, if you have dealt in truth and integrity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have dealt with him as he deserved-- for my father fought for you and risked his life and delivered you from the hand of Midian; but you have risen against my father's house today and have killed his sons, seventy men, on one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your relative-- if then you have dealt in truth and integrity with Jerubbaal and his house this day, rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you.*"

People tend to get leaders they deserve

You can never go wrong following a course of truth and integrity; you must learn what it means to live a life of conviction – you can't just follow the crowd as the men of Shechem did – you will end up without joy and on the path to destruction

B. (:20-21) Actions Based on a Life of Deception and Disloyalty Lead to Destruction

"*But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and consume the men of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from Beth-millo, and consume Abimelech. Then Jotham escaped and fled, and went to Beer and remained there because of Abimelech his brother.*"

CONCLUSION:

T. S. Eliot: "most of the troubles in the world are caused by people wanting to be important."

ONE MAN RULE THAT LORDS IT OVER THE SHEEP USURPS GOD'S PREEMINENT ROLE AND RESULTS IN A REIGN OF FUTILITY THAT CULMINATES IN DESTRUCTION

Adam Clarke: The condensed moral of the whole fable is this: Weak, worthless, and wicked men, will ever be foremost to thrust themselves into power; and, in the end, to bring ruin upon themselves, and on the unhappy people over whom they preside.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Why were the Israelites so quick to dismiss the model of the theocracy and seek to embrace the kingship model of the surrounding nations?

2) What qualifications for leadership should we insist upon in the church of Jesus Christ?

3) How should our giftedness protect us against seeking some other exalted status?

4) How valuable is the shade of a bramble bush to a tall cedar tree? How ludicrous is the desire of men to encourage someone to lord it over them?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Constable: Abimelech that predicted the effect of his rule. Jotham (lit. Yahweh is perfect, honest) stood on the same mountain where six of Israel's tribes had declared the blessings of abiding by the law of Yahweh and denounced the Shechemites for their foolish and wicked actions. The contrast between the Israelites' commitments in Joshua 8 and 24 and this passage must be one reason the writer included Abimelech's story in Judges.

Jotham's fable was a parable with a moral (cf. 2 Sam. 12:1-4; 2 Kings 14:9-10). It is the first parable in the Bible. The olive and fig trees and the grape vine represented productive human beings, oil, figs, and wine being among the most important products of Canaan. Brambles bore no fruit and offered no shelter or protection. They only injured those who got too close to them. Moreover they spontaneously burst into flames in hot weather and sometimes caused much damage consequently (v. 15). Obviously the bramble represented Abimelech, the trees and vine more noble individuals, and the cedars of Lebanon the upright leaders of Shechem.

Inrig: Verse 15 is filled with sarcasm. Imagine a bramble king! It was the most worthless tree imaginable, but it had delusions of grandeur. It willingly accepted the offer and loudly called the other trees to take refuge in its shade. What shade can a bramble bush offer a cedar of Lebanon?

Jotham's point is obvious. When they crowned Abimelech, they were choosing an absolutely worthless man. He could not give them the protection they wanted. Besides, he was dangerous, and he would destroy them.

F. Duane Lindsey: The major point of Jotham's parable was that only worthless people seek to lord it over others, for worthy individuals are too busy in useful tasks to seek such places of authority.

Gary Inrig: We need to remind ourselves at this point of the basic lesson of Judges 9. If God is not King, a usurper will arise in His place. If God had been kept in His place as King, Abimelech would never have been successful. But when there is a spiritual vacuum, Satan will rush in to fill it

Preacher's Commentary Series: Church history has provided us with examples of what can happen when anyone—even well-motivated and apparently godly men—moves beyond personal accountability to anyone else. None of us is immune from the corrupting influence of power and position. We can all too easily lose our perspective on ourselves, and with it our moral and spiritual balance. As pastors, we need faithful friends who will pastor us and bring us down to earth from some of our wilder flights of fancy. It is not for nothing that the pulpit is sometimes caricatured as "six feet above contradiction," or "cowards' castle." In a chapter full of irony, we must be careful to see that we do not succumb to the supreme idolatry of worshiping at the shrine of our own infallibility, or power, or pride. The more "successful" a ministry is perceived to be, the greater will be the danger that we start to believe our own press releases! Many a pastor has allowed himself to be "made king" in his little corner of God's world-wide field, by an enthusiastic band of supporters, and those people have lived to rue the day.
(Jackman, D., & Ogilvie, L. J. The Preacher's Commentary Series: Judges, Ruth. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson)

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **The Bramble King: When Ambition Replaces Anointing**
Introduction: This is really overall a message about the dangers, the perils of selfish ambition. William Penn once said that if we're not willing to be ruled by God, we will be ruled by tyrants. And in this period of the judges, Israel continually refuses to be governed by God.

Abimelech is not really a judge that is appointed by God. So far, when we look through the book of Judges, we see these are men and women, one woman, Deborah, that God raises up, to be judges for Israel, but we're going to see here Abimelech is not really appointed by God.

He did not deliver the nation from outside invaders, as we see. He was a self-appointed opportunist who had an inordinate lust for power and for authority. And so this narrative serves really several purposes. And one of them is it **shows the consequences of Gideon's actions** in chapter eight. Everything that Gideon did were the seeds that he laid that later blossomed into what we see here in chapter nine. All the atrocities that Abimelech is gonna commit here in chapter nine is because Gideon made that possible in chapter eight. Sometimes the consequences for our action we might not see in our lifetime. it may happen generations later.

It also shows the **consequences for Israel's choice**. Since Israel did not want God to be their king, or for God to reign over them, then it shows that God allows tyrants to do so. God says, you don't want me to reign over you, then I'll let you be ruled by tyrants. And that's what this illustrates here. It also **underscores the need for Israel to wait for God's appointed king**, just as it is taught in Deuteronomy chapter 17, that God will raise up a man after his own heart to be his king. It also underscores the notion that **Israel's problem is not external**, the problem is internal. The problem with Israel is not the enemies on the outside, it's the problem of sin on the inside.

And this also shows that **the problem of sin in the nation wasn't located to one region**, it wasn't located to the north, That's where we see the judges of Deborah and Gideon. It wasn't

limited to the south. That's where we see the judgeship of Ehud and Aphneel. It wasn't just in the east, that's where Jephthah will judge, or in the west, that's where Samson will rise up.

But this is right here in the central part of Israel. In other words, the problem of sin in Israel is not just in one region, it's nationwide. It's all over. And so it's obvious that the writer wanted Israel to learn some valuable lessons because he's gonna spend a lot of time emphasizing this because this is the longest chapter in the whole book of Judges.

And really this drama unfolds in **three acts**.

I. Acts one is the **treacherous politics of Abimelech**. This is where Abimelech takes center stage in the first part of the chapter.
II. And then we see act two, the **truthful parable of Jotham**. This is where Jotham will take center stage.
III. And then the third part of it is, Act 3, is the **triumphant providence of God**. This is where God will take center stage. So let's go through this drama in three acts.

I. The Treacherous Politics of Abimelech – vs. 1-6

When I look at Abimelech in this narrative, I see the story of a man who was perhaps one of the first politicians. He had ambition, and he wanted position, he wanted authority.

A. He establishes his campaign headquarters – **vs. 1**
Shechem is an important historical spot.

B. His constituents – **vs. 1**
First of all, he will gather together supporters of his relatives on his mother's side, and he enlists them to secure the support of the men of Shechem.

C. Conspiracy = whispering campaign
He begins this whispering campaign against the 70 sons of Gideon, and it works (**vs. 3**).

D. His Contributors – **vs. 4**
He finds contributors, he gets people who are Baal worshipers, and he gets them to take money out of the house of Baal and to contribute to his campaign.

E. His Cabinet – **vs. 4**
Abimelech hired vain and light persons which followed him. These were empty, reckless men. He hires them to execute his plan in order to have him reign over all of Israel. And that's how ambition operates, through persuasion, through manipulation, and through the use of corrupt resources. Ambition often manipulates people for personal gain, using charm, using flattery, and all that sort of thing.

F. His Campaign – **vs. 5**
All of the sons of Gideon (except one who got away) are slaughtered on this one stone (maybe an altar).

G. His Coronation – **vs. 6**
Selfish ambition is never content with cooperation. It breeds rivalry, division, and destruction. And this is what happens here. History's full of leaders whose ambition leaves a trail of blood. We all know that, right? From Caesar to the dictators to these modern times.

II. The Truthful Parable of Jotham – vs. 7-21

Here's the one son of Gideon that was able to escape, and he goes to the top of Mount Gerizim, and where he could be heard, I call that his pulpit. This is kind of a natural amphitheater where the acoustics were so very good. So that's why he chooses this very spot. Secondly, because it was a safe distance away, he could make a really quick escape if he needed to.

The parable of the trees – **vs. 8 -- the message is when people exalt worthless ambition over godly leadership, destruction always follows.**

A. The refusal of the worthy

The application is that true leaders do not seek position for themselves. That's the whole point here. They focus on serving God and bearing fruit. Ambition looks for thrones. Faithfulness looks for fruit. And that's the whole point here.

B. The rise of the worthless – **vs. 14**

This bush has no shade, it has no good use, it produces no fruit. The bramble bush, again, was only good for fire. Worthless leaders crave crowns but cannot give care. Here this bramble claims to be able to provide all of this but can really do nothing except really be a destructive force. When God's people choose bramble leadership, they are pierced and they are burned.

C. Interpretation – **vs. 16**

This is the leader that you want? That's really who you chose? Fine. then let fire come out from him and devour you, and you devour him. You deserve each other. You're gonna destroy each other. That's the idea there.

Now, after he gives this parable in verse number 21, Jotham then flees to safety, and he waits to see what will take place. But again, the application of all of this is that ambition outside God's will always ends in destruction.

III. The Triumphant Providence of God – vs. 22-

A. The discord of Shechem – **vs. 23**

God sent division. God did this. Even the hostility between wicked men is under divine sovereignty. And so we see this God stirring things up here. Matthew Henry writes this, those who combine in sin will no longer continue in peace. God can make the greatest friends of iniquity to be one another's scourges.

And the alliance that was built between Abimelech and these men of Shechem was not built on righteousness, it was built on deception and bloodshed, and now they turn on each other. There's a complete reversal.

B. The defiance of Gaal

C. The death of Abimelech – **vs. 50-57**

In the beginning, Abimelech roots his political ambition in the identity of a woman, his mother, who is a concubine. And in the end, he is killed by a woman. That's the end of his political life, his life period.

We see the chapter closes with a theological explanation to everything that happened. Look

down at verse number 56. Don't miss this. "*Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, and slaying his 70 brethren. and all the evil of the men of Shechem, did God render upon their heads, and upon them came the curse of Jopham, the son of Jeroboam.*" I think this is one of the clearest statements of divine providence in the whole book of Judges.

God allows Abimelech to rise, God stirs up the division, God orchestrated all the downfall, God repaid the wickedness here. Abimelech thought that he was in control of events. No, it was God who was in control of events. He was merely an instrument in God's hand to fulfill God's larger purposes.

Now let me just give you real quick, just a <u>few quick lessons</u>.

1) Sin eventually destroys itself
2) Wicked leadership always harms the people
3) God's justice may be delayed, but it's never absent.
4) Cycle of sin creating a longing for the greater king, the righteous judge. It all points to Jesus Christ.

Christ is the righteous branch. He is the righteous king. And Judges 9 again shows us what happens when Israel crowns its own savior, but it also prepares us to long for the king whom God appoints. And this parable of Jotham teaches us that true leaders bear fruit. They serve God's purposes, not their own pride. False leaders are brambles, scratching and burning and destroying those under them. But Christ is not a bramble king. He's the vine. He's the olive. He's the fig tree, all in one. He's fruitful. He's life-giving and protective.

TEXT: Judges 9:22-57

TITLE: THE CURSE OF JOTHAM – TREACHERY REWARDED WITH TREACHERY

BIG IDEA:
THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD INCLUDES THE FULFILLMENT OF HIS CURSES

INTRODUCTION:

Have any of you ever seen those little boxes of Bible promises where you can pick one card out each week and take comfort in the blessing promised in that verse? When we think of the faithfulness of God, we usually think in terms of His keeping His promises of blessing. What a comfort to sing some of the old hymns like "Standing on the Promises of God." Just like our Bible verse for the year "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today ad forever*" (Heb. 13:8). We know that our God will never act in a way inconsistent with Who He is and What He has promised to do. We can count on God's faithfulness every day.

But the conclusion of this account of Gideon's son, Abimelech, the Bramble King, reminds us that God is just as faithful in carrying out His promised curses. Have you ever been in a Christian book store and seem a little box of Bible curses – where you can pick one out each day and meditate on it? Not so great from a marketing perspective!

The Bible is full of prominent curses. Starts right at the beginning of Genesis:
Gen. 2:17 "*from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.*" Satan's strategy is to try to undermine God's curses; coming alongside and whispering: Surely God didn't mean what He said; Surely He won't act so severely.
Gen. 3 – is all about the pronouncement of major curses by God

- He addresses the serpent – declares that the seed of the woman will have the ultimate victory
- He addresses the woman – promises pain in childbirth – Did God keep His Word?
- Then He addresses the man – promises hardship and toil in everyday labor – How did it go for you this week at your job? Was it a country club type of experience?

Maybe you think God will give you a pass on certain aspects of the famous **Harvest Law**:
"*Whatsoever a man soweth, so shall he also reap.*"
Make no mistake – God keeps His Word. You can track the multitude of curses sprinkled throughout the Scriptures. Don't make the mistake of taking God lightly.

THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD INCLUDES THE FULFILLMENT OF HIS CURSES

For devotions, I have been using a compilation of daily nuggets from the pen of A.W. Tozer. As we consider the sovereignty and providence of God that allow Him to carry out His blessings and cursings, I found it interesting that the theme for today's reading was exactly our message for today: "God is faithful to condemn!" Don't be fooled by God's timetable where it might seem like there is no accountability. If you forsake **truth and integrity**, your treachery will be rewarded with the curse of God.

(:20) The Curse of Jotham: twofold application --

1) *Let fire come out from Abimelech and consume the men of Shechem and Beth-millo*
2) *Let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from Beth-millo, and consume Abimelech*

Flash forward to the final verse of Chapter 9: "*Also God returned all the wickedness of the men of Shechem on their heads, and* ***the curse of Jotham*** *the son of Jerubbaal came upon them*."

I. (:22-25) THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S CURSES IS SOVEREIGNLY ORCHESTRATED

God is the conductor; the master director; He is directing the course of history and all of the minute details associated with all events – yet without being the author of sin

A. (:22) According to God's Timetable

"*Now Abimelech ruled over Israel three years.*"

Three years is a long time. [What if you disobeyed your father and your mother warned you, when your father returns in three years he is going to punish you for that offense.] Probably thought that he had gotten away with his murderous treachery

Looks like he has expanded his rule somewhat beyond the borders of Shechem; apparently lived in Arumah – about 5 miles southeast of Shechem

Herbert Wolf: The word for "*governed*" (*yasar*) is unique to the book and is perhaps chosen to distinguish Abimelech's ill-fated rule from that of the true judges. Abimelech was more like a **tyrant** than a king, and he soon encountered opposition in Shechem itself.

There was enough time transpired to sour the relationship between him and his supporters; they got the type of ruler they deserved; the opposite of a servant king

B. (:23-24) According to God's Justice

1. (:23) Judging Treachery with Treachery

"*Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech,*"

cf. evil spirit that God sent to torment King Saul; could have been actual demonic spirit or a disposition to cause negative discord and strife

Block: the Hebrew word *raa* can have two meanings: moral malignancy or experiential misfortune, analogous to English "ill," which refers primarily to moral evil and secondarily to unpropitious conditions.

This had been an **unholy union** from the start – cf. how God has called us to separate from evil; beware of friendship with the world; beware of running with the crowd; beware of sexual unions outside of the scope of God's blessing – any type of **unholy alliance** will ultimately end badly; don't try to make a deal with the devil

Takes the ministry of the Holy Spirit to bind us together in peace and harmony

Inrig: But false promises are followed by disillusionment, and that is exactly what happened to the people of Shechem. They quickly realized that Abimelech was not a liberator; he was a tyrant, and they tried to break away from him.

2. (:24) Holding All Parties Accountable

"*in order that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood might be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers.*"

C. (:25) According to God's Methodology -- Flair for the Unexpected (Instigation)

1. Surprising Ambush = Primary Objective

"*And the men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains,*"

2. Surprising Attacks = Secondary Objective

"*and they robbed all who might pass by them along the road; and it was told to Abimelech.*"

Constable: Verse 25 probably means that the men of Shechem conspired to rob Abimelech of the tolls he received from the travelers and traders who passed through Shechem. They did this by ambushing them from Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal, the two mountains between which the road passed near Shechem.

II. (:26-41) THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S CURSES IS HUMANLY INESCAPABLE - COUP ATTEMPTED BY GAAL

You would think that one side or the other (Abimelech or men of Shechem) would emerge victorious

A. (:26-29) Men of Shechem Hopeful of Escape – Futile Aligning with a Human Savior

"*Now Gaal the son of Ebed came with his relatives, and crossed over into Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their trust in him. And they went out into the field and gathered the grapes of their vineyards and trod them, and held a festival; and they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank and cursed Abimelech. Then Gaal the son of Ebed said, 'Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal, and is Zebul not his lieutenant? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him? Would, therefore, that this people were under my authority! Then I would remove Abimelech.' And he said to Abimelech, 'Increase your army, and come out.'*"

Gaal had been waiting in the wings; he had never been on board with the leadership of Abimelech; he sensed his opportunity to drive a wedge between the men of Shechem and their bramble king

"*put their trust in him*" = pagan concept of kingship rule was closely akin to trusting in man as a type of human savior; a deliverer; someone who would make their life safer and more comfortable

Hamor identified as the founding father of the city of Shechem – **Gen. 33:19**

Gathering grapes – not giving credit to the God who had provided so rich a harvest for them to enjoy

Block: Like Abimelech's speech in v. 2, Gaal skillfully plays the ethnicity card in gaining the support of the lords of Shechem. If blood is the issue, then let it be kept pure, and let the kingship be brought home. Abimelech may claim kinship with the Shechemites through his mother, but his identity and nationality are determined by his father, Jerubbaal. Therefore, let the yoke of this foreigner be cast off.

Takes shot at Gideon here – speaks in deprecating fashion

B. (:30-33) God is Always One Step Ahead – Superior Intelligence and Winning Strategy

> "*And when Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger burned. And he sent messengers to Abimelech deceitfully, saying, 'Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his relatives have come to Shechem; and behold, they are stirring up the city against you. Now therefore, arise by night, you and the people who are with you, and lie in wait in the field. And it shall come about in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, that you shall rise early and rush upon the city; and behold, when he and the people who are with him come out against you, you shall do to them whatever you can.'*"

Zebul remained loyal to Abimelech; understood that Gaal had not been careful to make all the necessary preparations for warfare; if Abimelech could surprise him, he would stand a good chance of success

Everything is done in the darkness; the tone of deceitfulness and treachery as opposed to truth and integrity dominates this narrative

C. (:34-41) Arrogance and Boasting Crushed in the End

> "*So Abimelech and all the people who were with him arose by night and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies. Now Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance of the city gate; and Abimelech and the people who were with him arose from the ambush. And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, 'Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains.' But Zebul said to him, 'You are seeing the shadow of the mountains as if they were men.' And Gaal spoke again and said, 'Behold, people are coming down from the highest part of the land, and one company comes by the way of the diviners' oak.' Then Zebul said to him, 'Where is your boasting now with which you said, Who is Abimelech that we should serve him? Is this not the people whom you despised? Go out now and fight with them!' So Gaal went out before the leaders of Shechem and fought with Abimelech. And Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him; and many fell wounded up to the entrance of the gate. Then Abimelech remained at Arumah, but Zebul drove out Gaal and his relatives so that they could not remain in Shechem.*"

MacArthur: *a diviners' oak* = a tree regarded superstitiously where mystical ceremonies and soothsaying were done.

Gaal forced to leave the protection of the city and take his troops to fight Abimelech in the open fields; Zebul made it impossible for him to retreat back into Shechem for safe haven

III. (:42-57) THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S CURSES IS PRECISELY TARGETED

No collateral damage; no sloppy missing of the mark; strikes right at the heart of the target

A. (:42-49) The Destruction of Shechem

1. (:42-45) The City of Shechem in General

> "*Now it came about the next day, that the people went out to the field, and it was told to Abimelech. So he took his people and divided them into three companies, and lay in wait in the field; when he looked and saw the people coming out from the city, he arose against them and slew them. Then Abimelech and the company who was with him dashed forward and stood in the entrance of the city gate; the other two companies then dashed against all who were in the field and slew them. And Abimelech fought against the city all that day, and he captured the city and killed the people who were in it; then he razed the city and sowed it with salt.*"

Looks like the men of Shechem thought that the conflict was over and they could just go about their normal daily activities; they did not think that Abimelech would hold them accountable for aligning themselves with Gaal

Wiersbe: The sowing of salt on a conquered city was a symbolic action that condemned the city to desolation so nobody would want to live there. "*Put salt on Moab, for she will be laid waste; her towns will become desolate, with no one to live in them*" (Jer. 48:9, NIV).

Block: It is evident from this paragraph that not every corner of the city had fallen to him. The previous verses seem to have involved his destruction of the lower part of the city, as opposed to the acropolis on which the temple fortress stood. The former, which represented the areas where people lived and carried on their daily activities, took up the larger portion of the city, to be sure, but the last line of defensive personnel and structures still remained.

2. (:46-49) The Leaders of Shechem in Particular

> "*When all the leaders of the tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the inner chamber of the temple of El-berith. And it was told Abimelech that all the leaders of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. So Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who were with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand and cut down a branch from the trees, and lifted it and laid it on his shoulder. Then he said to the people who were with him, 'What you have seen me do, hurry and do likewise.' And all the people also cut down each one his branch and followed Abimelech, and put them on the inner chamber and set the inner chamber on fire over those inside, so that all the men of the tower of Shechem also died, about a thousand men and women.*"

Towering Inferno

Herbert Wolf: "*shoulder*" = "*Shechem*" – Thus the name of the city held prophetic import for its own destruction.

B. (:50-57) The Destruction of Abimelech

> "*Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he camped against Thebez and captured it. But there was a strong tower in the center of the city, and all the men and women with all the leaders of the city fled there and shut themselves in; and they went up on the roof of the tower. So Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it, and approached the entrance of the tower to burn it with fire. But a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head, crushing his skull. Then he called quickly to the young man, his armor bearer, and said to him, 'Draw your sword and kill me, lest it be said of me, A woman slew him.' So the young man pierced him through, and he died. And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, each departed to his home. Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father, in killing his seventy brothers. Also God returned all the wickedness of the men of Shechem on their heads, and* ***the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal came upon them***."

Abimelech feeling his oats; felt invincible; apparently the men of Thebez had been involved in some type of insurrection attempt as well or were supportive of the men of Shechem; Abimelech figured he would take the same military approach and he should achieve the same results. [Remember what it says in fine print in many advertisements: Past performance is no guarantee of future success.]

Look at the famous feat of this unnamed strong woman – she had carried this heavy upper millstone to the top of the tower and was able to hit the target at just the right moment

Herbert Wolf: an easily held stone, about ten inches long, that rode back and forth over the larger lower millstone as the grain was crushed (cf. Deut. 24:6). Grinding wheat was the work of women, and the woman doubtless took the stone with her as a potential weapon. Her success was as surprising as the arrow that pierced Ahab's armor (1 Kings 22:34). It was unmistakably a divine retribution.

2 Sam. 11:21 – came to a disgraceful end – "*Who struck down Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Did not a woman throw an upper millstone on him from the wall so that he died at Thebaz?*"

Block: The man who had shamelessly played the female card to seize the throne (vv. 1-2) now shamefully falls victim to a representative of this gender. Indeed the story of Abimelech the macho man is framed by two women: the first, who gave him life (8:31), and the second, who took it (9:53).

Doctrine of Retribution – Wikopedia: Divine retribution is supernatural punishment of a person, a group of people, or all humanity by a deity in response to some human action. . . Divine retribution is aligned with divine vengeance. Almighty God alone is a just judge. Delayed judgment will eventually become eternally displayed.
The wrath of God is aligned with God's nature where He loves righteousness and hates wickedness. The wrath of God is closely associated with Divine administration of justice. The wrath of God is commonly contrasted with the love of God.

Block: we observe God operating on the basis of fairness and honesty, doing what is right and giving people what they have earned. This time God does not act in mercy. He gives people the king they deserve, and he gives the king subjects he deserves. As dramatically as anywhere in Scripture, we observe a rigorous divine application of the principle of retribution. Fratricide has been answered with fratricide. He who had slaughtered his brothers "*upon one stone*" has his skull crushed beneath one stone.

CONCLUSION:

Gospel: Jesus made a curse for me:
Gal. 3:10-14 *"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'"*

What has God said about **Unholy Alliances**?? Do you think you can take fire into your bosom and not be burned??

Eccles. 12:13-14 *"The conclusion, when all has been hear, is fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil."*

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What are some curses from Scripture that still have application today?

2) Where have you experienced people acting out of treachery and deceit rather than truth and integrity?

3) What temptations to unholy alliances has God given you the grace to avoid?

4) Where do you tend to give yourself a pass as if God's warnings or His universal Harvest Law does not apply to you.

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

McCann: Abimelech's request to be finished off by his armor-bearer is similar to Saul's later request, so as to avoid dishonor (see 1 Sam. 31:4). Thus, the careers of Israel's first self-made king, Abimelech, and first divinely designated king, Saul, end in disgrace. Abimelech is an idolater from the beginning, and Saul is rejected by God for disobeying God's explicit command (1 Sam. 15).

Wiersbe: Indeed, the fire did "*come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon*" (v. 15). The phrase "*cedars of Lebanon*" represents the leading citizens of the city, who had supported Abimelech's rule (v. 20).

Rugh: **God's Sovereignty Over Evil**
Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6; OT examples for our instruction; learn about the seriousness of sin and its disastrous consequences; Judges is book of transition – from Israel functioning as a family before going down to Egypt to a nation; brings us up to the time of the monarchy in Israel; the ephod -- constant attraction of something visible and physical to be the focal point of our worship; Gideon was a great judge but had weaknesses and compromised in times of prosperity; Lord appeared to Abram at Shechem Gen. 12:6; Gen. 33-34 – Jacob and his sons interact with Shechem; covenant confirmed there before Joshua's death - Josh. 24; despite confusion and disorder in world affairs, God is sovereignly in control; bringing about the destruction of godless people and preparing the way for the righteous
Lessons and Applications:

- Disobedience leads to increasing wickedness and corruption
- Failure to discipline sin among God's people is a sign of spiritual decay and corruption
- Failure to discipline sin leads to increased wickedness and corruption
- All creation is under God's sovereign authority, even the demons
- Demons are used by God to bring about judgment and discipline
- God has made provision for us in our spiritual conflict
- God will judge the wicked

Michael Lefebvre – **Poetic Justice**
Gideon's new name = "the Baal fighter," one who contends with Baal; his son is setting up worship with Baal; God will not allow that to continue; examples of ones who did not initially believe promises of God (Zachariah, Pharaoh); Jesus is the ultimate Baal contender and king over God's people; passage framed by verses at beginning and end: this is what God is doing and this is why He did it; Abimelech being described as an oppressor, not a deliverer; but his reign is short-lived;
3 things about Gaal's rise to leadership:

- Comes in with network of relatives; reminds us of Abimelech
- V. 28 – questions the ties of Abimelech to this city; turns the table
- Focus on the Baal temple as the setting

Text is describing Poetic Justice; what goes around comes around; has had a bit too much to drink and is emboldened to speak against Abimelech; wickedness may flourish for a time but God's judgment will be executed; lot of references to ambushes in this narrative; color of deception and treachery throughout this text; all under the sovereign hand of God;

- Overthrow of Gaal (:34-41)
- Overthrow of the city – a second battle a bit of time later;
- Overthrow of the leaders
- Abimelech overthrown himself

Do not seek refuge in the gods of this world because there is no refuge in Baal; what is this Baal worship really all about? The Canaanite god of prosperity; land flowing with milk and honey; god of sexual, agricultural and economic prosperity; keep faith with Yahweh and His worship and His regulations for worship in His law

TEXT: Judges 10:1-11:28

TITLE: RISE OF JEPHTHAH -- FROM DESPISED REJECT TO DESIRED RECRUIT

BIG IDEA:
DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE LOVE OF GOD IN REMAINING FAITHFUL TO HIS PEOPLE DESPITE THEIR REPEATED APOSTASIES . . .
AND DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE GRACE OF GOD IN TRANSFORMING HUMAN OUTCASTS INTO CONQUERING HEROES

INTRODUCTION:

Remember what was prophecied of the Lord Jesus Christ: "*the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone*." (**1 Peter 2:7-8**; **Ps. 118:22** – "*This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.*" **Acts 4:11-12**) All of the judges point to the **ultimate Deliverer** in some form or fashion. Today we are going to be amazed at the **love of God** for His people and the **grace of God** to make leaders out of cast off rubble. Whatever our past may have been, by the providence of God it can be used to shape us and mold us for great usefulness to the Lord in the future. But before we get to the extended story of Jephthah which will take us two weeks to cover – we need to briefly mention two minor judges that are recorded at the beginning of Judges 10 by way of transition.

Transition: Two Minor Judges Highlight the Grace and Longsuffering of God's Covenant Loyalty:

1) (10:1-2) TOLA – 23 years

> "*Now after Abimelech died, Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, arose to save Israel; and he lived in Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim. And he judged Israel twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried in Shamir.*"

His name means "*worm*" – perhaps lowly in contrast to lofty ambitions of Abimelech

Jordan: can also refer to the scarlet-colored cloth made from a dye created by crushing worms. Such would be a robe of honor, signifying the dignity of the office of Judge.

Note that this region of Israel needed "saving" once again after the disastrous reign of Abimelech.

Came from tribe just across the border from Shechem

Block: The simple details "*he lived, he governed, he died, he was buried*" suggest an orderly and stable tenure.

2) (10:3-5) JAIR – 22 years (a few more details given here)

> "*And after him, Jair the Gileadite arose, and judged Israel twenty-two years. And he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities in the land of Gilead that are called Havvoth-jair to this day. And Jair died and was buried in Kamon.*"

His name means "*may God enlighten*" or "*splendid*"

Probably time period of book of Ruth

Block: the image of thirty sons riding on thirty donkeys conveys a picture of peace and prosperity, in contrast to the insecurity and danger that characterized the days of Shamgar and Jael.

Maybe this is what normal life could have looked like in the time of Judges without all of the roller coaster drama.

Motyer: As for Jair, what is the importance of his thirty sons with their thirty asses and thirty cities? They might possibly be meant as a bad sign (indulgence, ostentation, dangerous worldly trends). But I am more inclined to see Jair's rule as twenty-two further years of the Lord's kindness to Israel added to the twenty-three years under Tola. Elsewhere in the Bible large families mean prosperity and divine blessing, and he who rides on an ass rather than a warhorse is one who comes in peace. Sound judgment on the Deborah pattern, and a time of relative prosperity and peace, were what the people of God needed at this juncture.

But not what they deserved…in all fairness and honesty, Israel should not have survived. How it happened that Israel did survive, and what that tells us about Israel's God, is one of the most important issues in the book. . . Justice must demand the rejection of this impossibly faithless people. By rights, as Polzin says, Israel should not survive. She has forfeited every claim on God's approval.

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE LOVE OF GOD IN REMAINING FAITHFUL TO HIS PEOPLE DESPITE THEIR REPEATED APOSTASIES . . .
AND DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE GRACE OF GOD IN TRANSFORMING HUMAN OUTCASTS INTO CONQUERING HEROES

I. (10:6-18) THE PROMPTING FOR LEADERSHIP INTENSIFIES IN TIMES OF PRESSURE AND DESPERATION

A. (:6-9) Provoking the Lord to Anger

1. (:6) Diversity of Idolatry

> "*Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; thus they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him.*"

Look at how worship is defined in terms of **serving the deity** rather than in terms of extracting some personal blessing for yourself
Rom. 12:1-2 tone

Inrig: Each time they did the evil in the sight of God and chose paganism over God's truth, they sank lower and lower until, finally, here in Judges 10, they reached one of the bleakest times spiritually in the nation's history. In fact, as we read verse 6, we realize they would have worshiped almost anything or anyone, rather than the Lord God. There are seven false religions mentioned here, and they include some of the most perverted and depraved practices ever known to man.

2. (:7) Discipline of the Lord

"*And the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the sons of Ammon.*"

Davis: Yahweh meets intense apostasy with severe retribution, a double oppression

Western enemy = Philistines (story of Samson)
Eastern enemy = Ammonites – from across the Jordan

Inrig: They were a desert people who lived on the eastern side of the Dead Sea. They first overpowered the two and one-half tribes which had chosen to stay in the area east of the Jordan River, a region called Gilead, and occupied by Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh. Then Ammon gained sufficient power to cross the Jordan and to attack the central tribes in Israel – Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim.

3. (:8-9) Distress of the People

"*And they afflicted and crushed the sons of Israel that year; for eighteen years they afflicted all the sons of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in Gilead in the land of the Amorites. And the sons of Ammon crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah, Benjamin, and the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was greatly distressed.*"

Strong words are used here to describe Israel's situation: afflicted and crushed … 18 years is a long time;
Look at how temptation to conform to the ways of the world seems attractive at the time but never pays off in the long haul; the people are left in a distressed and afflicted state; they seem unable to make the connection between obedient faith and God's blessing

B. (:10-16) Pleading With the Lord for Mercy

1. (:10) Sorrow That Leads to Regret

"*Then the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, 'We have sinned against Thee, for indeed, we have forsaken our God and served the Baals.'*"

2 Cor. 7:9-10 difference between regret and repentance

Block: We must read on to find out whether or not this is more than a utilitarian manipulation of deity to be delivered from a painful situation or authentic heartfelt repentance.

Lots of people make the pronouncement that they have sinned once they have been found out – yet by that confession their heart knows no repentance – cf. Pharaoh as the plagues came upon the land of Egypt – in an evangelistic sense, it is not enough to just get someone to mouth a sinner's prayer; God must be involved in changing the heart

2. (:11-14) Pattern of Unfaithfulness That Puts Mercy At Risk

"*And the LORD said to the sons of Israel, 'Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the sons of Ammon, and the Philistines? Also when the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hands. Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods; therefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry out to the gods which you*

have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress.'"

Irony and sarcasm – "you made your bed, now sleep in it!" Very sad historical record; talk about repeating the mistakes of history

3. (:15-16) Repentance That Rekindles God's Covenant Love based on His Compassion

"*And the sons of Israel said to the LORD, 'We have sinned, do to us whatever seems good to Thee; only please deliver us this day.' So they put away the foreign gods from among them, and served the LORD; and He could bear the misery of Israel no longer.*"

Inrig: He is a God of incessant love and infinite mercy. . . He is the God of all grace.

Jordan: God will deliver them this time, not because of their half-hearted repentance, but because He loves them in spite of their sins. The longsuffering of the Lord has not yet come to an end. God will raise up for them a deliverer, Jephthah, who will show them their own spiritual shortcomings by exemplifying them.

C. (:17-18) Promoting the Valiant Warrior to Save the Day

1. Battle Lines Formed

"*Then the sons of Ammon were summoned, and they camped in Gilead. And the sons of Israel gathered together, and camped in Mizpah.*"

Unusual to get to this stage before the issue of leadership has been determined; later in Israel's history we will see the troops of Israel stymied by the taunting Philistine champion Goliath until David steps forward to trust the Lord and lead the way

2. Brave Leader Must Be Found

"*And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another, 'Who is the man who will begin to fight against the sons of Ammon?'*"

Somebody needed to lead the charge

3. Big Time Legacy Furnished

"*He shall become head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.*"

This is the carrot that is put out there

II. (11:1-11) THE PATHWAY TO LEADERSHIP CAN ELEVATE THE REJECTED

A. (:1-3) Jephthah as Despised Reject (but developing leader)

- 1. Valiant Warrior

"*Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a valiant warrior,*"

"*The Lord has opened the womb*" -- had quite the reputation; this characteristic is put first by way of importance, given the desperate situation of the people

- 2. Son of a Harlot

"*but he was the son of a harlot.*" – but there are some mitigating negative factors that would make him a surprising choice

James Jordan: Bastards could not be full citizens of Israel until the tenth generation (**Dt. 23:2**). . . Judah was the royal tribe in Israel; yet most of Judah were bastards (Gen. 38). Thus, they had to wait ten generations before they could take up full citizenship in Israel, and thus it was ten generations before any Judahite could become king. The genealogy in Ruth 4:18-22 shows that David was ten generations away from his bastard ancestor. This fact shows one of the reasons why Israel was not to have a king during the period of the Judges. Only someone from Judah could be king, and virtually all of Judah was temporarily excluded. This fact shows the folly of what Jephthah tried to accomplish . . .

Is. 56:1-8 promises the Lord's mercy to those in these target categories (eunuchs, illegitimate, Moabites and Ammonites) who come under the obligations of the covenant

- 3. Father was Gilead

"*And Gilead was the father of Jephthah.*"

Prominent father; same name as that given to the entire geographic region

- 4. Brothers cast him off

"*And Gilead's wife bore him sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out and said to him, 'You shall not have an inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman.*'"

Did not even give him any sustenance to take with him; drove him off empty-handed;
Will be a humbling thing for these same half-brothers now to acknowledge their need of him to return as leader and military champion of the people

- 5. Lived as an outcast

"*So Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob;*"

From a dysfunctional family; looks like he will amount to nothing; living like **Swamp Fox**

Inrig: became a kind of Hebrew **Robin Hood**, a leader of a military band who functioned as an unofficial police force. He skillfully brought together this refugee band, and, for a price, they protected the Hebrews and attacked the enemy. This provides another interesting parallel to the life of David because he did exactly the same thing in the period while he was hiding from King Saul.

- 6. Displayed leadership abilities and charisma

"*and worthless fellows gathered themselves about Jephthah, and they went out with him.*"

Swamp fox type of band of renegades; **1 Sam. 22:2** – parallel to David's experience

Jordan: Nehemiah 5:13 shows that the word translated "*worthless*" in verse 3 really only means "impoverished."

Down on their luck; outcasts from society

Inrig: Alone except for God. The grace of God was at work in this man's life, rescuing him from an apparently hopeless future. God does not submit to human prejudices, and He is not limited by the social, parental, and environmental factors that men consider determinative. A Christian knows that God is the great Determiner, and in that knowledge there is freedom. I am not a prisoner of my past, no matter how desperate that past was. God delights in using the unusable and in making the ugly beautiful.

Tob means "good"

B. (:4-11) Jephthah as Desired Recruit

1. (:4-6) The Desperate Search Committee

"*And it came about after a while that the sons of Ammon fought against Israel. And it happened when the sons of Ammon fought against Israel that the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob; and they said to Jephthah, 'Come and be our chief that we may fight against the sons of Ammon.'*"

They knew who he was and where to go to retrieve him

2. (:7-8) The Debated Proposal

"*Then Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, 'Did you not hate me and drive me from my father's house? So why have you come to me now when you are in trouble?' And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, 'For this reason we have now returned to you, that you may go with us and fight with the sons of Ammon and become head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.'*"

3. (:9-11) The Divine Witness

"*So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, 'If you take me back to fight against the sons of Ammon and the LORD gives them up to me, will I become your head?' And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, 'The LORD is witness between us; surely we will do as you have said.' Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and chief over them; and Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD at Mizpah.*"

Jordan: The whole deal is ratified in the presence of the Lord, which probably means that the Ark of God was in the field at Mizpah (2 Sam. 11:11).

Examples:

- King David – the son who was looked over – **1 Samuel 16:7**
- Lord Jesus Christ – the rejected stone

III. (:12-28) THE PLATFORM FOR LEADERSHIP MUST BE THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT OF THE DIVINE JUDGE – WHO DETERMINES RIGHT AND WRONG?

A. (:12-13) Ammonite Issue – The Land Rightfully Belongs to Us

"*Now Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the sons of Ammon, saying, 'What is between you and me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?' And the king of the sons of Ammon said to the messengers of Jephthah, 'Because Israel took away my*

land when they came up from Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok and the Jordan; therefore, return them peaceably now.'"

B. (:14-20) Historical Justification – You Have the Facts All Wrong

"*But Jephthah sent messengers again to the king of the sons of Ammon, and they said to him, 'Thus says Jephthah, Israel did not take away the land of Moab, nor the land of the sons of Ammon. For when they came up from Egypt, and Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh, then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, Please let us pass through your land, but the king of Edom would not listen. And they also sent to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh. Then they went through the wilderness and around the land of Edom and the land of Moab, and came to the east side of the land of Moab, and they camped beyond the Arnon; but they did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was the border of Moab. And Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon, and Israel said to him, Please let us pass through your land to our place. But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory; so Sihon gathered all his people and camped in Jahaz, and fought with Israel.*"

C. (:21-24) Theological Justification – The Lord Gave Us This Land

"*And the LORD, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them; so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country. So they possessed all the territory of the Amorites, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok, and from the wilderness as far as the Jordan. Since now the LORD, the God of Israel, drove out the Amorites from before His people Israel, are you then to possess it? Do you not possess what Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So whatever the LORD our God has driven out before us, we will possess it.*"

Jordan: Problem – Chemosh was the god of Moab, while Molech was the god of Ammon. Was Jephthah misinformed? Impossible. Was he being sarcastic, deliberately insulting? Possibly. Were the Ammonites, always close to the Moabites, in a temporary historical phase of worshipping the Moabite god? Possibly. There is not sure answer, though the third is most likely.

D. (:25-26) Statue of Limitations Justification – 300 Years of Possession

"*And now are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive with Israel, or did he ever fight against them? While Israel lived in Heshbon and its villages, and in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities that are on the banks of the Arnon, three hundred years, why did you not recover them within that time?*"

E. (:27-28) Closing Summary – the Lord Determines Right and Wrong

"'*I therefore have not sinned against you, but you are doing me wrong by making war against me; may the LORD, the Judge, judge today between the sons of Israel and the sons of Ammon.' But the king of the sons of Ammon disregarded the message which Jephthah sent him.*"

There is someone who has set the standard for right and wrong; who knows the standard and

who can make righteous judgments to hold people accountable to the standard.

CONCLUSION:
We never want to underestimate the Lord's love or His grace. In His providence and sovereignty, He works according to His ways to accomplish His purposes. We do not want to prejudge or make assumptions about how God can use us or even use others, despite their past or their circumstances.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) In my life, where do I see the Lord's patience and longsuffering in teaching me repeatedly a lesson which I am slow to learn?

2) What can help prevent believers from just turning to God for help in times of desperation and forgetting him in times of prosperity?

3) When have I written off someone in terms of their spiritual usefulness only to be surprised at how God has blessed them?

4) Are we possessing all that our Lord God has freely given to us?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Block: Scholars have recognized that the text divides into five dialogic episodes, each of which involves a confrontation and a resolution:

Episode 1	Yahweh versus Israel (10:6-16)
Episode 2	Jephthah versus Gilead (10:17-11:11)
Episode 3	Jephthah versus Ammon (11:12-28)
Episode 4	Jephthah versus His Daughter (11:29-40)
Episode 5	Jephthah versus Ephraim (12:1-6)

In each episode the power of the spoken word is a key motif. At the same time the narrator plays with the verb *abar*, which occurs sixteen times but with a range of meanings …

Gil Rugh: **Jephthah's Vow and Victory**
No details about the judgeship of these minor judges even though they ruled for a long time; selective account given to us by God; relentless pressure on people of God to conform to pagan people around them; there was an attraction to the world and to the worship of these other gods; we find the world appealing in so many ways and are tempted away from faithfulness and devotion to the Lord; Ammonites afflicting all the sons of Israel living in the land of the Amorites; 18 years is a long time to be enslaved; severe oppression; "You want help, why not go to the gods you keep turning to;" why do we need pressure and affliction to turn our hearts to the Lord for help? Everybody is remorseful about all the trouble they have when they are being punished for sins; does not mean they are truly repentant; "Do whatever seems good to you but make sure that means delivering us." Stage set for battle; God has sovereignly moved to

intervene; need some background on Jephthah the Gileadite = the man who will be the deliverer; God can use your past difficulties to prepare you for future service; you go from being nobody to top dog, in charge of all of Gilead; Jephthah starts with diplomacy rather than warfare;

4 arguments against their position:
1) (:14-22) land belonged to the Amorites, not the Ammonites – making a claim to land that never belonged to them; your claim is fallacious
2) (:23-24) military victory attributed to the corresponding god; our God gave us this land; why would we give it to you?
3) (:25) King of Moab never challenged right of Israel to this land; he opposed them because he hated them but he recognized their right to the land
4) (:26) We have been here 300 years; you have waited too long to make your claim; bottom line is we are not giving it to you
Careful answers – Jephthah could think as well as fight;
Ultimately makes his appeal to the Lord;
Stubborn refusal of king of Ammon to listen to what makes good sense logically; God is about to judge him and free Israel from servitude

Spirit of the Lord comes upon special leaders in OT to accomplish specific objectives; not necessarily to motivate them to holy living

Motyer: One of the main themes of the story of Jephthah will be that the rot which set in long ago has reached the core, and things central to the relationship between God and his people have now been affected. The national life lacks direction; Israel is a rudderless ship; the old standards have been forsworn, the old landmarks obliterated; the foundations are being eroded.

David Silversides: **The Beginning of the Delivery of Jephthah**
The Lord still did not leave Israel to disintegrate into anarchy; preserving a people to His name even after Abimelech;

1. Regret and Repentance (chap. 10)

a. Conformity to the world and its consequences – these pagans gave them a hard time in the providence of God; conformity never pays the dividends that we expect; can't really feel comfortable among those who don't love our God;

b. Confession and regret – look at all the people in Scripture like Pharaoh who admitted they had sinned for various reasons but did not really repent; in evangelism merely getting people to say they have sinned is not necessarily repentance; can be an expression of selfishness because the consequences of those sins are beginning to be felt; can be simply a desire for self preservation

c. (:11-14) Reminder of all that the Lord had done in delivering His people; His kindness and compassion and mercy; designed to stir up genuine repentance

d. (:15ff) Word took effect in genuine repentance (at least in some of the people) a change of practice; not just mere words; "His soul was shortened" – desired not to prolong Israel's misery

e. Ammonites increase the pressure

2. (11:1-3) The Difference that Grace Makes
He had a hard beginning in life; immorality brings bitter fruit and internal strife; legitimate sons did not want to share inheritance with Jephthah; dealt harshly with him; various other social misfits gathered around him; gained reputation as valiant man and courageous and effective fighter and leader of men; God's grace to the deprived and underprivileged; cf. to start for

Abimelech – not the ideal family situation; but not as rough of an upbringing; what a difference between the two men; Abimelech was appallingly wicked; murdered his half brothers; Jephthah ended up helping his brothers; never underestimate the sovereign grace of God

2. (:11:4-11) Things Which are Despised Has God Chosen

a. (:4-5) Need for a Leader – there was one obvious choice
b. Jephthah reminds them of their history of mistreating him
c. Whole matter must be solidly agreed to in presence of the Lord
d. Pride brought low; humbling occasion to ask him to be their leader

Lessons:

- the Lord does not choose as we do; beware of dismissing or despising for wrong reasons; don't make our own assumptions as to whom the Lord can use
- the Lord puts down the pride of men and the assumptions of men
- the Lord's message and methodology and chosen leaders are not of the world's choosing

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **When God Does Not Answer**

Introduction: There are moments when God hears his people and he refuses to answer, at least answer in the way that we think that he should answer. So this chapter forces us to ask a very deep question, and that is why would God delay, or why would he even refuse to answer his children when they cry out to him? God is not being cruel. It's not because God is indifferent to us, but as we'll see, it's because God is doing something deeper in the life of all of his children when at times he will not answer. Sometimes God will hold deliverance and hold the answer that we're asking for, again, not to harm us, but to expose perhaps some false repentance, or maybe to get us to the point where we're absolutely, totally ready to surrender to everything that God wants.

Big Idea: **Six reasons God does not answer when we cry out to him.**

Tola's leadership represents restoration after a time of revolution. He's a selfless leader. He's a stable leader. And so what we see here then in this passage is faithful leadership without the spectacular. Unlike more famous judges, Tola, he performs no record of miracles, he leads no famous battles, he doesn't give any famous speeches or anything like that, and yet he just faithfully, steadily governs for 23 years. Some of the most important leadership is steady, it's quiet, and it continues on, it perseveres. And that's what we see here. In a book that is filled with all types of extremes, Tola stands as a picture of ordinary faithfulness. And that's what we need is just ordinary faithfulness.

But we also see Yair, he's mentioned in verse 3. And after him arose Yair, a Gileadite, and judged Israel twenty and two years. And he had thirty sons that rode on thirty ascots, and they had thirty cities, which are called Havot, Yair, unto this day, which are in the land of Gilead. And Yair died and was buried in Caiman. So here's another judge who also leads quietly and faithfully. And the mention of him having 30 sons, riding on 30 donkeys, and governing 30 cities.

Again, it appears random, but it signals wealth. It signals influence. It signals a time of peace that was there in Israel. In the ancient Near East, to ride a donkey, that showed prosperity, because most people didn't have that opportunity. You would think that at this time of leadership, in this time of quiet and peace and prosperity, that Israel would return to God. They would be grateful to God, and they would show it by returning to the Lord. But that's not what happened.

The problem was not a lack of leadership. The problem was not a lack of opportunity. The problem was their heart. Their heart was unchanged. It shows their sinful heart. They didn't fall into sin because life got hard. They returned to sin even when life was stable.

1. Because we've grown comfortable in sin. Vs. 6
They were very comfortable in their idolatry. And when things turned bad for them, when they got a little uncomfortable, they cried out to God. But God does not rush to answer when people are sinning and they're comfortable in their sin.

God will chastise Israel, again in verse seven, in 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 Amnon. God is always faithful to punish his children when they go wrong. And here God uses the Philistines and the Ammonites to punish them.

2. Because we want relief more than restoration. Vs. 10
These nations are on either side of Israel, so there's a sense in which Israel is being hammered from both sides and they're being crushed in the middle. And it's summarized in verse number nine where it says that, so that Israel was sore distressed in verse number nine at the end of that. The phrase means more than just that they were having a hard time. It carries the idea of being pressed down, being crushed, being hemmed in, being brought to a place where there's no escape. Israel is not just under attack.

They're having pressure from all sides. And this is designed by God. There's enemies on the outside. There's idols within them. There's God above them who's against them. They have nowhere to turn. And there was 18 years of this distress. It's not a bad day. It's not a difficult season, but nearly two decades where God's hand is heavy on Israel because of their sin. And again, this is all the punishment of God. God will press you externally when you refuse to yield internally. And this is what God is doing here with Israel. That's why it says they were sore distress.

They were not moved by holiness. They were not convicted over what they were doing. They were moved by pressure, the pressure they were in. They didn't cry out when they begin sinning. They didn't cry out when God first chastised them. They stayed that way for 18 years. They waited until they couldn't bear the suffering anymore.

3. Because our repentance is only words. Vs. 10
If you read through the book of Judges, they're constantly saying, oh Lord, oh Lord, we confess. The only problem was it wasn't genuine. Wasn't real. And here in this moment, their repentance is reactive. It's not radical. It's not real repentance. There's a difference between true repentance and false repentance. You see, true repentance is demonstrated not in what a person says, but in what they do. In what they do. God is not moved by repentance that is verbal, but is not visible in the changes that you make in your life.

4. Because we're still trusting other saviors. Vs. 11-13
Daniel Block, the commentator, writes this, Yahweh's rehearsal of past deliverances is intended to expose the irrationality of Israel's behavior. They have no excuse for seeking other saviors. God delivers and delivers and delivers, and yet here they are seeking other saviors. And so their problem is not ignorance. It is a misplaced trust in spite of the evidence that God has been giving them about his faithfulness.

And so God might delay an answering when our trust is divided. We don't have a full, total trust in God. We might say, well, we're trusting God, but really, we're also, we're trusting money, or we're trusting influence, or we say, oh, we're trusting God, but actually we're trusting other people, or even ourselves. And God sees the difference between what we say and what we're really leaning on. God sees that change. Partial trust is no trust at all. It's no trust at all.

5. Because we have not yet surrendered to his will. Vs. 15

God begins to move when we stop negotiating with God and start surrendering. Repentance becomes real when we stop trying to control the outcome and we just surrender to the Lord. Daniel Block again writes, the people abandoned all attempts to manipulate Yahweh, and they placed themselves entirely at His mercy.

And then their action follows. They put away the strange gods from among them, and they served the Lord. And so we finally see it. It's not just words, but now it's actions. It's not just confession, but now it's change in their life. They didn't just feel bad about their idols. They got rid of all of them.

6. Because he's leading us to something deeper. Vs. 16

God's silence is not indifference. His delay doesn't mean that he's totally absent. It was preparation. What was he preparing them for? Because God wanted to do something deeper in their life. And that's what we have to remember. God wanted to expose their idols. He wanted to reshape their desires. He wanted to produce some humility in them. He wanted to bring them to true repentance and true surrender to him. So it's preparation.

God doesn't delight in our suffering, but he will use it. He will use it. He will continue to use it until he accomplishes what comfort could never accomplish. That's why he got you out of that comfort zone, because that comfort wasn't doing anything for you. God will use suffering until he'll accomplish his purpose.

And once that work is done, his heart is moved on our behalf. And what we see here is both sides of God. He's holy. He will not accept shallow repentance, but he's also compassionate. He's moved by genuine return to him, and he's compassionate towards his people. So when God doesn't answer you the way you expect, it doesn't mean that he doesn't care.

It just means that he's trying to remove something in your life that you're clinging to. He's correcting something deeper in your heart, and he's preparing you for something greater. He wants to do a greater, deeper work in you. Sometimes God withholds what you want to give you what you actually need, to what you actually need.

TEXT: Judges 11:29-40

TITLE: JEPHTHAH'S TRAGIC VOW – DON'T BARGAIN WITH GOD!

BIG IDEA:
COMMITMENTS MADE TO THE LORD MUST BE KEPT REGARDLESS OF THE COST

INTERPRETATION ISSUE:
Before even beginning the exposition and application of the message, we need to determine at the outset the fundamental question of what actually happened in this historical account. The two most widely held views are:

1) Jephthah's vow involved sacrificing whoever first came out of his door to greet him and he actually carried through and put his only daughter to death

2) Jephthah's vow resulted in dedicating his daughter to perpetual virginity as she served the Lord at the tabernacle (similar to Hannah's later dedication of Samuel)

In favor of position #2 = serving in the temple:

- We are horrified to think that a man identified as a hero of the faith in Heb. 11, a man in whom the Holy Spirit was working to accomplish a mighty victory for God's people would be so crass and ungodly as to sacrifice his daughter as a burnt offering (Deut. 12:31; 18:9); look at the evidence in the text that Jephthah was godly in many respects; look at the relationship he enjoyed with his daughter who so freely submitted to her circumstances and did not try to argue or flee
- The emphasis seems to be on her resignation to perpetual virginity rather than her acceptance of death
- Some commentators (and even bible translators) attempt to make an argument for translating the waw conjunctive as "or" instead of "and" in verse 31 leading to the possible dual options of "shall be the Lord's (dedicated to service if a person) OR I will offer it up as a burnt offering (if it is an animal)" – [but this seems contrived]

Brensinger: As well intended as such views might be, they simply confuse the issue. Jephthah's deed, though unarguably detestable, must be allowed to stand.

In favor of position #1 = putting his daughter to death as a burnt offering sacrifice:

- It is always best to favor the simple reading of the text and the one which requires the least amount of interpretative gymnastics; word for "burnt offering" would normally be taken in this light
- This had been the consistent interpretation recorded down through history, at least until the Middle Ages (cf. quotes by Josephus and others)
- The filling of the Holy Spirit to accomplish a specific task for the Lord was never any guarantee of holy living in other areas of life; cf. the major character flaws we have witnessed in the other prominent judges like Gideon
- Argument related to the emphasis on virginity explained by the great tragedy to die childless – especially when that would mean the end to all possibility of family succession

- When Jephthah made the vow, certainly his expectation was that it would be a human coming out of his house (animals did not live in the house) to greet him (animals would not be greeting him)
- Jephthah was influenced by the pagan culture around him and familiar with human sacrifice; his actions, though bizarre and horrific, must be viewed within the context of the violent times in which he lived
- The victory which he was trying to secure (not trusting in God simply to give it to him on the basis of grace) was of huge enough proportions to merit the ultimate type of sacrifice
- The intensity of the lamenting by Jephthah (including the tearing of his clothes) seems more consistent with death; the scriptures are presenting us here with the most extreme example possible to bring home the warning against foolish vows, against bargaining with the Lord – and emphasizing the need to keep our commitments to the Lord
- The annual four day commemoration observed by the daughters of Israel seems more consistent with death; otherwise why not just go to the tabernacle to visit her?

I do not think we can be dogmatic here, and maybe there are additional circumstances or complexity which we are missing … but I favor position #1 – despite how ruthless and unattractive it makes Jephthah appear. In taking this position, we need to avoid tarring Jephthah's entire character with the brush of ungodliness. While he is criticized for his foolishness, he is applauded for his unwavering commitment – as strange as that seems to us. We must not get so sidetracked by this difficulty in interpretation that we miss the point of the passage and its application.

INTRODUCTION:

Don't be a Yo-Yo – You can't take back your commitments to the Lord;

We live in a society where commitment has become a rare bird – an endangered species; look at the marriage and divorce statistics – yet when you go to the next wedding the solemn vows are once again exchanged

It used to be that a man's word was his bond, but we live in litigious society – complicated contracts – lawyers that just specialize in the verbiage of contracts; business today is made difficult by the complexity of the contracts

Look at the worthlessness of the treaties entered into by countries; not worth the paper they are written on

What type of commitment have we made to the Lord?
Rom. 12:1 "*present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice*" – certainly Jephthah's daughter fulfilled this

Numbers 30:2 "*If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.*"

Deuteronomy 23:21-23 "*When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the Lord your God will surely require it of you.. However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you. You shall be careful to perform what goes*

out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God, what you have promised."

Ecclesiastes 5:4-7

I. (:29-33) THE COMMITMENT MADE WITH PROSPECT OF GREAT VICTORY

A. (:29) Boldness of Jephthah – prompted by the Spirit of God

> "*Now the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, so that he passed through Gilead and Manasseh; then he passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he went on to the sons of Ammon.*"

Gathering an army to prepare for battle; able to muster the troops to follow his leadership; this was the region most at risk to the oppression of the Ammonites; no turning back now that he has taken up the mantle of leadership and is committed to engaging in warfare with the superior enemy forces

B. (:30-31) Bargaining of Jephthah – prompted by faith mixed with presumption

> "*And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, 'If Thou wilt indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand, then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the LORD's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.*'"

Whole burnt offering; that which goes up to the Lord on the altar; **Judges 6:26**
Jephthah intended this to be a very difficult vow for him to fulfill
Left it to the providence of God to determine the one to be sacrificed

Wolf: The words "*when I return in triumph*" are identical with those of Gideon in **8:9**, as he grimly promised death to the men of Peniel

Brensinger: The noun *olah*, whether in OT contexts of celebration or petition, consistently refers to a burnt offering (Gen. 8:20; 22:2; Lev. 1:4; 1 Sam. 7:9; Jer. 14:12).

C. (:32-33) Blessing Upon Jephthah – prompted by the grace of God

> "*So Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD gave them into his hand. And he struck them with a very great slaughter from Aroer to the entrance of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim. So the sons of Ammon were subdued before the sons of Israel.*"

Not just one battle involved here; this was an entire military campaign that was victorious against twenty cities

II. (:34-40) THE COMMITMENT MAINTAINED DESPITE THE GREAT COST

A. (:34-35) Commitments Can Be Costly

> "*When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. Now she was his one and only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter. And it came about when he saw her, that he*

tore his clothes and said, 'Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you are among those who trouble me; for I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot take it back.'"

Brensinger: In the traditional role of jubilant women welcoming home their heroes, this unsuspecting child dances in total celebration (Exod. 15:20-21; Judg. 5:28-30; 1 Sam. 18:6-7).

"*tore his clothes*" – **Lev. 10:6** – sign of intense mourning at time of death

B. (:36) Commitments Call For Submission

"*So she said to him, 'My father, you have given your word to the LORD; do to me as you have said, since the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the sons of Ammon.'*"

C. (:37-40) Commitments Worth Commemorating

"*And she said to her father, 'Let this thing be done for me; let me alone two months, that I may go to the mountains and weep because of my virginity, I and my companions.' Then he said, 'Go.' So he sent her away for two months; and she left with her companions, and wept on the mountains because of her virginity. And it came about at the end of two months that she returned to her father, who did to her according to the vow which he had made; and she had no relations with a man. Thus it became a custom in Israel, that the daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.*"

Block: No memorials were erected for Jephthah, but the memory of his daughter was immortalized in a festival celebrated in her honor. Nothing specific is known of this festival, except that it was observed four days each year by the women of Israel. It is doubtful this observance ever became a national event. The absence of any external attestation probably may be attributed to the fact that the events described to this point have all concerned only the Transjordanian tribes, whom their Cisjordanian countrymen tended to marginalize from the beginning.

CONCLUSION:

1 Thess. 5:24 "*Faithful is He who calls you, and He will also bring it to pass.*"

Look at all the passages that speak to the faithfulness of God

Not saying "Don't make any commitments to the Lord"
But be careful in what you pledge and follow through and keep your commitments; don't make commitments as part of some bargaining interaction with a God who graciously gives good gifts to His children.

"O Jesus I have promised to serve Thee to the end"

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What are some other Scripture passages that urge us to count the cost?

2) When have we tried to bargain with the Lord? What was our motivation? What lessons did we learn?

3) When have we kept our word and suffered some hard consequences as a result?

4) Why was Jephthah included in the Faith Hall of Fame in Hebrews 11?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Keil & Delitzcsh: the two clauses "*he shall be the Lord's*" and "*I will offer him up for a burnt offering*," cannot be taken disjunctively in such a sense as this, it shall *either* be dedicated to the Lord, or, if it should be a sacrificial animal, I will offer it up as a burnt-offering, but the second clause simply contains a more precise definition of the first, -- Jephthah must at the very outset have contemplated the possibility of a human sacrifice.

Motyer: If you have made a promise, you keep it. He should never have made that promise. He should have realized that keeping it might mean the breaking of other basic rules. But amid the welter of contradictory voices he had heard the voice of God saying, "You keep your word," and he heeded the vice. It was a mark of paganism to shut one's ears to inconvenient messages, as he knew: "*the king of the Ammonites did not heed the message of Jephthah*" (11:28). But Jephthah was a man of faith, and he did heed at any rate the message of God concerning faithfulness, whatever confusions may have accompanied it. What he did (the sacrifice of his daughter) is a thing all Scripture condemns; why he did it (in order to keep his word) is a thing all Scripture commends.

Dennis Bratcher: We are **supposed** to recoil from the monstrosity of Jephthah's actions. The later community of Israel who included this story in the biblical traditions knew how wrong child sacrifice was, so there would be no mistaking this for a model of right behavior. It would be another example of what happens when God's people become confused in their thinking about who is really God and how God works in the world. This becomes another lesson for Israel that God will not be manipulated by magical incantations or bargains that we strike with him on our own terms. That is precisely what Jephthah tried to do in making his vow to sacrifice the first thing that met him on his return home, if only God would help him win a battle. God did not need that bargain to aid Jephthah. Jephthah was yet another tragic figure in Judges who had not yet learned enough about God to know that God does not respond to magic or bargains, which lay at the heart of Ba'al worship. Jephthah's battle against the Ammonites was not won because of his vow, but because of God's presence (11:32). His lack of faith in God, and understanding of who God is, cost him his daughter.
http://www.crivoice.org/jephthah.html

Tim McQuade: When people face a challenge they are tempted to bargain with God. The greater the challenge the more tempting it is to try to make a deal with God. Jephthah tried it, we

mustn't. There are problems with trying to make a deal with God. The first problem is that God doesn't care for it. Rather than an attempted bribe, God would much rather see faith.

A second reason is that you can't, or won't keep the promise you made. If you promised to go to church every Sunday, for example, you cannot keep it. You will, eventually, miss a Sunday. Things will work initially, but over time you'll forget the deal you made. . .

Trust God. Don't try to manipulate Him. Don't bargain because you cannot keep it. Don't bargain because God is unimpressed. Don't bargain because God wants your faith.
http://www.christianity.com/SermonHelps/11599536/

Woodrow Kroll: I think the daughter may be the real story here. You're right--she is courageous, she is obedient, she is loyal to her father (to his ill-conceived vow). And I think that what she teaches us is that there is honor in courage and obedience and loyalty, and that's a lesson that many people apparently have forgotten today.
http://www.backtothebible.org/index.php/Back-to-the-Bible-Radio-Program/Jephthah-s-Tragic-Mistake-2010.html

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **The Danger of Careless Vows**
Introduction: We're gonna see the story of a judge who speaks some words. He speaks a vow, and that vow ends up being a careless vow, and it ends up being not a blessing, but a curse. And this is the Judge Jephthah, as we'll look at. Now remember, the Book of Judges is not necessarily a celebration of heroes. We know that some of these judges were men who did good things, but also we see their flaws. Each judge was raised up by God, and it reveals, in some way, kind of a deeper spiritual failure in the life of Israel.

Big Idea: **Three causes of careless vows**

I. A desire to prove ourselves. Vs. 1-11
A. The Rejected Brother
We're introduced again to Jephthah. Several things about him. First of all, he's a rejected brother. In verses 1 to 3, Jephthah was the son of a harlot. Look at verse 1. Now, Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, and he was the son of a harlot. And Gilead beget Jephthah. Jephthah came by his father having this immoral relationship, and again this also reveals kind of the moral conditions of Israel at that time.

However, at least Gilead acknowledged him and took him into his own home, but his sons did not accept him. And they called him the son of a strange woman. And so when Gilead died, notice verse number two, and when 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. Thou art the son of a strange woman.

B. The Requested Warrior
All the elders come to him because he was a warrior and he knew how to fight. And so they came to him. Notice where we have to give Jephthah credit here that if the Lord delivers you, he points to the Lord, you'll see a lot. in this chapter when he points to the Lord in a lot of ways, and that he does exercise certain amount of faith. In fact, the writer of Hebrews is clear that Jephthah was a man of faith.

C. The Respectful Negotiator – vs. 12-13

The king of Ammon is determined to have war, so the negotiations will fail. He tries, but the negotiations fail, but we do learn some things about Jephthah by this passage from verses 12 down to verse 28.

It teaches us two things about him. First of all, **he knew the scripture**. He knew the Old Testament. He was not an ignorant man. He knew the history of his people, and he was not a hothead. **He was not looking for a fight**. Being a military man, he understood when you go to war, thousands of people are killed, and he didn't want to just go right out to war. He wanted to try to head it off, and so he does his best to negotiate to get out of the war, but the king of Ammon would not have it.

He says, Israel stole our land and we want our land back. Sounds familiar? So first, what Jephthah does is he presents four arguments to try to negotiate with his king. Argument number one is, first, **he presents the facts**. In verses 14 to 22, he basically says, hey, look, remember that when Moses and the children of Israel came to the land of Ammon, they asked for permission to just pass through. And the king of Ammon would not grant it. And so that's what he says in verses 19 and verse number 20. Look, they wanted to go through. The king of Edom wouldn't let them through. They were asking for permission. And so this led to war.

And as a result, God gave the victory. Again, he's pointing to the Lord. God gave them this victory. Israel didn't steal any land. They captured it from the Ammonites and the Amorites. And so it wasn't really stolen. And that's the second argument. **It was given by the Lord**. Look at verse 23. And so now the Lord God of Israel has dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, and shouldest thou possess it? And so this was the Lord's doing. This wasn't our doing.

And the third argument is that **Israel had lived on this land for centuries**. This had been 300 years since this has happened. Why all of a sudden do you rising up now? I mean, they've lived on this land for 300 years. And verses 25 and verse number 26. And so, you know, why are you all of a sudden wanting this land?

And then the final argument that Jephthah uses is that You know, you're not actually fighting against Israel, **you're fighting against the Lord**. And I recommend that you not fight against God. That was his argument in verse 27 and verse 28. Look at verse 27. Wherefore I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me. The Lord, the judge, be judged this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon. But in verse 28, they would not listen.

II. A failure to trust God's promises.

Instead of resting in God's power, he makes a vow and it's a rash vow. He vows to sacrifice. when you scheme for what God has promised, you suffer.

Negotiation assumes that God's willingness to act depends upon your promise, not on his character. And that in a way is kind of an insult to God. Matthew Henry wrote this, many ruined themselves by a vow when they thought to bind themselves to their duty. In other words, they thought they were strengthening their obedience, but actually they were exposing their unbelief. And again, you don't get things from God by negotiating or bargaining.

III. A reaction in the heat of pressure.

The central question is, did Jephthah literally sacrifice his daughter as a burnt offering, a human sacrifice, or is this speaking about something different? Now, an answer to this, there are two major views here, two major views. Here's the first view.

One view says that this is really speaking about **lifelong dedication, perpetual virginity**. And so this view argues that Jephthah did not kill his daughter, but he dedicated her to the service of the Lord lifelong in the tabernacle where she would remain unmarried and she would serve there as a virgin. Now the arguments for this view go like this. First of all, God forbids human sacrifice in Deuteronomy 12. And so would a man who's being empowered by the Holy Spirit do something like this?

Here's another argument. The wording of the vow. Some say the phrase translated shall be the Lord's. or I will offer it up, meaning if it is an animal that comes out, I'll offer it up, but if it's a person that comes out, then that person will be dedicated. So they kind of take that view. And then there's another argument.

They say the emphasis is on her virginity. If you look at verse number 37 and verse 38, it says that she bewailed her virginity two times. Verse 37, verse 38, that seems to highlight the fact that she knew no man. So she would be in the service of God, a virgin, suggesting the tragedy would be childlessness, not necessarily death.

And then another argument under this view is that the daughters of Israel lament her yearly, according to verse number 40. If you look at that, every year they would lament. And some argue that this could mean celebrate or commemorate, not mourn her death. So that's one view.

View number two, no, this is talking about a **literal human sacrifice**. It's a literal human sacrifice. Now this is a view that's historically held by most scholars, and it's thought to be the most strongest. This view holds that Jephthah actually did sacrifice his daughter in a burnt offering unto the Lord. Now what are the arguments for this view? Well, first of all, the plain reading of the text. In verse 31, I will offer it up for a burnt offering.

And the idea of coming forth from my house to meet me, when he's talking about someone coming to meet me, could he be talking about an animal there? They say, really, that's more of a person that will meet him. And so he had human sacrifice in mind when he made this vow, not an animal, okay? I don't think he was talking about the family dog. If Lassie comes first, Lassie's gonna get it. That's not the idea here.

The me here has the sense of a person. Daniel Block, one of the most respected commentators on Judges said this, the narrator leaves little doubt that Jephthah actually sacrificed his daughter. The language of burnt offering elsewhere in scripture always refers to a literal sacrifice. And then another Old Testament scholar, Barry Webb, said, So that's one argument, the wording. But number two is the narrative tone.

The passage is somber. It is tragic. It is not celebratory. It reads like a catastrophe, not a consecration. I mean, you would think that if your child were gonna serve the Lord in a special way the rest of their life, there would be some celebration in that. Some reason to rejoice. But there's none of that here. It's all tragedy. And the emphasis is on grief, not service. Again, the words of Jephthah in verse 35.

Alas, my daughter, thou hast brought me very low. This sounds like an irreversible loss, not merely a change of life direction. But another argument used is the broader context of judges. What does the whole book of Judges show? It shows the moral and spiritual decline of the people. It shows how did the people in that land of Canaan were becoming Canaanites.

This was the very thing that God warned them against, why they were to keep the law. So they would not be influenced by the culture around them. And so by this point, however, in the history of Israel, Israel was acting more like a pagan nation than the chosen people of God. And human sacrifice, though forbidden, was practiced by surrounding cultures. Did the law forbid human sacrifice? Of course it did in Deuteronomy 12.

But that doesn't mean that they were living by the law of God. In fact, the whole point of the book of Judges is how they were rejecting the law of God. And they weren't walking in the law of God. And again, a quote from an Old Testament scholar, in this instant, Jephthah was neither rash nor pious. He was outrightly pagan.

And we already saw in chapter 10 that Israelites worshipped Milcom, the Ammonite god, and Kimesh, the god of the Moabites, whose leaders have been known to offer children in sacrifice. This is part of what they did. And so, Jephthah, we could say here, approaches God like a pagan worshiper. If you will deliver me, then this is what I'll do. This is not a covenant, it's a contract.

I think that this is really, sadly, this is referring to human sacrifice. I think the wording of it, the context of judges, and all of that, I think this is referring to the terrible tragedy of human sacrifice, which shows, again, how the culture had corrupted Israel at that time, and how that even the leadership was at times acting like pagans rather than acting like the people of God. So we talked about the mystery of the vow. Let me just talk to you a little bit quickly about the mistakes of the vow.

Let's talk about <u>some lessons</u> you can learn from this mistake, and I'll go over them pretty quick here.

1. **You can know the truth and still think like the world.**

2. **Culture does not usually replace your faith, it redefines it.**
   Jephthah didn't abandon the Lord, he reinterpreted the Lord according to the culture. And people had a tendency to do that. We color our theology through the lens of the culture. And we redefine God according to the culture. Jephthah still prays, he still vows, he still speaks religious language, but he reshapes God. in the way that he thinks, like the culture.

3. **Passion without biblical clarity is dangerous.**

4. **When scripture is not your authority, culture will be.**

5. **Careless theology leads to costly consequences.**

6. **Leaders who are shaped by culture will lead others into tragedy.**

Conclusion: You know, sometimes the things that you say can trap you, can trap you when you say it. And if you bind yourself to those decisions, when wisdom says don't, then you're in

trouble. It's far better to break a foolish vow than to keep it and break the law or the heart of God. So, be careful what you say before the Lord. Don't promise what he has not required. Don't bargain for what he's already promised. Don't speak out of pressure, fear, or pride.

Trust in the Lord.

Where Jephthah failed, Christ succeeded. Our Lord Jesus never spoke careless words. He always spoke words of truth, well-thought-out truth. And when Jesus made a vow, he kept that vow. And Jesus was the one who said, not my will, but thine be done. And on the cross, he said, it is finished.

TEXT: Judges 12:1-15

TITLE: INTERNAL CONFLICT TEARS APART THE PEOPLE OF GOD

BIG IDEA:
INFLATED EGOS AND A HARSH SPIRIT ERUPT IN TRAGIC CONFLICT FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

INTRODUCTION:
Last week we saw the tragic consequences of the rash vow made by Jephthah. After he enjoyed a great victory over the Ammonites, he paid the unnecessary price of sacrificing his only child. God wanted to give him the victory by grace through faith; but in his insecurity and his desire to look the part of the macho leader, he stepped over the line of faith into presumption. We saw lessons of commitment – Jephthah was certainly a man of his word; and even more laudatory lessons of submission on the part of his unnamed daughter and her remarkable response; but we also saw a harsh side of a leader who in no way models **the grace** of that great Savior to come – the Lord Jesus, full of grace and truth.

As the narrator wraps up for us the aftermath of Jephthah's great victory, he recounts another sad chapter in the history of God's people. As we see 42,000 Ephraimites slain, we are reminded that the destruction from internal conflict within the people of God can often be greater than that inflicted by our enemies. This should not surprise us because we have all of church history to shock us with the type of suffering and anguish caused by God's children fighting amongst themselves.

What can we learn from this OT account to help us avoid some of the strife that arises not so much from doctrinal differences but from pride and selfish ambition and general politicking for positions of power and influence?

INFLATED EGOS AND A HARSH SPIRIT ERUPT IN TRAGIC CONFLICT FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

I. (:1-3) INFLATED EGOS INSTIGATE TERRITORIAL STRIFE

A. (:1) Internal Insurrection – the Men of Ephraim Assert Their Importance

> "*Then the men of Ephraim were summoned, and they crossed to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, 'Why did you cross over to fight against the sons of Ammon without calling us to go with you? We will burn your house down on you.*'"

Passive – "*were summoned*" – as if to do battle with the forces of Jephthah; does not indicate who did the summoning; very aggressive and threatening as they instigated this internal conflict; there will always be troublemakers who go around stirring up opposition and making some type of argument of how they have been wronged or mistreated

Block: their wounded sense of **self-importance**

Brensinger: Zaphon apparently lies in the Jordan Valley, about five miles northwest of Succoth

(cf. 8:4-9) . . . Once again, Ephraim clearly relishes the type of influential position allotted to it during the judgeship of Ehud (3:27).

Look at the type of extreme threat they make against Jephthah – he has no family left now that he has sacrificed his only daughter; now they are threatening some type of mob vengeance in the form of burning down his house and killing him

cf. territorial strife in the realm of government: different intelligence agencies not being able to cooperate and wanting to each take the glory for any successes; turf battles are commonplace; political jockeying for supremacy;
all about wanting to get credit – even when credit is undeserved

cf. territorial strife in the business world – sales reps are great for this – claiming an account to be their customer when they have never bothered to call on it or develop it; all of a sudden they start to do business because of a connection they have with some other sales rep and the arguing and posturing begins

cf. territorial strife in the church –

B. (:2-3) Inexcusable Indifference – Jephthah Tries to Set the Record Straight

> "*And Jephthah said to them, 'I and my people were at great strife with the sons of Ammon; when I called you, you did not deliver me from their hand. And when I saw that you would not deliver me, I took my life in my hands and crossed over against the sons of Ammon, and the LORD gave them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day, to fight against me?*'"

Block: literally: "I was a man of contention" – first against his own people and then against the Ammonites; life of strife

You had your opportunity – not recorded in Scripture whether Jephthah really reached out to them in this way or not;

Look at the difference in how Jephthah responds to how Gideon responded earlier –
Rather than speaking in self deprecating terms, he emphasizes his own courage and initiative and effective leadership – although he still gives God the ultimate credit for the surprising victory against troops with such superior numbers and weaponry

Your complaint at this point in time makes no sense – you don't have any justification or a leg to stand on

By fighting against the Lord's servant (whom He blessed with victory) you are essentially fighting against the Lord Himself

Illustration (Inrig): I am reminded of the story of the man who came up to D. L. Moody and said, "Mr. Moody, I don't like the way you preach the gospel."

"You know," Mr. Moody said, "I'm always willing to learn. Tell me about the method you use."

"I guess I don't really have one," the man said.

"I'll tell you what," Moody said, "I like the way I do it better than the way you don't do it."

There are a large number of Christians that like to sit on the sidelines and just critique what is being done in different circles. They are not aggressive in living by faith and ministering to others out of a compassionate heart. They are just judgmental because they have certain personal convictions about things should have been done differently. They are a great source of discouragement to those who are faithfully loving others and carrying out the exercise of their spiritual gifts. But they want to claim credit at the end for any success and are jealous if the Lord doesn't seem to need them to carry out His work.

Inrig: It is hard to imagine a more obnoxious attitude. They had reacted to Gideon in a similar way in the middle of this battle with Midian. Ephraim was always brave after the battle. Obviously, the Ephraimites were an arrogant, critical, envious group. Although a small tribe, they were very sure of their own rights, but totally unwilling to accept their responsibilities. They were always ready to fight with their brothers, but never against the enemy. . .

The Ephraimite attitude is destructive and divisive. The church of Jesus Christ does not need grandstand quarterbacks or armchair generals. It needs believers who are willing to take their God-given responsibility to serve God and other believers. It is contemptible to have the heart of an Ephraimite. Do not complain and criticize. Instead, lead by example, encouragement, and edification!

ANTIDOTE: HUMILITY

Romans 12:3ff "*For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another*."

Phil. 2:3-5 "*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus . . .*"

II. (:4-6) A HARSH SPIRIT CAUSES JUDGMENT TO SQUELCH MERCY

Difficulty here: what part is legitimate judgment against sin of which the Lord approved … and where did Jephthah maybe go too far??

A. (:4a) Fighting Should Have Been a Last Resort but Judgment was Necessary

"*Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought Ephraim;*"

It does not seem like Jephthah had much of an appetite for diplomacy in this case; but maybe he had no other choice in the face of the unreasonable fighting attitude of the Ephraimites; they had

come to pick a fight

B. (:4b) Name Calling Never Helps Matters

"*and the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, 'You are fugitives of Ephraim, O Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim and in the midst of Manasseh.'*"

Prov. 15:1 "*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger*."

Note the play on this word "fugitives" throughout the story

Block: the use of the phrase "*fugitives*" is surely intended to touch a sore spot in Jephthah's own experience, generalizing his own painful personal experience as an outcast from his Gileadite countrymen

C. (:5-6) Brethren Should Allow Mercy to Triumph Over Judgment

"*And the Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan opposite Ephraim. And it happened when any of the fugitives of Ephraim said, 'Let me cross over,' the men of Gilead would say to him, 'Are you an Ephraimite?' If he said, 'No,' then they would say to him, 'Say now, Shibboleth.' But he said, 'Sibboleth,' for he could not pronounce it correctly. Then they seized him and slew him at the fords of the Jordan. Thus there fell at that time 42,000 of Ephraim.*"

Think of all of the heartache associated with the Civil War in our country – forget about which side was right or the issues involved; just think of all the bloodshed and the hard feelings the broken relationships; disputes should not come to blows among brethren

Inrig: Jephthah treated fellow Israelites as if they were Ammonites. It is one thing to be provoked to battle, but it is quite another thing to stand at the fords of the Jordan and cold-bloodedly execute Ephraimites. Jephthah was a hardheaded legalist. He had experienced God's grace in his own life, but he did not practice it in his relations with others. He knew nothing of the tenderness and love and grace of God.

Do these fleeing brethren deserve to be executed? In a civil sense, probably Yes … but it also seems like there could have been a place here for extending mercy; 42,000 is a large number to kill; Jephthah is not included in the Hall of Fame Faith annals of Hebrews 11 because of this exercise of military might

Ask a person from New England to say the expression: "I went to the party in my car."
During World War II, the Nazis identified Russian Jews by the way they pronounced the word for corn: "kookoorooza."

Wiersbe: Because of this story, the word *shibboleth* has become a part of our English vocabulary and is now found in our dictionaries. It stands for any kind of test that a group gives to outsiders to see whether they really belong.

Preceptaustin.org: This intertribal war spelled disaster for the tribe of Ephraim, which did not fully recover and achieve recognition and leadership until after the downfall of Solomon. . . For the third time in Judges, the capture of the fords of the Jordan was crucial (v. 5; 3:28; 7:24-25).

ANTIDOTE: GRACIOUSNESS

James 2:13 "*For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.*"

Eph. 4:1-6 "*walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling.*"

Col. 3:12-15 "*So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.*"

III. (:7-15) APPENDIX -- THREE MINOR JUDGES CONTRASTED WITH JEPHTHAH

(:7) Jephthah – 6 Years

> "*And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.*"

Davis: the writer wants us to see Yahweh's deliverance tinctured by human foolishness and human arrogance. It is as if even the winners can't have a clean win. We have salvation here but a marred salvation. The writer is suggesting that if we seek a perfect salvation we will have to look to One greater than Jephthah.

These minor judges are contrasted with Jephthah in four ways:

- longer reign
- greater number of offspring
- greater stability and unity among the neighboring tribes
- specified city of burial

Brensinger: Once the energy of Israel's judges was directed solely at removing foreign oppressors; now Jephthah's activities conclude with the mass destruction of Israelites themselves. As a result, no reference appears concerning the land experiencing peace (cf. 3:11, 30:5-31; 8:28). Instead, Jephthah's judgeship, which for the first time in the book is shorter than the period of oppression that induced it, simply ends in the shadow of Israel's ever-worsening internal fortunes

A. (:8-10) Ibzan – 7 Years

> "*Now Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel after him. And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters whom he gave in marriage outside the family, and he brought in thirty daughters from outside for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years. Then Ibzan died and was buried in Bethlehem.*"

Probably the lesser known town of Bethlehem in Zebulun's territory up north
[Block concludes instead that it is Bethlehem of Judah since no tribal identification is furnished]

B. (:11-12) Elon – 10 Years

"*Now Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel after him; and he judged Israel ten years. Then Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried at Aijalon in the land of Zebulun.*"

Brensinger: the names Elon and Aijalon are, apart from differing vocalizations, exactly the same in Hebrew. The town, therefore, bears the name of the clan that has settled there.

C. (:13-15) Abdon – 8 Years

"*Now Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel after him. And he had forty sons and thirty grandsons who rode on seventy donkeys; and he judged Israel eight years. Then Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died and was buried at Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites.*"

Brensinger: each of these three judges serves for a noticeably short period of time, as do Jephthah and Samson (cf. 10:2-3). By implication, Israel seemingly experiences little stability and has frequent administrative changes.

Motyer: And in the continuing goodness of God, the brief notices of Jephthah's successors focus on the holding together, not the flying apart, of God's people. For three decades Israel will enjoy peace and unity. After Jephthah's six-year judgeship, Ibzan "*judged Israel seven years*", then Elon "*judged Israel ten years*", then Abdon "*judged Israel eight years*". These men are distinguished by the same marks of prosperity that we saw in the case of Jair, and in addition Ibzan arranges marriages for his children which will help to bind Israelite clans together.

CONCLUSION:

Psalm 133 "*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, coming down upon the edge of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon coming down upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing – life forever.*"

Desire of the Lord Jesus expressed in his final priestly prayer:
John 17:21-23 "*that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me; that they may be perfected in unity so that the world may know that You sent Me, and love them, even as You have loved Me.*"

Reality of still living in a sinful world with our own pride and selfishness and ambition – we have to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit and to maintain the peace as much as we are able

INFLATED EGOS AND A HARSH SPIRIT ERUPT IN TRAGIC CONFLICT FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Antidote:

- For Inflated Egos = a right view of yourself from God's perspective -- **Humility**
- For a Harsh Spirit = the **Graciousness** displayed by our Lord Jesus towards each of us

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Where have you seen pride make people unreasonable?

2) Where have you seen inflated egos cause problems in terms of church strife?

3) Is this a situation where Jephthah went too far and was too severe or do you think the Lord was guiding him to execute the Ephraimites to this degree?

4) Why do you think so little is recorded about the rule of certain judges?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gil Rugh: **Jephthah's Vow and Victory**
People of Ephraim – tend to be observers when there is hard work to be done but then complain that they were not included; we take it personally that we were not invited to the battle; complained to Gideon of the same thing; "I did call you and you didn't come!" Jephthah is not now in a negotiating mode; giving the Lord credit for what happened; doesn't let them escape back across the Jordan; guards the fords and makes them verbalize the password; killed 42,000 there on the spot; Jephthah was a good military man; fitting judgment for their sin in not coming out to battle; only judged for 6 years!

Matthew Henry: Those resentments that have the least reason for them have commonly the most rage in them. Jephthah was now a conqueror over the common enemies of Israel, and they should have come to congratulate him, and return him the thanks of their tribe for the good services he had done; but we must not think it strange if we receive ill from those from whom we deserve well. . .
The Gileadites were as true Israelites as any other, and at this time had signalized themselves, both in the choice of Jephthah and in the war with Ammon, above all the families of Israel, and yet are most basely and unjustly called fugitives. It is an ill thing to fasten names or characters of reproach upon persons or countries, as is common, especially upon those that lie under outward disadvantages: it often occasions quarrels that prove of ill consequence, as it did here. See likewise what a mischievous thing an abusive tongue is, that calls ill names, and gives scurrilous language: it sets on fire the course of nature, and is set on fire of hell (James 3:6), and many a time cuts the throat of him that uses it, as it did here, Psalms 34:8. If these Ephraimites could have denied themselves the poor satisfaction of calling the Gileadites fugitives, they might have prevented a great deal of bloodshed; for grievous words stir up anger, and who knows how great a matter a little of that fire may kindle? (2.) This affront raises the Gileadites' blood, and the indignity done to themselves, as well as to their captain, must be revenged.

David Silversides: **Pride and Division**

1. Adding sin to sin (:1-3)

Ephraim's failure – failed in day of battle; did not come to their aid; tendency to be argumentative; 8:1-3; touchiness about their position; desire to be honored as leadership in Israel; **Ps. 78:8-9,67** – rejection of Ephraim; every sin involves unbelief – breaking of God's covenant referenced; they wanted the honor of victory for a battle they failed to join; they would fight against their brethren sooner than giving up their pride; they should have been appreciative of Jephthah; for the sake of their pride men will do the most outrageous things; their unbelief and pride went together; pride and strife go together; this pride led to an internal war; **James 4**; people wanting their own way; wanting preeminence and not submitting to the Word of God; concerned about prestige; humility is a fruit of faith;

2 Pride judged (:4-7)

Diversity of dialect – in His providence the Lord did not allow these to escape judgment;

3. The Lord's Grace and man's Discontent (:8-15)

The Lord continued to raise up deliverers for Israel; purging His people and yet still preserving His people; prevented His people from being crushed by their enemies

2 Lessons:

- Don't think that reason will necessarily quell pride; pride is ridiculous and outrageous
- See that the cause of truth and the future of the church belongs with the Lord

Michael Sullivant: **Three Warnings to Pay Strict Attention To**

How many times have we seen warning labels on things and did not observe them; not just a historical perspective – but warnings we can apply to today

1. Be careful of spiritual pride in your lives

Look back at the lesson from chapter 8 and how they rose up against Gideon just 2 generations ago; wanted to experience the glory of victory without working for the victory; if you just sit you will sour; it is not usually the busy Christian who is critical; President Reagan's 2 plaques which he had on his desk in oval office:

- "It CAN be done" – Phil. 2:13 – through Christ for us
- "There is no limit to what a man can do or where he can go if he doesn't mind who gets the credit"

Ultimate victory came from the Lord as we fulfill our responsibilities; "Trust and Obey";
We are what we are by the grace of God; grace is God's free favor on me, undeserved

Prov. 6:16-19 – list of abominations – things that God hates, abhors, detests; all starts with pride

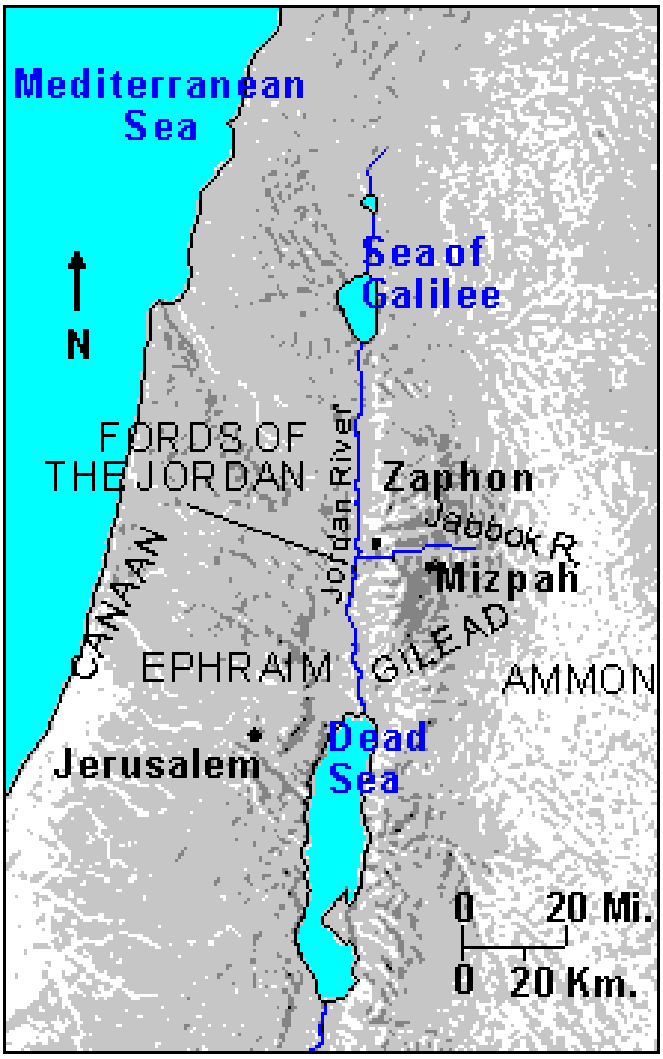
- In serving God even in victory, you will have difficulty; does not mean that God is not working in a positive way in your life; a mistake is evidence that someone was trying to do something; at least try to do something for the glory of God
- Even if no one helps you, you must do all you can to fulfill God's will for your life – Ephraimites would not help Jephthah;
- You must die to both praise and criticism; deflect both to the Lord; we are seeking to please the Lord

2. (:5-6) Be careful of your speech

These Ephraimites tried to lie their way through but their speech betrayed them;
When people hear us talk, do we come across as Christians?

3. Be careful of rebellion in your life

They all lead to misery and destruction



Dr. Jerry Harmon: **The Damaging Sin of Strife**

Introduction: And normally when a division comes, it's not usually all at once. It's not usually over a major doctrine. It's often over something that is small. Perhaps someone feels overlooked, someone feels unappreciated, or words are spoken, or assumptions are made, and then pride steps in. And people, instead of seeking understanding, they begin to take sides. And before long, what was once a unified body now becomes strained. And now there is division.

And it's not the enemy on the outside that's doing the damage, it is the pride that is on the inside. That's exactly what we see here in Judges chapter number 12. The people of God are not being attacked by a foreign nation. What we're used to seeing that in studying Judges is that foreign nations on the outside are the ones that are attacking. But here, that's not the case.

What's happening here is that Israel is turning on each other. Israelites are fighting among each other. Ephraim is offended. And Jephthah responds. And Jephthah doesn't respond really well to the offense, and what begins as wounded pride ends up devastating the whole nation and weakening the whole nation.

Because pride, when it takes root, will weaken the people of God.

Big Idea: **Three important lessons about the damaging sin of strife**

I. Strife begins from pride. Vs. 1-3

They were angry because they were not sharing in the glory of the victory that Jephthah had just won. Now you might remember it was the same group that came to Gideon in chapter 8 after Gideon won the battle against the Midianites. A pattern … They had nothing to do with the battle, but they still wanted to share the glory of it now.

Shows how quickly pride turns to violence. Those are shocking words. There's no attempt by these guys to understand what was going on. There's no inquiry about the events, no patience, just accusation and a threat to Jephthah. It tells you again, pride doesn't stay emotional, it becomes destructive. When pride is wounded, it doesn't just complain, it lashes out.

II. Strife spreads by provocation. Vs. 4-6

A. The Rebuke – 4 Arguments in response to the men of Ephraim

1. **Pride distorts the facts**. You were needed, but you didn't come. Vs. 2
   Their anger is not based on truth. It's based on perception.'
2. **Pride delays action**. I had to act because the situation was urgent. Vs. 3
   He says, look, I didn't have time to wait around to see if you were coming. I mean, I sent the message. You didn't respond. We couldn't wait. Lives were at stake. I had to act.
3. **Pride seeks recognition** rather than being humble. The tribe of Ephraim developed this reputation for being unreliable. They had a way of missing messages and not responding and not showing up when it mattered.
   It's God who gave the victory. Vs. 3
4. **Pride fights the wrong enemy**. Why are you fighting your own people?

Notice the response of Ephraim. Responded with insults. Vs. 4
That's classic pride. When truth confronts it, it doesn't repent, it retaliates. And that's exactly what we see here. Jephthah gives them the facts and they retaliate with strong words. The Bible says in Proverbs 15 one, a soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger. And again, Proverbs 12, 18. There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword. Their words weren't neutral. Ephraim's words were very wounding. And so they invited conflict.

Because of their insult to Jephthah and his men, the result was civil war breaks out. Now, Jephthah was the wrong guy to insult, because he was a warrior. Be careful who you insult. because he didn't take it well, and he ends up doing battle against these Ephraimites, and this got so bad, think about this, that 42,000 of them died. 42,000, think about that. It started out with an angry confrontation, and it escalated to a civil war where 42,000 people died. That's terrible.

III. Strife saps our power. Vs. 7-15

His was very short, and it was really marked with conflict, a rash vow, a broken home, a civil war, His leadership didn't end in peace, it ended in pain. Strife didn't just affect the people, it affected the leadership as well. You see, division doesn't just wound relationships, it divides leadership. Leaders that are constantly dealing with strife are losing the ability to lead effectively. Instead of building, they're managing conflict. Instead of advancing, they're putting out fires. So strife will debilitate leadership, but also it diminishes impact.

So what's the cure for all this? Humility, just simple humility. It's having the mind of Christ.

Philippians 2.3, let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves. The whole chapter two in Philippians is all about the selflessness of Christ, the mind of Christ.

Instead of demanding recognition, Christ humbled himself. Instead of provoking wrath, he bore the wrath of the Father upon himself. Instead of strife, he made peace through his blood. Paul points to Christ, he points to the life of Christ with respect to how to live a selfless life, how to live a humble life, and he is our example.

It's okay to disagree, but division is not okay.

TEXT: Judges 13:1-25

TITLE: SAMSON – AUSPICIOUS BEGINNINGS

BIG IDEA:
THE AWESOMENESS OF OUR GOD CALLS FOR A LIFE OF SEPARATION FROM SIN UNTO HIS SERVICE

Awesome = both wonderful in His person and in His works

INTRODUCTION:

In our lessons regarding the life of Samson we are going to discover that promising beginnings do not guarantee an exemplary life. Samson proves to be a contradictory character. As with Jephthah, he is included in the Hebrews 11 Hall of Faith Heroes – God used him in a mighty way to bring partial deliverance from the oppression of the Philistines. His God-given strength remains legendary. In that regard he is even a type in some respects to the ultimate deliverer who would grant us freedom and new life for all of eternity. But a model of godly character he is not. Despite his many advantages in life --which begin with this auspicious divine birth pronouncement and fulfillment – he proves to be a spoiled, self-indulgent individual who stumbles into all sorts of self-made disasters. Yet we don't want to paint him in too negative a light since he ruled for 20 years (15:20) and the incidents that have been recorded for us seem to highlight more of his flaws than his contributions.

9 REASONS THIS DIVINE BIRTH PRONOUNCEMENT WAS AUSPICIOUS:
(propitious, favorable, bright)
Thus we should expect Samson to fulfill a significant role in God's overall program for His people

I. DESPERATE NATIONAL TIMES

> "*Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, so that the LORD gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years.*" (:1)

Continued apostasy and unfaithfulness; degenerating cycles of disobedience and discipline

God's covenant people had been assimilated into the surrounding Philistine pagan culture; they were no longer even crying out to the Lord for deliverance; were not living as a separated people; they did not realize how close they were to losing their identity as the people of God – the ones through whom blessing would eventually come to the entire world through the Promised Seed – the coming Messiah – this present deliverer, Samson was only a type; he was called to a life of separation – speaks to our need to be separate from defilement and dedicated to the service of our Lord and God

Motyer: To be given "*into the hand of the Philistines*" (13:1) meant that Israelites fraternized readily with them, that even intermarrying with them was acceptable, that the once-patriotic men of Judah would rather be rid of Samson than rock the boat of harmonious relations with them (15:9-13), and that even the Lord had to be "*seeking an occasion*" against them because every snag of hostility between them and Israel had been carefully smoothed over (14:4). In other

words, Israel had totally sold out to the values of the Philistine world.

Renewed demonstration of the grace of God; taking the initiative to reach out to them in their oppression and send a deliverer

Forty years is a long time – entire generation

Philistines clustered in five major cities along the coastal plains: Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron

Tom Fuller: The Philistines (means "*wanderer*") came from Greece around the same time as the Israelites (1,200 BC). Their occupation of the coastal area of Southern Palestine (a word which comes from "Philistine") sped up nearer the time of Samson and they disputed land with Israel around the territory of Dan and Judah.

They lived in 5 city-states, ruled by local "kings." They were a powerful people and oppressed Israel until David conquered them (1 Samuel 13). They were experienced in metallurgy and so their technology gave them an edge militarily.

How desperate are we for full deliverance from our Lord Jesus Christ?

II. DESPERATE FAMILY SITUATION

> "*And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had borne no children.*" (:2)

This was a major disgrace and source of sorrow; no one to carry on the family name; wife is unnamed in this account; unable to fulfill her potential in life as wife and mother; this was a condition that had caused growing hardship over a long period of time – maybe she was beyond normal child-bearing years

Significance of tribe of Dan: along with Judah – most closely vulnerable to the threat of the Philistines

Wiersbe**:** The tribe of Dan was originally assigned the land adjacent to Judah and Benjamin, extending to the Mediterranean Sea. Since the Danites weren't able to dislodge the coastal inhabitants, however, the tribe relocated and moved north although some of the people remained in their original location. Zorah is about fifteen miles from Jerusalem in the foothill country near the border of Philistia.

Brensinger: Central to the story of Samson's birth is the barrenness of Manoah's wife. This is so, not primarily because of the pain and anguish associated in the ancient world with such a childless condition, but because of the recurring theological importance of barrenness in the Bible. Time after time, moments of grave difficulty serve as the context for **wonderful conceptions**. In this way, emphasis once again falls squarely upon God's role in the unfolding of salvation history.

Other biblical examples of God promising to open the womb in significant circumstances:

- Sarah / Isaac Gen. 11:30; 18:1-15; 21:1-7 – three men; one was the Lord
- Hannah / Samuel 1 Sam. 1:1-28 -- Eli

- Elizabeth / John the Baptist Luke 1:5-25, 57-66 – angel of the Lord
- Mary / Jesus Christ Luke 1:26-38 – angel Gabriel

S. Lewis Johnson: The troubles that come to us are frequently the things that prepare us for the things that God has for us in the future. And no doubt, the winds of trouble that had come to Manoah's wife in her barrenness were designed to cast her upon the Lord, so that when the time came, and God in his own supernatural way, gave her a child, she would be the kind of mother for him that God intended that he should have.

III. DIVINE MESSENGER = THE ANGEL O F THE LORD = PREINCARNATE CHRIST

- Identified in vs. 3 by the narrator as "*the angel of the Lord*" – looks like a man
    - Angels did not appear as heavenly winged creatures in these interactions

- First characterized by the woman as "*a man of God*" (:6)

- Progression from Manoah just interacting with the messenger as a man of God to recognition that this was the angel of the Lord = God Himself

Who delivers the pronouncement (authoritative announcement) makes all the difference

> "*Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, 'A man of God came to me and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. And I did not ask him where he came from, nor did he tell me his name.*

Very **awesome** ("*to cause fright*") in terms of His appearance; impressive; majestic; glorious; transcendent – the Awesomeness of God lies at the heart of this passage

Origins **incomprehensible** – "you cannot unscrew the inscrutable" – there are those things where it is a glory to search out what God has revealed and then there are the secret things which belong to the Lord

Name incomprehensible
Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible: He received no answer since names were considered the essence of a person, and to know the name would have carried with it the ability to control the person.

IV. DIVINE CONDITIONS OF SEPARATION PRESCRIBED FOR BOTH MOTHER AND CHILD = NAZIRITE – SEPARATED FROM THE WOMB

> "*Then the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman, and said to her, 'Behold now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son. Now therefore, be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing. For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb;*'" ("3-5a)

> "*But he said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and now you shall not drink wine or strong drink nor eat any unclean thing, for the boy shall be a*

Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'" (:7)

"So the angel of the LORD said to Manoah, 'Let the woman pay attention to all that I said. She should not eat anything that comes from the vine nor drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing; let her observe all that I commanded.' " (:13-14)

Why did the angel of the Lord appear to the woman instead of to Manoah?

This passage supports the pro life position in the abortion debate – no question that life and personality begin at conception; while the child was still in the womb, these conditions of remaining pure from defilement needed to be observed by the mother

Usually Nazirite vows were voluntary – here they were being commanded for both the mother and the child

Usually Nazirite vows were temporary – here they are permanent until the death of the child

Separation unto God is in view for His purposes

Tom Fuller: Nazirites (Numbers 6:1-12) had three special restrictions:
1. They were to abstain totally from "fermented drink" including grapes and raisins;
2. They could not have their hair cut; and
3. They could not come near a corpse.
This is important because Samson violates all three of these prohibitions at some time in his life.

Prohibition against cutting the hair put last – these 4 chapters are the account of Samson breaking all three of these vows

Inrig: Obviously, Samson was going to be a striking figure, because nothing represented his position more than the hair on his head. Men could not see whether he drank wine or was around the dead, but they could see his long, braided hair and know that this man was set apart in a special way to God. In his Nazirite life-style, as well as in his birth, Samson was unique.

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary: Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist were the only "Nazirites for life" recorded in the Bible. Before they were born, their vows were taken for them by their parents.
[Interesting to see the parallel types of prophetic announcements of their births]

V. DIVINE MISSION ANTICIPATED

"*and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines.*" (:5b)

Yet in the fulfillment of his mission, Samson is going to act much more like an isolated individual – trying to exact vengeance against his own personal enemies. You don't see him rallying the troops or exerting that type of cooperative leadership. The story is all about Samson himself. Almost in spite of himself, the Lord uses him to carry out His intended mission.

VI. (:8-14) DIVINE REITERATION OF THE PRONOUNCEMENT TO MANOAH

"*Then Manoah entreated the LORD and said, 'O Lord, please let the man of God whom Thou hast sent come to us again that he may teach us what to do for the boy who is to be born.' And God listened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again to the woman as she was sitting in the field, but Manoah her husband was not with her. So the woman ran quickly and told her husband, 'Behold, the man who came the other day has appeared to me.' Then Manoah arose and followed his wife, and when he came to the man he said to him, 'Are you the man who spoke to the woman?' And he said, 'I am.' And Manoah said, 'Now when your words come to pass, what shall be the boy's mode of life and his vocation?'*"

Answer to prayer – even though more details and instruction are not given – just an instant replay of what had transpired earlier

Manoah prayed and yet the angel of the Lord returned to his wife first

Significance of "I am" designation – cf. gospel of John

Give me more details about the child's calling and mission

VII. (:15-23) DIVINE WONDERS VALIDATE THE PRONOUNCEMENT

A. (:15-16) Wonders Witnessed in the Context of Worship

"*Then Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, 'Please let us detain you so that we may prepare a kid for you.' And the angel of the LORD said to Manoah, 'Though you detain me, I will not eat your food, but if you prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the LORD.' For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the LORD.*"

B. (:17-20) Wonders Validate the Messenger and Thereby His Pronouncement

"*And Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, 'What is your name, so that when your words come to pass, we may honor you?' But the angel of the LORD said to him, 'Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?' So Manoah took the kid with the grain offering and offered it on the rock to the LORD, and He performed wonders while Manoah and his wife looked on. For it came about when the flame went up from the altar toward heaven, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their faces to the ground.*:

Tom Fuller: The Angel doesn't really answer Manoah's question about his name except to say that it is "beyond understanding" or "wonderful". The root Hebrew word means "to be great, to be separate, difficult." It's the same word used in verse 19 "the one who works wonders" or "he did a wondrous thing" (KJV). I think the implication is that you are dealing with such a higher being than you that it would be useless to try to explain it to you.

Psalm 139:6

Dale Ralph Davis: There the psalmist is being overwhelmed by God's intimate, detailed, comprehensive knowing of him – his activities, his purposes, his words (before they're spoken!). . . . *That knowledge is too wonder for me – it is so high I cannot reach it!* . . . it's beyond me . . . it's so grand I can't pull it all in . . . There is a mystery, a depth, a surpassingness about God that we can never fathom, comprehend, or touch (cf. **Rom. 11:33**). This does not mean we cannot

know God; it means that though we may know God truly we do not know him exhaustively. He has given us sufficient but not complete knowledge of himself. There are still limits imposed; we do not have total knowledge of his character and ways.

C. (:21a) No Need for More Revelation

"*Now the angel of the LORD appeared no more to Manoah or his wife.*"

All questions have been answered; God has the final word
What a privilege that we have the Word of God – we are not dependent on such isolated glimpses into the mind and will of God.
2 Peter 1:16-21 "*the prophetic word made more sure*" – more privileged than those who witnessed the Transfiguration account

VIII. (:24-25) DIVINE PRIVILEGES EXTENDED IN INTIMATE FELLOWSHIP

A. (:21b-22) Frightening Realization

"*Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the LORD. So Manoah said to his wife, 'We shall surely die, for we have seen God.'*"

Manoah knew some scriptures – but did not have a good grasp on the context and application … needed help here from the theological insights of his wife

B. (:23) Fallacy in Manoah's Fear

"*But his wife said to him, 'If the LORD had desired to kill us,*
Just as in the case of John the Baptist, the Dad (Zacharias) needed reassurance; it was the Mom that more favorably received the promised announcement

Look at the privileges we enjoy every day and take for granted:

1. Privilege of Intimate Worship

"*He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands,*"

2. Privilege of Witnessing Divine Wonders

"*nor would He have shown us all these things,*"

S. Lewis Johnson: So what he did was to make fire arise out of the rock, consume the animals of the sacrifice, and then as the flame shot up towards heaven, the angel went over in the flame and ascended unto heaven himself. He did wondrously, his name was wonderful and he exhibited some of the characteristics of who he was and what he could do in what happened. . .

Now at a time like this it's good to have a wife like Manoah had. It's wonderful to have a wife like her, and not a wife like Job's. I'm sure that Job's wife would have given him encouragement in his disappointment. She would have said, "It's true and it may be soon." [Laughter] But, there are some people who say that women cannot reason. But the facts are that women often perceive a great deal better than men. Mr. Spurgeon has put it, "They look at once into a truth while we're still hunting for our spectacles." and that was certainly the case here, because Manoah's wife understands fully the significance of the appearance of the angel long before it had dawned upon Manoah.

3. Privilege of Receiving Divine Revelation

"*nor would He have let us hear things like this at this time.*"

In fact there could be no fulfillment of the divine promises were Manoah and his wife killed in judgment

IX. (:24-25) DIVINE FULFILLMENT

A. (:24a) Birth of Samson

"*Then the woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson;*"

Tom Fuller: Samson is born. His name could come from the word for "*sun*." A new light for Israel.

"*sun's child*" – born only a few miles from Beth-Shemesh, the city whose name means "*house of the sun*"

B. (:24b) Blessing Upon Samson

"*and the child grew up and the LORD blessed him.*"

Similarly, Look at the brief parallel descriptions of the childhood of:

- John the Baptist -- **Luke 1:80** "*And the child continued to grow and become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.*"
- Jesus Christ – Luke 2:40 "*The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.*"

C. (:25) Beginning of Samson's Exercise of Power by the Spirit of God

"*And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.*"

We must never forget that the power Samson exhibited came from the Spirit of the Lord working through him

Implications from this passage about the doctrine of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Zeisler: The Hebrew word *to stir* is an interesting word. It originally meant to tap or agitate something. It could be used of the way a cowboy in a rodeo gouges his bronco with his spurs to try to make him buck harder and higher so he gets more points for riding him. This is not a word that suggests God was wooing Samson, teaching him, and persuading him. Samson was stirred into action, but not as a partner in God's plans.

Tom Fuller: I think there is a clue to Sampson's character here. He lived at Mahaneh-dan, which is the place where 600 Danites camped earlier (though it appears in Chapter 18). These men were part of an armed raiding party that was completely godless and rebellious. I'm not saying there is a direct connection but I wonder if Sampson's rebellion might not have been influenced here.

CONCLUSION:

THE AWESOMENESS OF OUR GOD CALLS FOR A LIFE OF SEPARATION FROM

SIN UNTO HIS SERVICE

Awesome:

- In His Grace – the unfaithful Israelites deserved to be case off
- In His Person – His name is Wonderful, incomprehensible
- In His Promises – and then in His faithful fulfillment
- In His Works – changed lives – so that He transforms us into living sacrifices as a trophy of His grace and power

With this divine birth pronouncement and its fulfillment, Samson certainly had an auspicious beginning … and we know he finished with a bang. In the next several weeks it will be sad to see how he failed to measure up to his Nazarite calling and yet how God still used him when he acted in faith and dependence upon God's power.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) In what ways is Samson different from the preceding 11 judges?

2) How has God specialized in doing the impossible in your life – demonstrating His awesomeness?

3) Why isn't the name of Manoah's wife recorded here for us when she is so prominent?

4) What implications and support do you see in this passage for the doctrine of the Trinity?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Bruce Rzengota: The Philistines were great in military strength of their day. They controlled the secrets of smelting iron. Bronze was previously used to make tools because its melting point is lower than that of iron. The Iron Age began with the development of higher temperature smelting techniques. During the Iron Age, the best tools and weapons were made from steel, an alloy consisting of iron with a carbon content between 0.02% and 1.7% by weight. Steel weapons and tools were nearly the same weight as those of bronze, but stronger. However, steel was difficult to produce with the methods available. Therefore, many Iron Age tools were fashioned of wrought iron.

They subdue Israel with different weapons.

* Trade
* Intermarriage
* Business and Pleasure

If the Israelites wanted an axe or a plough, they had to go to the Philistines to get it, they had to go to their oppressors.

Steve Zeisler: **The Hollow Hero**

I'm convinced that the Lord intended Samson to be an object lesson for everyone who would read his story and to anyone in his generation who would look clearly at him. The nation's character was distilled to a single person in Samson; he was living out the thinking and the spiritual insensitivity of the entire nation around him. The fact that God would choose this man to be their leader was saying something about the people: that they were out of control that they were protected by the power of God who was faithful to a faithless people, that they did not love righteousness. He was teaching them to see themselves by focusing on this individual. It's consistent with our psychology to focus on an individual heroic figure to try to gain insight about who we are as a people. That's why the Lord brought Samson into being, to be a picture of what the nation was really like.

This phenomenon ought to make us think a bit, and it is one of the reasons why moral, thoughtful people are so concerned about our nation. What quality of leaders is rising to the forefront? Which people do young folks in this nation look up to as heroes to be emulated? The political figures in a democracy represent the people who elevate them higher and higher and establish them with more and more power. What do our political leaders say about who we are as a nation? What are their values? This is one of the reasons it's important and totally legitimate to ask questions not just about the political positions of individuals, but about what kind of people they are. A candidate's character says something about the electorate who will raise him or her to office.

The church needs to ask hard questions. Why have so many of our public leaders and clearly identified spokespersons turned out to have so much ugliness in their private lives? The individuals who receive the focus say something about the general condition of life in the larger group. And the church as well as the nation has a great deal to be concerned about, it seems to me, given the quality of people who are being raised to leadership.

I'm convinced God deliberately put Samson in leadership as a hollow man, a man who was all externals, a man of power and authority who had absolutely no control of his inner life. He was buffeted by his appetites and whims. Until the last chapter of his life he never knew anything of humility or a knee bent before God, never knew anything of wisdom, never loved anything but himself and never cared for purity. He was a man who was telling the nation what it had become. He also serves as an important way for us to ask questions about ourselves. Are we, too, people whose relationship to God has everything to do with externals and nothing to do with internals? Are we, too, impressed by dramatic displays of power that never result in formation of character? These questions are well worth asking.

David Silversides: **The Lord's Doings Through Samson**
Not a full account of the life of Samson – he judged for 20 years; focus seems to be on his sins; but he was used of the Lord mightily against Israel's enemies; near anarchy and sin of every kind in Israel at this point;

1. Separated from the womb (:1-5)
Look at how the Lord can answer prayers above all that we ask or think; evidently they were believers; must have been praying for a child;
The Angel (Messenger) of the Lord – looked like a man; that is the norm for angelic appearances in Scriptures; something about him that convinced woman he was no ordinary man; this was Christ; Judges 6:12,14 appeared to Gideon – identified as Jehovah; Mal. 3:1; Gen. 48:16;
Significance of Samson shown by this divine announcement;

A Nazarite – Num. 6:1-8; 3 marks:

- No fruit of the vine; nothing to blunt alert and focused separation to the Lord;
- long hair -- 1 Cor. 11:14 – for the woman it was a sign of submission to the man; for the Nazarite a special symbol of submission to the Lord for the Nazarite
- Separation from unclean – from dead bodies; Devotion to the Lord; but as a judge he came into contact with those enemies he killed
-

2. The great Parental Question (:6-7)

Manoah believes the testimony of his wife and yet as the head of the house he wanted to hear directly from the Lord what his responsibility is; "*What shall we do unto the child that shall be born?*" This largely had to do with the special calling of his son; but every parent should have this attitude; children are gift from God; not enough for the father to put the bread on the table and leave nurturing to the mother;

(:9-14) The Lord Answers: Too often Christian parents simply follow accepted norms; when we are asked to give an account it will not be enough to say that we did what everyone else did; this praying and asking was before the child was even born

3. (:15-23) The Lord Shows Himself and Confirms His Word

This was more than a man; declining food because he did not need it; exerting authority to tell Manoah to make sacrifice not in Shiloh but in this unauthorized place

This worship was received by this Angel of the Lord because he is God;

Received our worship; Revealed promises to us – the fulfillment of presupposes that we shall live!

4. (:24-25) The Mighty One

Spirit of the Lord working through Samson ("mighty" or "strong")

Strength resides in the Lord; his neglect led to the withdrawal of the power of the Spirit from him

Application: Manoah and his wife were obscure people in the nation of Israel; yet God used them

Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible: Samson was a somewhat enigmatic figure, with very little similarity to other judges. He resembled them only by being possessed of the Spirit, which seized him suddenly and drove him to violent action, exhibiting itself in extraordinary strength. But his exploits were always individual. He called no one else to his aid, led no troops to battle, and was in no sense a national leader. In fact, all he did was to avenge his own personal wrongs on the Philistines. Yet the key to the understanding of Samson is to be found in these individual exploits. They are of such extra-ordinary proportions that Samson must be understood as a heroic figure, living in a heroic age, and recorded in here in lit.

S. Lewis Johnson: **Bright Beginning**

If there is a man whose life exhibits carnality, and worldliness, it is Samson's. But there is no doubt that, at the end of his life, he had a triumphant exit. Speak about a grandiose exit, he had a grandiose exit and it was a magnificent expression of faith. I'll always look forward to studying the last chapter of Samson's life because it is such a manifestation of faith by a man who had a bright beginning, a very disappointing manhood, but a magnificent death. So the tragedy of Samson's life closes in triumph.

He was man who was characterized by great power, but also great passions, which he found almost impossible to control. He reminds me at least, of the words that the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians chapter 9, when he exhorts the Corinthians about the necessity of self-control. Paul wrote, "And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible." The idea of self-control, that's of tremendous importance in the Christian life. And Samson illustrates the failure of men to control their own talents and capacities. . .

It was lawful for wine to be drunk. It was lawful in New Testament times. Around the Lord's table, wine evidently was served, for men who misused the Lord's table became drunk from the drinking of the wine at the Lord's table. Wine, it is called in the Old Testament "the blood of grapes" because the connection between wine and blood is obvious. They both are red, they both are flowing liquids. But also, wine is said to be a symbol of joy. And so the fact that wine is used at the Lord's table is designed to express the joy of redemption. And when a person takes the wine in remembrance of our Lord's sufferings for us, he's taking that which indicates joy and which suggests the blood of Christ by which we have the forgiveness of sins. But the Nazarite is to abstain from wine. Separation from any kind of sensual enjoyment is the ideal.

And then further, he was to abstain from the cutting of his hair. You would think that today there are lots of Nazarites around. [Laughter] But of course this was to go much further than just the physical long hair. It was, in a sense, the separation from the pride of appearance, suggested by that.

And he was also to abstain from touching any dead body, and it's said in the context of the death of someone in the family, which suggests that there was separation from the dearest earthly relationships, in order that God may have the full and complete place in life, that he really should have in the lives of all of us.

Gary Inrig: What is biblical separation? The answer is not to be found in either of the extremes. Isolation, external separation, is no more biblical than assimilation. We are not to be chameleons, conforming to our environment, but neither are we to be hermits, sealed off from the world of men. . .

The other major judges … led a repentant people against the enemy. Samson, by contrast, fought alone, and his battles were very personal affairs. Not once was he joined in battle by so much as one man. Therefore, when we study his life and see his enormous failures, we need to balance our disgust with the recognition that Samson singlehandedly exposed the dangers of the Philistines and held back their control of Israel. He was the one man of his day who realized that a person or nation could not compromise and remain free to serve God. . .

Samson's separation turned out to be purely negative. He vowed not to take wine, not to cut his hair, and not to go near the dead. He knew the code, but he did not understand the concept. The point of the Nazirite vow was not separation from, it was separation unto.

Brensinger: The Lord is the one who *works wonders* (13:19). Believers celebrate their awe through song, as in this piece from the Russian Orthodox liturgy: "Who is so great a God as our God? Thou art the God who doest wonders" (*Hymnal*: 62; cf. 149, "Great God of Wonders").

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **Hope in Dark Times**

Introduction: And when the night is long, his mercy is already at work. God gives his people hope in times of darkness. That may be that you're here tonight and you're going through your

own time of darkness. I hope that this narrative will speak to you and encourage your heart as you read through it.

Big Idea: **Three ways that God offers hope in times of darkness that we experience.**

I. God begins his work when we've given up.

A. Corruption

Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord. How many times have we read this phrase in the book of Judges? And we read it yet again. Israel doesn't seem to really learn. They keep repeating the same cycle of sin.

B. Correction

And in the second part of verse one, it says, and the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines 40 years. This time God raises up the Philistines as their oppressors to correct Israel. A formidable foe.

C. Complacency

And after four years of being under bondage, they kind of just really adjusted to that life. They'd just given up. The enemy was so formidable that they just said, what's the use? Maybe at first they began to try to fight against the Philistines, but they saw that resistance was futile. And so they just simply gave up. And they're absolutely complacent during this time.

D. Compassion

Israel may have settled, but God did not. God is not accepting this. God stepped into the silence and he chose a nameless barren woman to bear a son. Look at verse two.

Samson is consecrated to the Lord, but what we're going to find out is he's not consistently committed to that calling, and he'll compromise it himself. He's set apart, but he doesn't live that way. He's marked by God, but frequently he will disregard that mark. But that's why this Nazarite vows matters so much in this story.

Because of Samson's lack of full devotion, he'll become a partial deliverer of Israel. He will begin to deliver Israel. Look in verse number five at the latter phrase where it says, and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. The emphasis is on the beginning, and that's not accidental. It signifies that Samson's role will be real, and yet it'll be incomplete. He'll be unable to finish the task. Like all the other judges, he's going to fail, and that's the thing that we see often in the book of Judges. God is showing that this system in itself is insufficient. The judges are not getting the job done, and that's why we see the refrain, in those days there was no king in Israel, And every man did that, which is right in his own eyes.

II. God speaks his word when we don't understand. Vs. 6

A. Confusion

Like Manoah, we hear something that seems like it might be from God, but we don't really understand. We don't really know for sure. And so we want confirmation. And so what does Manoah do? He turns his confusion into prayer.

B. Confirmation – vs. 9-10

So really what we see here is that in our confusion, God's word is our compass. He points to the word of God. We don't need to see the whole row, we just need to see the next step. When you

don't know what God is doing, open his word and let him remind you of who he is. And find your instruction from the word of God.

III. God reveals his presence when we feel small.
Notice several things that God did for Manoah and his wife when he manifested this presence.

A. God redirected their focus to worship. Vs. 16
The best thing you can do in your time of darkness is to worship the Lord. When God reveals himself, he reorients our lives around this idea to worship him.

B. God reminded them of his incomprehensibility. Vs. 17-18
We need to remember that, and we need to remember in our time of darkness that God does nothing arbitrarily. God has a plan for everything that he does, and it's wonderful. But also God revealed his glory in a way they could not ignore.

C. God brought them to a place of humility and reverence.
The presence of God should produce a holy fear, not a casual familiarity, but a holy fear.

D. God gave them assurance through his grace.
If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering. Hey, genius. That's the reason for the burnt offering. And if God were gonna kill us, he wouldn't have received that burnt offering that he just received. In fact, when the angel ascended in the flame, that was a visible sign that God had accepted them and not condemned them.

But a second reason she gives is that the Lord is the one who revealed these things to us. Look at verse 23, but his wife said unto him, if the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering in our hands, neither would he have showed us all these things. So the fact that, you know, the implication being why would God communicate anything to us if he were gonna turn it right around and then kill us?

That doesn't make any sense. And then finally, a promise was given to both of them that that what? They're gonna have a special child. How are they gonna have a special child if they're both dead?

In our times of darkness, God will come to us in his presence and he will manifest himself unto us to bless us, to give us his grace, to turn our fear into worship and to turn our despair into God's presence and our weakness doesn't destroy us, it strengthens us.

TEXT: Judges 14:1-20

TITLE: SAMSON'S FATAL FLAW – PART OF GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL PLAN

BIG IDEA:
THE FATAL FLAW OF SELF INDULGENT LUST BECOMES THE STIMULANT GOD USES TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PROVIDENTIAL PLANS FOR HIS PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION:

We tend to think way too highly of ourselves. We think that our plans and accomplishments are so important. While we forget that God constantly acts behind the scenes to accomplish His Sovereign, Providential Plans for His People – regardless of our level of maturity or godliness. This is no way excuses our sinfulness or minimizes the need for us to walk worthy of our high calling; but it does remind us of the wisdom and power of God in accomplishing His purposes. In our story today, it appears that Samson is the main character – acting out his self indulgent lusts with no regard for his divine mission and calling. Yet in actuality, God is the central figure in writing this chapter of the history of His people and His grace and mercy in untangling them from their adulterous relationship with the pagan world.

Last week we saw Samson's **Bright Beginning** – he seemed to have everything a Jewish boy could want – parents with a spiritual focus, a divine calling from the highest possible authority, divine enablement with the power of the Spirit operating in his life … we should expect great things from Samson as we enter into Chap. 14. But what we find is a man with a **Fatal Flaw**.

THE FATAL FLAW OF SELF INDULGENT LUST BECOMES THE STIMULANT GOD USES TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PROVIDENTIAL PLANS FOR HIS PEOPLE

5 CHARACTER DEFICIENCIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE FATAL FLAW OF SELF INDULGENT LUST – COUPLED WITH THE KEY TO GOD WORKING BEHIND THE SCENES

The five sections of the narrative are marked by the same phrase: "*went down*" (*yarad*)

S. Lewis Johnson: Did you notice in verse 1 the Scripture says, "Then Samson went down to Timnath," in verse 5 it says, "Then Samson went down to Timnath." You know when you get out of God's will, it is always down. It's remarkable how often the geography of the Bible agrees with the spiritual truth lying back of it. When Abraham went to Egypt it was to go down into Egypt. When God spoke to Jonah and said, "Jonah I want you to go to the Ninevites and I want you to preach against them," we read, "Then Johan as he turned from the will of God went down to Joppa." When you get out of the will of God in the Bible it almost seems that the geography's trying to teach us some lessons. It's down, always down when you move from the will of God.

I. (:1-4) POOR JUDGMENT – NO SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY OR SELF CONTROL

A. (:1-2) Reacting Superficially

"*Then Samson went down to Timnah and saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters*

of the Philistines. So he came back and told his father and mother, 'I saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife.'"

Why was Samson going down to Timnah – what good could come of rubbing shoulders with the enemies of God? Nation of Israel was so compromised at this point in their history that you couldn't tell any difference between the friends of God and His enemies. The line of demarcation, of separation, had been erased.

We raise our children with the intention that they will learn to make good life decisions. We want them to grow in wisdom and in good judgment. We want them to value our counsel and yet learn to trust the Lord in decision making. Samson struggled in this area.

Brensinger: Timnah was a town located six miles west of Zorah. Although Timnah fell within the Danites' original territorial allotment (Josh. 19:42), it clearly has since come under expanding Philistine control. That Samson can travel there so freely, however, suggests what the overall narrative repeatedly implies elsewhere: relations between the Philistines and the Israelites are relatively cordial. A mixed marriage is not unthinkable.

Inrig: for years they had been praying for him that God would use their son to deliver Israel. Now their son, whom God had called to live a life of separation, wanted to marry one of the enemy. That was not only a betrayal of his calling, it was direct disobedience to the Word of God, because God had told His people not to intermarry with the pagan people who lived in the land (**Deut. 7:3-4**).

Controlled by the lust of the eyes – **1 John 2:16** – living by sight instead of by faith

B. (:3) Rejecting Sage Counsel

"*Then his father and his mother said to him, 'Is there no woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?' But Samson said to his father, 'Get her for me, for she looks good to me.'*"

There were other pagan cultures that practiced circumcision as Israel did – although not with the significance of the divine covenant. The Philistines were particularly a despised enemy because they were uniformly uncircumcised.

Rejection of biblical authority (**Ex. 34:12-16**; **2 Cor. 6:14-18**)
Rejection of authority of his parents
Rationalizing that he has peace about this decision; he knows what he is doing

This warning against mixed marriages should be sobering to us today; we all know of situations that are not pleasing to the Lord; yet there is no fear of the Lord; people just continue on and are unwilling to repent … serious business; do you think you can take fire into your chest and not be burned?

Inrig: He was a man who rejected authority . . . He was a self-confessed spiritual anarchist, a man who had adopted the social values of his pagan contemporaries. Cf. 17:6; 21:25 . . . He also refused to practice self-discipline . . . Self-discipline is not denying our drives and desires; it

is submitting them to the will of God and to the timing of God. Samson's mistake was not in being attracted to that woman, but in failing to submit his sexual drives to the Lord's control. His purpose is to produce rich fruit in my life, and that comes as I refuse to walk in the flesh, and, instead, put myself under the control of His Spirit. In His time, there is a wonderfully satisfying harvest.

S. Lewis Johnson: Now notice what he says too. He says it twice, "*She's right in my eyes. Get her for me for she's right in my eyes*." Later on in verse 7, "*So he went down and talked to the woman and she looked good to Samson*" or "*she was right in Samson's eyes*." Now the Scriptures in the Book of Judges say that one of the difficulties with the people who lived at this time was that every man did that which was right in his own eyes. That was God's condemnation of this particular age. And here is the Nazarite, the man of God, saying "*She looks good to me, she's right in my eyes.*"

Block: The repetition of the verb "*to see*" in vv. 1-2 demonstrates that he is operating on appearance and for personal interest, not on principle or for the greater good.

C. (:4) Reaping Sovereign Providential Purposes

"*However, his father and mother did not know that it was of the LORD, for He was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. Now at that time the Philistines were ruling over Israel.*"

Look at how the Lord can take even our poor judgment and sinful choices and bring about His sovereign purposes; in reflecting upon our past we should not despair, but repent and ask the Lord to use us now in the situation we find ourselves

God can use evil for greater good; life of Joseph (**Gen. 50:20**); cross of Christ (**Acts 4:28**)

Key: God is at work behind the scenes to stir up strife between His people and the pagan, uncircumcised Philistines – Peaceful co-existence with the world is never God's plan for His people

II. (:5-6) SECRET LIFE – NO TESTIFYING TO GOD'S POWER

"*Then Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came as far as the vineyards of Timnah; and behold, a young lion came roaring toward him. And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, so that he tore him as one tears a kid though he had nothing in his hand; but he did not tell his father or mother what he had done.*"

Wiersbe: it appears that Samson left the main road (and his parents) and went on a detour into the vineyards; and there a lion attacked him. A vineyard was a dangerous place for a man who was not supposed to have anything to do with grapes.

Dale Ralph Davis: We must not ignore such previews. David argued that if Yahweh made him able to wipe out the lions and bears that attacked Jesse's sheep, he would also give him guts and skill to knock off the King Kong of Philistia (1 Sam. 17:34-37). . . No, you needn't expect lions to come roaring out of vineyards; but you should notice this pattern in God's ways. He will, by some smaller episode of deliverance or provision, show you how adequate he is so that you will

be encouraged to rely on him in upcoming and possibly more demanding circumstances.

Key: God provides both the attacking lion and the supernatural power to enable Solomon to tear it to pieces

III. (:7-9) BREAKING COMMITMENTS – NO HEART DEDICATION TO THE LORD

A. (:7) Vetting His Potential Bride on the Wrong Grounds

"*So he went down and talked to the woman; and she looked good to Samson.*"

B. (:8-9) Violating Vow of Separation

"*When he returned later to take her, he turned aside to look at the carcass of the lion; and behold, a swarm of bees and honey were in the body of the lion. So he scraped the honey into his hands and went on, eating as he went. When he came to his father and mother, he gave some to them and they ate it; but he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey out of the body of the lion.*"

Curiosity caused him to turn aside to see what had become of the dead lion carcass

Broke the Nazirite vow involving avoiding contact with the dead – was careful not to tell his parents the full story

Brensinger: Typically, bees avoid rotting bodies, preferring drier and more amicable conditions.

You would expect flies and maggots, but not bees; the hand of God has prepared this test for Samson

Samson caused his parents unknowingly to become defiled as well – although they acted in innocence –not knowing the source of the honey

Key: God overrides the normal laws of nature to set up a test which will appeal to Samson's unbridled appetites

IV. (:10-18) DIVIDED LOYALTIES – NO RELATIONSHIP OF TRUST

A. (:10-14) Delivering the Riddle

1. (:10-11) Setting the Scene

"*Then his father went down to the woman; and Samson made a feast there, for the young men customarily did this. And it came about when they saw him that they brought thirty companions to be with him.*"

Inrig: the word indicates a drinking bout, a drunken celebration. . . So he broke that part of his vow which repudiated strong drink.

Block: When they saw Samson, they were afraid of him. Not taking any chances, they surrounded him with bodyguards. . . Yahweh was determined to create tension between Israel and the Philistines.

Talk about a big wedding party – makes for an expensive rehearsal dinner

2. (:12-13) Proposing the Prize

"*Then Samson said to them, 'Let me now propound a riddle to you; if you will indeed tell it to me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes. But if you are unable to tell me, then you shall give me thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes.' And they said to him, 'Propound your riddle, that we may hear it.'* "

3. (:14) Reciting the Riddle

"So he said to them, 'Out of the eater came something to eat, And out of the strong came something sweet.' But they could not tell the riddle in three days."

Samson thought he was betting on a sure thing – not exactly a fair, sporting proposition to introduce to his new friends.

B. (:15-18) Deciphering the Riddle

1. (:15-17) Applying Pressure

"*Then it came about on the fourth day that they said to Samson's wife, 'Entice your husband, that he may tell us the riddle, lest we burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us to impoverish us? Is this not so?' And Samson's wife wept before him and said, 'You only hate me, and you do not love me; you have propounded a riddle to the sons of my people, and have not told it to me.' And he said to her, 'Behold, I have not told it to my father or mother; so should I tell you?' However she wept before him seven days while their feast lasted. And it came about on the seventh day that he told her because she pressed him so hard. She then told the riddle to the sons of her people.*

When you marry someone, you marry their relatives also –

Wiersbe: First the Philistine woman enticed him (14:1), then she controlled him (v. 17), and then she betrayed him (v. 17), which is the way the world always treats the compromising believer. Samson could kill lions and break ropes, but he couldn't overcome the power of a woman's tears.

2. (:18) Winning by Cheating

"*So the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down, 'What is sweeter than honey? And what is stronger than a lion?' And he said to them, 'If you had not plowed with my heifer, You would not have found out my riddle.'*"

F. Duane Lindsey: In calling her a "*heifer*" he was ridiculing her for her untamed and stubborn spirit (cf. Jer. 50:11; Hosea 4:16).

Disparaging reference to his new bride

Ray Pritchard: Samson at this point pictures a believer going further and further away from God. If you simply look at his long hair he appears to be dedicated to God, but his lifestyle tells another story. On the outside he looks like a man of God, but on the inside he's no different than a man of the world.

That's what eventually happens when you drift away from God. You start out innocently enough, testing the water, carefully wandering where you don't belong, following your emotions to see where they will lead you, casually going your own way, oblivious to those who would warn you of the danger ahead. Eventually your spiritual commitments don't mean much to you anymore. You end up like Samson, looking spiritual on the outside, but worldly on the inside.

Key: God was able to use the tears of Samson's nagging bride to frustrate Samson's confidence in his own ingenuity by pressuring him to reveal the secret to his riddle. This exposed the divided loyalties of his bride and drove a wedge between Samson and the Philistines.

V. (:19-20) REVENGEFUL ANGER – NO ENJOYMENT OF LONG LASTING RELATIONSHIP

A. (:19) The Hulk Sulks

"*Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of them and took their spoil, and gave the changes of clothes to those who told the riddle. And his anger burned, and he went up to his father's house.*

S. Lewis Johnson: the sovereign work of God fulfilling his purpose, because he is, through Samson, he is seeking an occasion by which a struggle may develop between his chosen people Israel, and these unbelieving Philistines. And in this struggle he will deliver the children of Israel from the Philistine yoke.

Dale Ralph Davis: Our impulse is to attribute the slaughter of Ashkelon to Samson serving "in the flesh" . . . but the text will not allow us to do that. . . Here now was the occasion Yahweh was seeking (v. 4). Here is the climax of the story . . . what we are dealing with is not Samson's temper but the Spirit's power. If this seems brutal, we must simply live with it. We have already seen that when Yahweh delivers his people he does not always dip his saving acts in Clorox and sprinkle them with perfume. To be delivered from evil will frequently be messy.

If we are not offended at how vicious Samson's deed is, we may stumble over how small it is. If Yahweh is saving Israel, what difference can thirty Philistines make? Yahweh promised only that Samson would *begin* to save Israel from the Philistines (13:5). Here in Ashkelon is the beginning of the beginning. We must not despise it.

[I disagree with argument by Davis – Spirit of God did cause Samson to take action; but that does not mean his intentions and motives were pure. He was still driven by revengeful anger – not righteous indignation.]

B. (:20) Strife Over the Wife

"*But Samson's wife was given to his companion who had been his friend.*"

Key: God has created enmity between the Philistines and Samson. The process of the deliverance of His people from Philistine oppression begins with the slaying of 30 Philistine

men.

CONCLUSION:
Seeing these five associated character deficiencies, is it really worth it to pursue the lusts of the flesh?

Ps. 32:8-9 *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you. Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, otherwise they will not come near to you."*

Block: Superficially we are fascinated by Samson's exploits, but at the deep level we must see the hand of God in these events. With brilliant irony the narrator describes a free spirit, a rebel driven by selfish interests, doing whatever he pleases without any respect for his parents and with no respect for the claims of God on his life, but in the process he ends up doing the will of God.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What role should the parents play today in helping to secure a wife for their son or a husband for their daughter?

2) Where have we made judgments based on just external factors and followed our appetites rather than the will of God?

3) How do we combat the temptation to self indulgent lust?

4) How can Samson be acting in selfish anger and still be used by the Spirit of the Lord to accomplish God's overall plan?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Inrig: Samson may well have been the strongest man who ever lived. . . Yet, for all his strength, Samson was a weak man, because he never learned to control himself. Proverbs 16:32 could have been spoken directly to Samson: "He who rules his spirit [is better] than he who captures a city." Although he was fully capable of singlehandedly capturing a city, Samson did not discipline and rule his own desires and lusts. As a result, for all his strength, he was a weak man.

[Contrast Samuel and Samson – **1 Sam. 15:22-23**]

S. Lewis Johnson: **Divine Providence and the Dangers of Ungodly Allowances**
The reason for Samson's strength and his failure lay in the central feature of his life, he was a Nazarite. Remember, God said he should be a Nazarite from his birth. Now the vow of a Nazarite was the vow to abstain from fleshly lusts. The details are insignificant for us right at

the moment, but it was a vow to abstain from certain fleshly lusts and to live for God. Now his physical strength was only a symbol of his spiritual strength. It was not that Samson was strong naturally. He was strong supernaturally. He was strong because he was a man of God and God's power, through the Holy Spirit, worked in him. If you saw Samson bounding over the hills in Palestine, and saw the seven locks of his head flowing in the breeze, the impression that you got as an Israelite would have been, there goes a man who is obedient to Jehovah. There was crystallized in Samson the strength that comes from obedience to God. That's the impression that his life was to have in the nation Israel. So the secret of his strength lies in his submission to the will of God. And the secret of his failure lies in the same thing, his failure to have God as the central power in his life, and when he breaks his oath, or when he removes himself from his position as a Nazarite, he becomes like any other man.

Block: the picture the author paints of this man is ugly. Samson is disrespectful of his parents, callous toward his Nazirite calling, without any loyalty to his own people, compromising in his ethic, rude to his wife, flippant with his tongue, and driven by lust, eroticism, and appetite. The only way in which good can come from this man is by Yahweh overpowering him with his Spirit and driving him to the task of delivering his people, something he is not naturally inclined to do.

Ray Pritchard: *The truth will set you free* but it will hurt you first.

In a flash I realized why most people have trouble growing spiritually. It's not because we don't know the truth. My soul, we've got so much truth it's running out our eyeballs. We hear the truth at church, on the radio, from our friends, from books and tapes and seminars and concerts. And we get it straight from the Bible. That's not our problem. If just knowing the truth were all we needed, we'd all be candidates for permanent sainthood.

"The truth shall set you free … but it will hurt you first." For some, that will be the most important thing you hear in this series on Samson. Take some time to think about it. It's the most important truth I've heard in the last two years.
So here's the question: Are you willing to let the truth hurt you? Whenever you decide to say, Yes, the words of Jesus will come true for you and the truth will at last set you free.

No, the problem runs deeper than that. We know the truth but we don't want to let it hurt us so we deflect it, ignore it, deny it, attack it, argue with it and in general avoid it in any way we can. Our approach is like a spaceship being attacked by aliens. We put up the force field so we can deflect the incoming bullets of truth. After awhile we get so good at deflection that the truth never gets through to us at all.

We hear the truth … we know the truth … but we deflect the truth so it never gets close enough to hurt. Therefore, we are not set free.

And that's why …

We're still angry

We're still stubborn

We're still bitter

We're still greedy

We're still arrogant

We're still filled with lust

We're still self-willed

We're still unkind

We refuse to let the truth hurt us!

Are You Willing To Let The Truth Hurt You?

Samson thought he was free, but he wasn't. He was in bondage to his own uncontrolled emotions. Strangely enough, the truly free man is not the man who does whatever he wants. The truly free man is the man who has dared to let the truth hurt him and in the process of being hurt, he has been set free.

John Hanneman: **Infatuation Blues**:
This story is probably the ultimate example of what the Bible calls the "*lust of the eyes*." In the Garden of Eden, Eve "*saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes*" (Gen. 3:6). Our eyes stimulate our desires. We see something, we are tempted, and we want to possess it. . . Compare this verse with the words of Deuteronomy 6:18, "*You shall do what is right and good in the sight (eyes) of the LORD, that it may be well with you and that you may go in and possess the good land which the Lord swore to give your fathers.*" This word "right" is used of straightness, of uprightness. When we do what is "right" in our own eyes as opposed to what is "right" in the eyes of the Lord, then we have changed the standard. We have veered away from the directions which God has given to us. . .

The desire to marry can be very strong. But so too can the temptation to be swept away by infatuation. The temptation to become involved physically before marriage fans the flame and distorts the vision even more. The temptation to marry a non-believer in order to satisfy the inner desires of the heart is very strong. The temptation to make a relationship work because we are tired of being single can be especially deceptive. Given the choice of following God, or having the possibility of romance and marriage, many choose romance. . .

Despite his desires, his manipulation, etc., Samson did not end up with the girl. God saved him despite himself. He kept Samson separate for his own purposes. God is faithful to us. Like a parent who walks behind a child who is learning to walk, God protects us from danger. Sometimes, he allows us to fall and we suffer scrapes, but other times he catches us and saves us from disaster. We desire what seems right in our eyes, but what may look right often is not right, so God intervenes for his glory and our benefit.

Al Mohler: "**Transforming Culture: Christian Truth Confronts Post-Christian America**":

A remarkable culture-shift has taken place around us. The most basic contours of American culture have been radically altered. The so-called Judeo-Christian consensus of the last millennium has given way to a post-modern, post-Christian, post-Western cultural crisis which threatens the very heart of our culture.

Reflecting on the changes experienced by America over just the last half-century, John Howard of the Rockford Institute described the end of World War II as "a half century and a whole civilization ago." We know how he feels. Looking back on the America of 1945, it does look like a whole civilization has passed.

The evidence is overwhelming. Moral relativism has so shaped the culture that the vast majority of Americans now see themselves as their own moral arbiter. Truth has been internalized, privatized, and subjectivized. Absolute or objective truth is denied outright. Research indicates that most Americans believe that truth is internal and relative. No one, the culture shouts, has a right to impose truth, morality, or cultural standards.

In the courts, revisionist legal theories and psycho-therapeutic issues have replaced concern for right and wrong. Justice has become a political argument, not a societal standard. Righteousness is rejected as a concept, a relic of an older age of a common morality, nuclear families, and Victorian dreams. The discourse of a revealed morality commanding right and forbidding wrong is as out of place in contemporary America as a log cabin on Wall Street.

The most influential sectors of society are allied in furthering the process of social disintegration. Television and mass culture have so shaped the American consciousness that many citizens are now intellectually unable to sustain a serious moral conversation. Those who attempt to engage the American people in a serious moral conversation are met with immediate dismissal or - more worrisome still - blank stares.

In candor, we must admit that the Church has been displaced. Once an authoritative voice in the culture, the Church is often dismissed, and even more often ignored. At one time, the influence of the Church was sufficient to restrain cultural rebellion against God's moral commandments, but no longer. The dynamic of the culture-shift marches onward. On the protestant left, leaders have simply capitulated to the revisionist ideologies and surrendered revealed morality. On the evangelical wing, however, the greater temptation is to affirm biblical morality in principle, and wink at infractions as matters of merely individual interest.

The displacement of the Church is characteristic of the process of secularization, which has now so thoroughly altered the landscape of American culture. Though sociologists point to continuing high levels of religious activity and statements of belief - both of these in sharp contrast to other western nations - the truth is that very little of this activity translates into authentic discipleship, active church membership, and bold Christian witness.

The worldview of most Americans is now thoroughly secularized, revolving around the self and its concerns, and based on relativism as an axiom. We Americans have become our own best friend, our own therapist, our own priest, and our own lawgiver. The old order is shattered, the new order is upon us.

What, then, is the Church to do? At the onset, we must disallow both optimism and despair...though the direction of the culture may be dramatically downward, we have no right to assume that this slide cannot be corrected.

We must understand that, in the Christian worldview, culture is important, but never ultimate. Beyond this, we acknowledge that God is sovereign, and His providence rules over all.

To contend for Christian truth in the face of this culture is to discover what it means to be a member of a cognitive minority; that is, a minority which quite evidently thinks and lives differently than the larger culture. To confess the truths of God's Word in the late twentieth-century America is to take on a counter-cultural posture; to stand against the stream and to press against the grain.

The mission of the Church in the midst of this cultural crisis is to proclaim the truth and reach out to the casualties. In the face of rampant relativisms, the believing Church must proclaim the truth of God's Word, the permanence of His commands, and the reality of His judgment. Given the cultural context, this task is one of the most important tests of Christian faithfulness. To proclaim biblical truth to this culture is to risk social isolation, outright rejection, and, in some cases, potent attacks.

The Church which proclaims that adultery, premarital sex, and homosexuality are inherently and unquestionably sinful will quickly discover what it means to be cut off from the cultural mainstream. The preacher who takes on the divorce culture and takes his stand for the enduring covenant of marriage will run into direct confrontation with society's attraction to "open marriage" and what some now describe as "serial monogamy." The Christian who stands in defense of the unborn will be told that her voice is unwanted, unheeded, and unwelcome - and in no uncertain terms.

(http://www.sbts.edu/mohler/fidelitasPrint.php?article=fidel016)

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **Strength Wasted on Selfish Desires**
Introduction: God gave Samson some amazing gifts, and yet he seemed to squander all of them. And all of the victories that Samson had, as we read in the book of Judges, they were really all personal victories. They really were really selfish victories. Of all the judges, God gave Samson more ability and talent and strength. than any of those judges, and yet he seemed to do less for God than any of the judges.

Now, as we come to chapter 14, the first thing I notice is that there's a distinct contrast between the spirit of Manoah and the spirit of Samson. And I think that this is purposeful on the writer's part. I think the writer wants us to feel the tension here in this contrast. Manoah reveres God's presence and Samson is going to ignore it. Manoah felt small before God, Samson will feel strong without God. And Manoah responded with worship at the presence of God. Samson will respond with self-indulgence. Manoah received assurance through grace. Samson will presume upon God's grace.

Big Idea: **Three ways in which Samson wasted his gifts and his calling**.

I. When we choose our own way instead of God's way. The Lust of the Eyes
The expression went down and went up occurs often in the Samson narrative. He's spending a lot of time in Philistine territory. He wants to marry one of the daughters of the enemy. This was a betrayal of his calling. It was an act of disobedience to God's word.

Deuteronomy 7.3 forbids this. But Samson wanted what he wanted. And really in verse number three, Samson says, you know, get her for me because she pleases me well. And that one verse, that single sentence epitomizes the whole life of Samson. Samson was sensual.

He's doing what is right in his own eyes. Whatever he sees he wants, that's what he gets. And so this is really the lust of the eyes. He said, she pleases me well. Essentially, he liked what he saw. But he was also a selfish man. This was all about Samson. This is what he wanted. Notice how many times the word me is used here. In verse two, he says, get her for me. And then in verse number three, get her for me, for she pleases me.

We have to see that Samson is really a perfect representation of the whole nation of Israel. Really, he's a mirror of Israel, when you think about it. He personifies the whole nation. That's the key to understanding the Samson narrative. Samson is a mirror of the whole nation. Samson is miraculously born of the will of God. Israel is miraculously born of the will of God. Samson is called to a high life of separation and devotion to God, just like Israel was called to a high life of separation and devotion unto God.

Samson is rash, opportunistic, and immature, even so the nation of Israel has those same qualities. Samson is drawn to foreign women, like Israel is drawn to foreign gods, committing spiritual adultery. before the Lord. Samson experiences bondage and oppression at the enemy. Israel will experience bondage and oppression at the enemy. Samson cries out to God in his oppression and Israel cries out to God in their oppression.

Samson is blinded and even so Israel is blind. And Samson is abandoned by God and doesn't seem to know it. Israel is also abandoned by God and doesn't seem to realize it. Samson disregarded the law of God, and Israel disregarded the law of God. Samson refuses correction when it comes, Israel refuses correction when it comes.

Sometimes God will give a nation a leader to mirror that whole nation, to show what the nation is. And this is what Samson is. He's sensual, he is selfish. But another thing we see about Samson, he was superintended. Look at verse number four.

God can overrule sin, but he never excuses sin. God can use the sinful choices that other people make and use it to accomplish his glory, but at the same time, he doesn't approve it. He doesn't say it's okay. God can use sin to accomplish his purposes all the while hating that sin and never approving of it.

II. When we cross boundaries God has set. The Lust of the Flesh

Samson does not have much regard for the boundaries that God set in his life. And there are three indicators in the text that tell us this.

A. The Detour thru the vineyard – vs. 5

A vineyard is a dangerous place for a man that's supposed to have nothing to do with grapes. Num. 6:1-4. Shows us his careless attitude towards the vows that God has given him.

B. The Defilement with the lion – vs. 5-9

Bees do not normally inhabit cadavers. That's not something that you normally see. That's normally something that you would see flies or maggots, sorry, do that, and that's a disgusting picture. But that's the insects you would see that would inhabit a dead cadaver. But apparently this lion's carcass had dehydrated and decayed quickly and dried up and provided a hospitable environment for these bees to live and produce honey. And so here Samson sees this carcass with this bees honey in it, this hive of bees there.

Here again is an example of Samson placing his fleshly appetites above the call of God. This is the lust of the flesh. He valued the taste of honey drawn from this dead carcass more than he valued the vow to God. He places satisfaction above separation here. And so again, this is another compromise for Samson.

And you know, failure begins with small steps. It begins with small compromises that people

make. People don't start out outright denying God. They start out by walking through a vineyard, going someplace they shouldn't go, being around things that they shouldn't be around and putting their hands on things that they shouldn't be putting their hands on. That's how it all starts here. We place ourselves in tempting circumstances and wonder why we fail and we compromise. Charles Spurgeon said, we seldom fall suddenly. Sin is a downgrade and we slide with our eyes open. And that is so very true.

Now, an ordinary Israelite wouldn't eat this. Even an ordinary Israelite, not to mention someone who had a Nazarite vow, but an ordinary Israelite would have feared defilement. This would have been unclean to them. So they wouldn't have done it.

III. When we care more about ourselves than God's glory. Vs. 10-20 – Pride of life
The rest of the chapter revolves around Samson's wedding. And again, I see three indicators that Samson cares more about himself than God's glory.

A. Samson's revelry – vs. 10
Now this all seems innocent enough, but if you look at the Hebrew word for feast here, it's the word which means a seven-day drinking party. And this would no doubt have involved drinking wine. And so this too is a violation of his Nazirite vow to abstain from wine.

There's a pattern. because Samson took honey from a corrupt environment, and Samson is gonna take a wife from a corrupt environment of the Philistines. So this really touches on a wider theme in the book of Judges, and that is Israel trying to coexist with that which is unclean and that which is forbidden. We see this pattern over and over again.

B. Samson's riddle – vs. 12
Samson just makes a joke out of what should have humbled him, what should have caused him to be fearful before the Lord. And again, what it demonstrates is that consistently Samson is treating holy things carelessly and casually.

Now again, this whole story exposes a flaw in Samson's character. He's physically strong, but he's morally weak. He can tear apart lions, but he can't resist the wiles of a woman. And so Daniel Block again writes, Samson displays a tragic inability to recognize spiritual danger in intimate relationships.

God is acting for Israel despite Samson's motives. And so we need to understand that. The Spirit's coming really highlights God's grace, not Samson's worthiness. And that's what we need to see here. Samson might act in anger, but God is going to use that anger to judge the Philistines and begin the work of delivering his people through that one event.

Note this, whenever we use our strength, our giftedness, what God's given us for our own selfish purpose, we're always gonna end up empty. Always you'll end up empty. Again, Samson was all about him. It was all about him addressing his wounded pride. He wasn't concerned about the glory of God, he was concerned about his own pride. Samson's strength had become a tool for self-expression, not for God's divine purpose.

TEXT: Judges 15:1-20

TITLE: SAMSON'S SUPERNATURAL STRENGTH

BIG IDEA:
THE LORD ANOINTS ISRAEL'S DELIVERER WITH SUPERNATURAL STRENGTH TO EMERGE VICTORIOUS IN THE CYCLE OF RETALIATION WITH THE CONNIVING UNCIRCUMCISED PHILISTINES

INTRODUCTION:
We have already had glimpses of Samson's supernatural strength. He killed the lion with his bare hands. He turned the tables on the gloating Philistines by slaughtering 30 of their leading men to provide the sets of clothing he had bet in the riddle episode. But now his supernatural strength becomes the focal point of the narrative as we witness this cycle of retaliation between him and the Philistines. Opposition and enmity continue to grow and will reach their peak in the concluding scenes from Chapter 16.

Chapters 13-16:
- **Bright Beginning (13)**
- **Fatal Flaw (14)**
- **Supernatural Strength (15)**
- **Final Feat (16)**

Samson is an unusual solitary figure. You never see him leading troops into battle. He always acts alone. In fact both the Philistines and his own people engage in treachery against him:
- Philistines turn his wife against him
- Father-in-law gives his wife away
- Israelites try to bind Samson and deliver him over to the enemy

Nobody is on Samson's side. But we must understand that the Lord has anointed him to carry out a special mission of beginning to deliver the Israelites from the Philistines. Even when Samson acts from mixed motives of revenge and retaliation – as if he is just carrying out a personal vendetta – the Lord is providentially using the situation to motivate Samson to strike in judgment against the enemies of God's people. In that sense his actions are justified and even commendable – which is why we see him included in Hebrews 11 in the Hall of Faith Heroes.

Wiersbe: Quoting Spurgeon: "His whole life is a series of miracles and follies."

Difficult person to figure out – not very likeable and yet a heroic figure that must depend upon God for the exercise of his supernatural strength.

THE LORD ANOINTS ISRAEL'S DELIVERER WITH SUPERNATURAL STRENGTH TO EMERGE VICTORIOUS IN THE CYCLE OF RETALIATION WITH THE CONNIVING UNCIRCUMCISED PHILISTINES

I. (:1-3) THE PROVOCATION TO AROUSE GOD'S ANOINTED DELIVERER TO ACTION INVOLVES TREACHERY THAT BREEDS RETALIATION

A. (:1a) Joyful Intentions

"*But after a while, in the time of wheat harvest, it came about that Samson visited his wife with a young goat, and said,'I will go in to my wife in her room.'"*

Samson sulked for awhile – mad at his wife and mad at the Philistines -- but finally renewed his passion and pursuit of his wife; he cooled down in one sense – but in another sense his passions heated up

Question: had the marriage been consummated during that seven day celebratory feast? Or had Samson left her in her father's house before consummating the marriage? In any event, he viewed her as his legal wife.

There's nothing that says "I love you" like bringing a gift of a young goat – no edible flower arrangements back in those days

Look at Samson's approach:

- Demanding
- Arrogant
- Possessive

B. (:1b-2) Jilted Reversal – Plan B Proposed

"*But her father did not let him enter. And her father said, 'I really thought that you hated her intensely; so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please let her be yours instead.'"*

Lev. 18:18 – against the law of God – plus Samson was not about to settle for second best

Jilted = to drop a lover capriciously or unfeelingly

Father was taking his life in his hands and yet he knew it would be wrong to break up the existing marriage of his eldest daughter

C. (:3) Justified Retaliation

"*Samson then said to them, 'This time I shall be blameless in regard to the Philistines when I do them harm.'"*

They have it coming – why didn't he focus his fury on the father?
Inrig: It was not the girl or the father who had caused the problem, but the Philistines who had blackmailed the girl into betraying him.

Wolf: Later on David did not hesitate to take back his wife Michal forcibly, though Saul had given her to another man (1 Samuel 25:44; 2 Sam. 3:13-15). . . When David's son Absalom later set Joab's barley field on fire, it proved an effective way of achieving his purpose (2 Sam 14:29-32).

Block: Samson is about to fulfill Yahweh's design expressed in v. 4, rupturing the comfortable relationship then existing between the Israelites and the Philistines. Samson's words create an atmosphere of anticipation, and the reader wonders what this irascible character will do next. No doubt the narrator finds great amusement in telling the sequel.

II. (:4-8) THE POWER BESTOWED ON GOD'S ANOINTED DELIVERER WREAKS DEVASTATION ON THE WICKED

A. (:4-5) Power Demonstrated in the Devastation of Philistine Property

> "*And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took torches, and turned the foxes tail to tail, and put one torch in the middle between two tails. When he had set fire to the torches, he released the foxes into the standing grain of the Philistines, thus burning up both the shocks and the standing grain, along with the vineyards and groves.*"

Foxes – possibly "jackals" that travel in packs -- it refers to a person who cheats or swindles a man in an underhanded way. But God is specializing in doing the impossible here – so not out of the question that these may have been foxes.
Must have been very difficult to hunt down and capture and contain 300 foxes or jackals

Shocks = just harvested grain
Standing grain = still growing in the field
Grain, grapes and olive oil represent the staples of their agricultural economy

James Jordan: Samson is expressing here a desire for a child. The kid of the goats is a regular symbol for a child, and by bringing a kid, Samson made his intentions known. . . The Philistines, by wrecking his marriage, have prevented him from enjoying the seed that would be lawfully his. In response, then, Samson destroys their harvest, their standing grain. They have ruined his harvest, so he ruins theirs.

Wiersbe: Samson could be fairly sure that their fear of the fire and their inability to maneuver easily would make them panic. Thus they would run around frantically in the fields and ignite the grain. The fire then would spread into the vineyards and olive groves. It was a costly devastation.

B. (:6-8) Power Demonstrated in the Devastation of Philistine Life

1. (:6) Vicious Targeted Payback

> "*Then the Philistines said, 'Who did this?' And they said, 'Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he took his wife and gave her to his companion.' So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire.*"

Samson can never keep anything secret from the Philistines – they figured out his riddle by plowing with his heifer; here they had no problem coming up with the identity of the one who had ravaged their fields and vineyards

Wife had tried to avoid this very fate of being burned by being disloyal to Samson … but she ended up being toasted anyway

Fire seems like their solution to everything

Block: People may act as though they are masters of their own fate, but the hidden providence of God is able to bring the schemes and conduct of human beings upon their own heads and thereby accomplish his own purposes. On the other hand, the Philistine rationalization sounds hollow. Needing a scapegoat, the Philistines may simply have concluded that it was easier to deal with the Timnite than with Samson. In their response, however, the Philistines underestimated

Samson's commitment to his wife, his preparedness to retaliate, and his physical strength. . . . Samson always acts as if each destructive action will be the last, a disposition that is confirmed only when he destroys himself with his enemies.

James Jordan: There is a contest of fires in these two chapters. . . Fire is the sign of judgment, man's or God's (as we saw in Judges 1:8 and 17). Whose fire is stronger? . . . The war is a war of religions, of Gods.

2. (:7-8) Vengeful Retaliation in the Form of a Great Slaughter

> "*And Samson said to them, 'Since you act like this, I will surely take revenge on you, but after that I will quit.' And he struck them ruthlessly with a great slaughter; and he went down and lived in the cleft of the rock of Etam.*"

"*ruthlessly*" = "leg on thigh" = a wrestling metaphor for a ferocious attack, a total victory

In all of these types of payback scenarios, you ask yourself, when does the killing stop? Violence breeds violence – we are not told how many died in this "great slaughter" – but since things are building to a crescendo, I would imagine significantly less than 1,000

He understood the Philistines would come looking for him and he found a good secure hiding place

III. (:9-17) THE PURSUIT OF GOD'S ANOINTED DELIVERER BY BOTH THE PHILISTINES AND THE ISRAELITES DRIVES SAMSON TO ACT ALONE IN ACCOMPLISHING HIS DIVINE MISSION

A. (:9-10) Hunted by the Philistines

> "*Then the Philistines went up and camped in Judah, and spread out in Lehi. And the men of Judah said, 'Why have you come up against us?' And they said, 'We have come up to bind Samson in order to do to him as he did to us.'*"

Lehi = "jawbone"—perhaps the location was given this name after the incident

Search and destroy mission to find Samson and take him out; interesting that they come to solicit the help of the men of Judah – expecting that these cowards will not want to engage them in battle but will turn over their divinely appointed champion

B. (:11-13) Handed Over by the Israelites

> "*Then 3,000 men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam and said to Samson, 'Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us?' And he said to them, 'As they did to me, so I have done to them.' And they said to him, 'We have come down to bind you so that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines.' And Samson said to them, 'Swear to me that you will not kill me.' So they said to him, 'No, but we will bind you fast and give you into their hands; yet surely we will not kill you.' Then they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.*"

Wiersbe: The passion to get even seemed to govern Samson's life. His motto was, "*As they did*

unto me, so have I done unto them."

Inrig: We can get to the place where we have so accommodated ourselves to the world's life-style and to the presence of sin in our lives that we just accept them and give up the fight. We do not really believe things will change, so we give in. . . he did everything to keep from attacking his own people. That is why he made them promise not to kill him, but he submitted to the ultimate degradation of having them tie him up and hand him to the Philistines. Only a deep-seated commitment to God's purpose in his life could have made Samson deal so kindly with people who were mistreating him so badly.

Brensinger: Oppression here is not so much violent and turbulent as it is subtle and even acceptable. From all indications, the Israelites have not essential arguments against being in this weakened state! Apparently, falling far short of the Lord's intentions cause no serious concern.

Look at how Satan used Judas to betray Jesus and hand him over to be taken into custody by the authorities and tried on trumped up charges to then be executed – prophecy from Genesis 3 – but a bruising of the heel of the seed of the Messiah who would rise from the dead and crush the serpent's head – death cannot hold the Savior – just as these new ropes melted like flax and dropped from the hands of Samson

C. (:14-17) Helped by the Holy Spirit

> "*When he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him. And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily so that the ropes that were on his arms were as flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds dropped from his hands. And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, so he reached out and took it and killed a thousand men with it. Then Samson said, 'With the jawbone of a donkey, Heaps upon heaps, With the jawbone of a donkey I have killed a thousand men.' And it came about when he had finished speaking, that he threw the jawbone from his hand; and he named that place* ***Ramath-lehi***."

"*fresh jawbone*" – an old one would be too brittle to be effective; probably took this one from a carcass; think of the implications again for his Nazirite vow …

James Jordan: The Hebrew word for "*heap*" is spelled and sounds exactly the same as the Hebrew word for "*ass*." The poem is a very funny pun, comparing the Philistines to asses.

Wolf: The carcasses of donkeys were usually thrown outside the city wall (Jer 22:19), and this kind of disgraceful burial had befallen the Philistines.

Did not need to save the jawbone and make some type of religious relic or idol out of it; it was just the convenient weapon that God allowed him to use at the time; but the power came from the Lord

"*the high place of the jaw bone*" – Jawbone Hill = the mound Samson had made by piling up all the dead carcasses of the Philistines

IV. (:18-20) <u>THE PROVISION</u> TO SUSTAIN GOD'S ANOINTED DELIVERER REINFORCES A STATE OF HUMBLE DEPENDENCE – STRENGTH FOR SERVING THE LORD COMES FROM THE DIVINE STREAMS OF LIVING WATER

> *"Then he became very thirsty, and he called to the LORD and said, 'Thou hast given this great deliverance by the hand of Thy servant, and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?' But God split the hollow place that is in Lehi so that water came out of it. When he drank, his strength returned and he revived. Therefore, he named it **En-hakkore**, which is in Lehi to this day. So he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines."*

"*the spring of him who called*"
Jer. 33:3 "*Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know*."

Samson's tone even in this prayer still sounds demanding and ungrateful

S. Lewis Johnson: It is rather interesting that this word that is translated "split", in my version is the word that was used of the rock in Rephadim that Moses smote and out of which came water to assuage the thirst of the children of Israel. It's often been commented upon that when Moses smote that rock in Exodus chapter 17 and the water came out of it, and those words which are used there are probably the words upon which our Lord depends when he speaks about the fact that when he is glorified the Holy Spirit shall come. It's often been said that the smiting of the rock is a reference to the cross of the Lord Jesus and the out flowing of the water is a reference to the Holy Spirit who is given to all who believe. And it is interesting here that we have this mighty victory by Samson over the forces of evil suggesting to us the Lord Jesus as the one who overthrows Satan, who has the hold upon us by virtue of our sin, and as a mighty champion he has overcome Satan through the cross and through the simple gospel. And now we have the outpoured water suggestive of the fact that those of us who have come to know our Lord Jesus Christ do receive the Holy Spirit who is in the final analysis the test of whether we really are believers in Christ.

Wiersbe: If triumphs aren't balanced with trials, there's a danger that we'll become proud and self-confident. . . . If Samson had only heeded this warning and asked God not only for water but for guidance! "Lead us not into temptation" would have been the perfect prayer for that hour. How quick we are to cry out for help for the body when perhaps our greatest needs are in the inner person. It's when we're weak that we're strong (1 Corinthians 12:10); and when we're totally dependent on the Lord, we're the safest.

Dale Ralph Davis: an act that calls to mind Yahweh's provisions for Israel on the wilderness journey (Exod. 17:6; Num. 20:8, 11).

CONCLUSION:
Several Lessons for us:

- Violence breeds violence; the pathway of personal revenge must be replaced in the believer by the grace of forgiveness – but here we see Samson used by the Lord in a national sense as a deliverer and a judge
- The strength of the Lord is sufficient for fighting the Lord's battles – especially against sin and temptation; we have the resurrection power of our Lord Jesus working on our behalf
- Don't ever live as these sad Israelites did – complacent with being in bondage to the enemy; you have been called to a life of freedom in the power of the Spirit

- Even after great spiritual victories, don't get too big for your britches; remember your need for humble dependence upon the Lord for everything in life – down to your next drink of water

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) When have we responded out of a motivation of personal retaliation and sought to return evil for evil? When have we experienced a soft answer turning away wrath? How do we compare the two different responses?

2) When have we experienced temptation and difficulties after some spiritual high? How has God used that to keep us humble and dependent on Him?

3) How lonely must Samson have been in living as such a solitary figure? How does compromise with the world impact the strength of fellowship which God's people should enjoy?

4) What type of judge was Samson during that 20 year period?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

S. Lewis Johnson: **God's Provision and Deliverance from the Philistines**
It is more likely, it seems to me, that this word fox is really the word jackal. The Hebrew word is a word that is derived from, rather, which is related to a Persian word from which we get the English word jackal, shugal, and the Hebrew word shual probably has that force. The reason I think that it is probably a jackal instead of a fox, though they are related animals of course, is because the jackals particularly travel in packs. And it would have been relatively easy for Samson to capture or trap three hundred of them. . .

Now this is a very clever pun, which we don't understand if it's not properly translated in English. But the word for donkey is also the word for heap, and so it is literally, "with the jawbone of a heap," heap, two heaps. So he's playing on the fact that he took the jawbone of a donkey, or a heap, and he made a pile or a heap of Philistines with it [Laughter] he's rather clever with words . . .

Now the father's suggestion was wrong and evil, that Samson marry the second daughter, because the Law of Moses had spoken specifically against that, that one should not take two wives, sisters, while they were still living, both of them. It's probable that he wanted a second dowry. And so he suggested that Samson marry the younger daughter. Well Samson, at this point, says, "This time I shall be blameless in regard to the Philistines when I do them harm." There is a saying that some people do odd things to get even. And Samson certainly does a very odd thing, by our western standards, to get even with the Philistines because of the way that they have treated him. . .

It is a sad picture of the low estate of the nation Israel that they should prefer the control of the

enemy, the Philistines, to the hope of deliverance through the means of Samson. With three thousand men and Samson, why they could have easily blasted the Philistines and not only would Samson have begun to deliver Israel, he could have delivered them, no doubt. . .

But you know, when one man stands with God against the entrenched forces of evil, though they be great and mighty in the eyes of men, with the jawbone of an ass, with the simple gospel, God is sure to win the victory. The weapons of the servant of God are the weapons of the sovereign grace of the gospel and a church that is willing to lean in simplicity upon the teaching of holy Scripture, the principles of the local church found in holy Scripture. I fully believe that when a church is willing to stand upon what the Bible says, the principles of the word of God, and with the simple gospel in her hands, that church shall secure the victory that God intends for them to have, and he will work mightily through them. . .

Gil Rugh: **The Life of Samson**
A unique judge in a variety of ways; no record of him leading any armies; he stands alone against the Philistines; a Nazirite from the womb; how can he kill human beings when he is not allowed to have contact with dead bodies? His hair is the main issue; his unique gift is a strength beyond any other human; incomparable strength; he is in a totally different category; none to be compared to him; supernaturally given by God; a man of great moral weaknesses; glaring deficiencies that will eventually do him in; only concerned about what pleased him and would give him pleasure; Conflict over his wife; Samson takes everything personally; breaking the stranglehold of the Philistines on the Israelites; part of God's judgment on the ungodly Philistines; traps and collects 300 of these animals; no animal rights groups in those days; what is the problem? Coming up to take Samson captive; God working behind the scenes to arrange all these things; 3,000 men of Judah come to confront Samson – not to help him as their deliverer; why are you making trouble for us? Sad state of affairs; resigned to their servitude; anything for peace; picks up available weapon = jawbone of a donkey; Samson is acting as the agent of the Lord

David Silversides: **Israel's Deliverer Coming to the Fore**
1. Israel's deliverer aroused again (:1-8)
It was right for Samson to fight the Philistines; yet combined with impure motives; not just some meaningless blood feud; Philistine women were repeatedly cause of compromise for Samson; then he assumes his true role as deliverer for his people against the Philistines; aroused to hostility to fight the Lord's battle; the provocation (:1-2); Samson's response (:3-5); what they had done to him was inexcusable; what he did in return was justifiable; terrible retribution (:6); Samson's wife had betrayed her husband in order to avoid being burned; ended up being burned anyway; the third spoiling of the Philistines (:7); he broke their bones (:8)
2. Israel's deliverer disowned (:9-13)
- Those with zeal for the Lord's battles are often seen as a nuisance or menace to those who want to be left alone and are indifferent to the Lord's cause; they are embarrassed by them and want to be disassociated from them because they do not want to share in the reproach; Gen. 49:14;
- the Lord Jesus Christ rejected by false professors who saw no need of the deliverance He came to bring; he servant is not above His master
3. Israel's deliverer triumphs (:14-17)
Supernatural strength in view here; lack of acknowledgment of the Lord as the deliverer??
4. Israel's deliverer humbled (:18)
Now he feels his dependence upon God in the routine things of maintaining existence; Samson calls upon the Lord as the author of deliverance;

Lessons:

- The adorable providence of God – used the painful, bitter fruit of Samson's compromises to fulfill his calling as Israel's judge against the Philistines
- The immense power of God – Samson raised up as a lone warrior; the Lord enabled him to do what a whole army might do; no constraint with the Lord to save by many or by few; can use small numbers and feeble people
- The Lord will have us feel our dependence – "*my grace is sufficient for you; my strength made perfect in weakness*"
- The fellowship of Christ's sufferings – despised and rejected of men; came unto His own and His own received him not

Dale Ralph Davis: chapters 14-16 can be divided into six main episodes. Each episode is structured around these two basic elements: a Philistine success [or Solution] followed by a Samsonite disaster [negating their solution]. . . The Philistines are the enemies of Yahweh's people. Here their stupidity is held up for ridicule; here they are made the laughingstock of Israel. Why? To show us the peril of being an enemy of Yahweh's people (even of his *sinful* people), for Yahweh makes fools of those who seek to ruin and crush his people. The awesome fearfulness of Israel's God!

TEXT: Judges 16:1-31

TITLE: SAMSON'S FINAL FEAT

BIG IDEA:
ISRAEL'S FLAWED CHAMPION FULFILLS HIS CALLING BY BRINGING DOWN THE HOUSE IN HIS FINAL FEAT OF SUPERNATURAL STRENGTH –

PROVIDENTIAL PREPARATION AND POSITIONING LEAD TO THE PERFORMANCE OF A CHAMPION

INTRODUCTION:

If you are like our family, you have spent some time this past week watching the performances of a wide variety of Olympic champions over in London. They have prepared for years for their one glorious moment of competition. They have sacrificed and disciplined themselves to position themselves for that ultimate gold medal. As we get to know their personal stories, we see a mixture of flaws and virtues as we would with any of the rest of us. But they have risen above all obstacles to captivate a worldwide audience with their superior level of skill and performance under pressure. There is nothing quite like earning the distinction of World Champion.

Samson was a Champion on a much more critical stage than mere sports and national honor. He had been designated by God from the womb as the one who would begin to deliver God's people from the oppression of God's enemies. The cosmic battle between God's kingdom program and Satan's adversarial agenda lies at the heart of Samson's odd mixture of sinful foibles and Spirit-filled conquests. Behind the scenes, the providence of God is constantly at work to accomplish God's sovereign purposes. We have traced his story through chapters 13, 14 and 15. We have been impressed by his **Bright Beginning** with the angel of the Lord announcing his divine calling and Nazirite pathway to a life of separation. We have witnessed his **Fatal Flaw** of self indulgent lust and arrogant over-confidence that constantly places him in situations of temptation and danger. We have also been astonished by the **Supernatural Strength** which the Holy Spirit has unleashed on specific occasions through this heroic figure. Now we come to the scene of his **Final Feat**. Everything has been building towards this final showdown between Samson and the Philistines.

ISRAEL'S FLAWED CHAMPION FULFILLS HIS CALLING BY BRINGING DOWN THE HOUSE IN HIS FINAL FEAT OF SUPERNATURAL STRENGTH –

PROVIDENTIAL PREPARATION AND POSITIONING LEAD TO THE PERFORMANCE OF A CHAMPION

I. (:1-3) PROVIDENTIAL PREPARATION FOR THE CHAMPION'S FINAL FEAT

A. (:1) Fatal Flaw Creates Vulnerability

"*Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her.*"

Samson was his own worst enemy; he constantly opened himself up to temptation and allowed

the lust of the flesh to drive his behavior; you can imagine that he was sexually frustrated after being denied relations with his Timnite wife; what is he doing visiting Gaza – an enemy stronghold?

Especially seemed to like foreign women

We must have a mindset to Flee temptation as **Joseph** did – not Flirt with it

2 Tim. 2:20-22 "*Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart*."

1 Cor. 6:18 "*Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body*."

B. (:2) Futile Trap is Ready to be Sprung

> "*When it was told to the Gazites, saying, 'Samson has come here,' they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. And they kept silent all night, saying, 'Let us wait until the morning light, then we will kill him.'*

Look at how word about Samson and his activities spreads so quickly; he is the hated enemy of the Philistines; now he has been delivered into their hands; they need to take advantage of this intelligence and act quickly and decisively

Just like the SWAT teams that like to move in on their subject just as first light dawns. Apparently they shut the gate to the city and posted guards so that there was no way he could escape from the fortress. But they thought they could grab a little shut-eye in preparation for the upcoming surprise raid on Samson.

The Lord is going to deliver His servant – but not based on any righteousness of his own; he is in the midst of a sinful sexual alliance – yet God still has plans to continue His work of preparation in Samson's life in anticipation of the final act

C. (:3) Forceful Foreshadowing of Ultimate Escape and Conquest

> "*Now Samson lay until midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the city gate and the two posts and pulled them up along with the bars; then he put them on his shoulders and carried them up to the top of the mountain which is opposite Hebron.*"

What made Samson rise up at midnight? The Providence of the Lord

The waiting military force of the Philistines was in awe of this feat and dared not challenge Samson at this point – they just stood and watched as the symbol of their invincibility and power

was carried off by the Champion of the Israelites

I have trouble pulling up the roots of some old shrub that I want to get rid of – no problem for Superman

We see why this incident is recorded – probably not the only occasion where Samson frequented a prostitute – but this incident bears important parallels to his final pulling down of two posts (cf. tearing down the goalposts at football games)

F. Duane Lindsay: Whether this is a hill outside of Gaza that has a view eastward toward Hebron, or whether Samson carried the doors uphill 37 miles to a hill outside of Hebron, is not clear from the text.

Block: This segment reveals an Israelite inexorably drawn to the Philistines and continuing to be driven by his senses. He has no scruples about fraternizing with the enemy. . . as concerts by world class artists are opened by colleagues of lesser importance, so this unnamed woman sets the stage for Delilah. At the same time this picture of Samson's extraordinary strength provides the background for what happens when his hair is shorn.

Application:

- How has God equipped me?
- What lessons has God taught me?
- What trials has God brought me through?
- What forgiveness and grace have I experienced?

II. (:4-22) PROVIDENTIAL POSITIONING FOR THE CHAMPION'S FINAL FEAT

4 Rounds of Attempted Capture:

A. (:4-9) Round 1 of Attempted Capture – Delilah's Treachery

1. (:4-5) Proposition

> "*After this it came about that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. And the lords of the Philistines came up to her, and said to her, 'Entice him, and see where his great strength lies and how we may overpower him that we may bind him to afflict him. Then we will each give you eleven hundred pieces of silver.*'"

Temptation comes in attractive forms

Block: Sorek was the name of a wadi valley that ran from the hill country of Judah and Dan down to the Mediterranean coast, through the northern part of Philistia. . . For the first time in the Samson narrative a woman is name. But like many other elements in the Samson narrative, the name Delilah is a riddle. Etymologically, the most likely explanation relates the name to Arabic *dalla*, "to flirt," but the name may be an artificial punning construct consisting of *d* + *lylh*, "of the night." Alternatively, the name may simply be a Philistine name whose meaning remains unknown.

Entice (*patah*) means to deceive, seduce, allure, coax or persuade and depicts the seducing of persons sexually or enticing them into sin and transgression. The Philistines used this same verb (*patah*) when they demanded that Samson's bride-to-be "coax" him into revealing his secret (Jdg

14:15). Even as the Timnite girl managed to get the truth out of Samson, tragically so would Delilah. – preceptaustin.org

This time did not take the tactic of threatening to burn her alive; went with the more conventional strategy of bribery – very extravagant amount – 1100 X 5 = 5500 shekels of silver; compared to 400 paid by Abraham to purchase a burial plot for his wife – everything about the Samson account speaks to excess

Wanted to afflict him instead of just kill him; he had tormented them; they wanted to put him on display and make sport of him – show off the trophy of their conquest; imagined that his strength must be tied to some type of magical power – wanted to discover and break that connection

2. (:6-7) Enticement

"*So Delilah said to Samson, 'Please tell me where your great strength is and how you may be bound to afflict you.' And Samson said to her, 'If they bind me with seven fresh cords that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.*'"

If she really approached him on such a direct basis, highlights his over-confidence and foolishness even to have such a conversation

Wolf: bowstrings made from animal intestines

These would come from a freshly slaughtered animal – thereby compromising once again his Nazirite oath regarding refraining from contact with the dead

3. (:8-9) Escape

"*Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh cords that had not been dried, and she bound him with them. Now she had men lying in wait in an inner room. And she said to him, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' But he snapped the cords as a string of tow snaps when it touches fire. So his strength was not discovered.*"

Delilah called out to test the effectiveness of the capture strategy before the hiding Philistines were willing to reveal themselves.

B. (:10-12) Round 2 of Attempted Capture

1. (:10-11) Enticement

"*Then Delilah said to Samson, 'Behold, you have deceived me and told me lies; now please tell me, how you may be bound.' And he said to her, 'If they bind me tightly with new ropes which have not been used, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.'*

2. (:12) Escape

"*So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' For the men were lying in wait in the inner room. But he snapped the ropes from his arms like a thread.*"

C. (:13-14) Round 3 of Attempted Capture

1. (:13) Enticement

Then Delilah said to Samson, 'Up to now you have deceived me and told me lies; tell me how you may be bound.' And he said to her, 'If you weave the seven locks of my hair with the web and fasten it with a pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.'"

Samson starting to give in; ties his strength to some aspect of his hair – getting very close to giving up the secret
Attaching his hair to some type of loom

2. (:14) Escape

"*So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his hair and wove them into the web. And she fastened it with the pin, and said to him, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' But he awoke from his sleep and pulled out the pin of the loom and the web.*

D. (:15-22) Round 4 of Attempted Capture – Delilah's Persistence

1. (:15-17) Enticement

"*Then she said to him, 'How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have deceived me these three times and have not told me where your great strength is.' And it came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death. So he told her all that was in his heart and said to her, 'A razor has never come on my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me and I shall become weak and be like any other man.'"*

"*your heart is not with me*" -- you won't confide in me

Block: Samson's problem with his vow is not so much that he willfully violates it; he simply does not take it seriously. Like his strength, and the people around him, it is a toy to be played with, not a calling to be fulfilled.

Oscar Wilde: I can resist anything . . . except temptation."
Over confidence blinds us to reality – Samson thought he could handle Delilah, but she proved his undoing

2. (:18-22) Entrapment

"*When Delilah saw that he had told her all that was in his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, 'Come up once more, for he has told me all that is in his heart.' Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her, and brought the money in their hands. And she made him sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair. Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him. And she said, 'The Philistines are upon you, Samson!' And he awoke from his sleep and said, 'I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.' But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him. Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes; and*

they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains, and he was a grinder in the prison. However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off.

"*shake myself free*" – shows he was bound as before

Grinding at a mill was a woman's job (9:53)

Wolf: It is unclear whether he used a small hand-mill or was forced to turn a large circular stone, a job normally given to donkeys.

Making license plates in the local prison

Dale Ralph Davis: Samson is a paradigm of Israel: one raised up out of nothing, richly gifted, who panders around with other loves and yet, apparently, always expects to "have" Yahweh. . . watch out, lest you abandon the divine call, leave your first love, and forfeit the divine presence.

Look what has happened to the main-line denominations! You could write "Ichabod" over the doors of their expensive headquarters and ivy-covered seminary buildings. The glory of the Lord has departed – and they don't even know it!

Application:

- Why am I positioned here (in terms of geography, home, job, family, church, etc.)?
- How has God provided for my needs?
- How has God directed and guided me?
- How is God working behind the scenes in my life – even using my sins for His glory?

III. (:23-31) PROVIDENTIAL PERFORMANCE OF THE CHAMPION'S FINAL FEAT

A. (:23-27) Humiliation of Samson – Mocking the God of Israel

1. (:23-24) Religious Rivalry

"*Now the lords of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice, for they said, 'Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hands.' When the people saw him, they praised their god, for they said, 'Our god has given our enemy into our hands, Even the destroyer of our country, Who has slain many of us.'*"

Dagon = their grain deity – remember how Samson had earlier destroyed their crops with fire from the foxes

2. (:25) Demeaning Degradation

"*It so happened when they were in high spirits, that they said, 'Call for Samson, that he may amuse us.' So they called for Samson from the prison, and he entertained them. And they made him stand between the pillars.*"

3. (:26-27) Getting a Grip

"*Then Samson said to the boy who was holding his hand, 'Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them.' Now the house was full of men and women, and all the lords of the Philistines were there. And about*

3,000 men and women were on the roof looking on while Samson was amusing them."

James Jordan: In the Temple of Dagon, the central pillars were like the arms of Dagon, holding up the Philistine world. The Philistines had confidence in the might of Dagon. They were congregated on the roof, certain that Dagon could uphold their garden-civilization. . . When he pulled them down, he symbolically pulled down the entire civilization built upon Dagon.

B. (:28-31) Avenging of Samson – Crushing Dagon Along with the Philistines

1. (:28) Samson Turns to the Lord for Strength

"*Then Samson called to the LORD and said, 'O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.'*"

"*remember*" is not the opposite of "to forget" but has the significance of taking note of and acting on behalf of; showing favor to

S. Lewis Johnson: Incidentally, you'll watch carefully the terms that are used for God here, and Samson uses three of them, he says, "*O Lord*" and the word is the word that speaks of God as the covenant keeping God. And then he uses the expression, "*O Yahweh Adonay*" and that's the word that speaks of him as the sovereign God, master. And then in a moment he will use the term, "*God*" which speaks of him as the strong God.

2. (:29-30) Samson Has the Last Laugh

"*And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and braced himself against them, the one with his right hand and the other with his left. And Samson said, 'Let me die with the Philistines!' And he bent with all his might so that the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed in his life.*"

3. (:31) Samson Finishes Strong

"*Then his brothers and all his father's household came down, took him, brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. Thus he had judged Israel twenty years.*"

Application:

- What can I trust God for?
- How does God use my weakness to demonstrate His strength?
- What will fulfill my calling?
- What will advance God's kingdom and glorify Him?

CONCLUSION:

How could God have used such a strange figure to be the Champion of Israel?

Dale Ralph Davis: Here is this Samson, a sort of wild ass of a man, entertaining yet unpredictable, so promising and so tragic. . . During the War between the States, the story spread that General Grant had been drunk at the Battle of Shiloh. A friend of Abraham Lincoln

came late one night to press his argument that General Grant should be relieved of his duties – popular opinion was turning against him. Lincoln responded: "I can't spare this man; he fights." He may look seedy; he may have trouble with booze; popular opinion may stand against him – but he fights. At least he wasn't comfortable just co-existing with the enemy – he waged war against them.

God's Providence accomplished His purposes in ways that surprise us. He uses events to **Prepare** and then **Position** his servants for victorious **Performance** so that He receives the glory!

James Jordan: The story of the fall of Samson should have taught Israel three basic things. First, that even the strongest man will fall if he goes a whoring after pagan culture. Second, that involvement with pagan culture would destroy their lives and calling, blinding them and rendering them impotent in life. And third, that a more perfect Messiah would be needed if Israel was ever fully and finally to be delivered form sin and bondage. What was needed was a Deliverer who would be both morally pure and also omnipotent.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) In what ways do we express over confidence and self indulgence in living life just according to our own desires?

2) Is there any temptation in our life where we need to urgently Flee and remove ourselves from certain situations or relationships or contexts?

3) How has the Lord providentially used situations and experiences in surprising ways to prepare us and position us to use our spiritual gifts for the advancement of His kingdom?

4) When we turn to God in repentance and dependence, how have we seen the power and presence of God revitalize our service to Him?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

S. Lewis Johnson: **The Danger of Unconscious Decay**
Mr. Spurgeon titles his sermon on this section, "Shaven and Shorn but Not Beyond Hope." I think that is a lesson from this chapter in Samson's life. . .

The ungodly never understands the nature of spiritual strength because they're blind, they do not understand what it is. The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they're foolishness to them. Neither can he know them because they're spiritually discerned. They do not realize that spiritual power depends upon relationship to the Lord, and obedience to his word, a desire to do his will, these are the things from which spiritual power flows. So try to find out his secret, what's he wearing? What's he got on? What's his trick? What's his thing? . . .

Oh what potentialities, what opportunities, what talents and gifts, and oh the destruction wrought

by spiritual decay. Lord, deliver us from similar decay. Oh God, if that decay has already taken place, we thank Thee for the hope expressed in the life of Samson. That his condition was not without hope and that by the grace of God, he finally became what he should have become from the beginning, a Nazarite to God.

Steve Zeisler: **Desire, Deception, Revenge**
Samson's story is living proof that getting to do whatever you want is a very bad option unless you want the right things, unless you have learned to crucify the desires and inclinations in yourself that will send you off in the wrong direction. God places restrictions, walls, and impediments in our lives and lays burdens on us precisely to teach us to want different things than we otherwise would. He gives us these things to make us realize that this world is not our home, that we are only temporarily assigned here, and that we are being prepared for eternity. We are being taught, if we'll listen, to become aware of the unseen realities, to long for heaven, to care more about the presence and peace of God in our lives than whatever circumstances can offer us. He makes it hard on us precisely to teach us that the things we keep reaching for aren't worth having. . .

Samson had been the instrument of God from his mother's womb. God had chosen him to be the fearful opponent of the Philistines, a wicked, violent, destructive people who deserved everything they ever got from Samson. They were idolaters who hated the cause of the living God. God continued to use Samson, and the power of the Spirit of God would come upon him, enabling him to do extraordinary things. Throughout his life we can imagine the Lord waiting for Samson, urging him, wooing him, wanting him to respond not just as an instrument of God's power, but as someone who had a relationship with him. But this was the last straw. What Samson did here was give the story of his Nazirite beginnings into the hands of a Philistine courtesan, making himself completely vulnerable to her. And the Lord finally departed from Samson. When his hair was shaved and the last vestige of the vow that he was to keep was gone, God's patience with Samson was at an end. . .

Every other time Samson killed Philistines, it was because he was mad at them. They got in his way, they killed his wife, or they did something else that made him furious. But here God was being mocked, and because of this, we can assume that Samson for the first time began to care about something other than himself. So he called out for strength to act.

Phil Newton: **Samson Duped and Avenged**

<u>Concluding lessons:</u>

1. God's call upon our life and subsequent gifting for service must be accompanied with serious devotion and discipline.

2. The self-centeredness of unrestrained living always lands us in a snare.

3. A dulled spiritual walk leaves us with an undiscerning mind that willingly swallows the enemy's bait.

4. God's gifts and calling upon our lives will not be trampled upon with immunity.

5. There's mercy with the Lord. His name will be honored even in the face of a thousand Dagons being praised for what they could never do.

Block: As the Samson saga reaches its denouement, the ironies in his life come to full fruition. Overnight this man is transformed from one whose life is governed by sight and whose actions are determined by what is right in his own eyes into a blind man with eyes gouged out. Overnight a life of coming and going as he pleases turns into a life of bondage and imprisonment. Overnight the person who had spent his life insulting and humiliating others becomes the object of their humiliation. Overnight a man with the highest conceivable calling, the divinely commissioned agent of deliverance for Israel, is cast down to the lowest position imaginable: grinding the flour for others in prison. Samson's sun has set.

Motyer: Personally, Samson stands as a dreadful warning, the man of enormous potential who never grasped that the Spirit's call to holy discipline is even more important than the Spirit's gifts. But on the broader canvas, the plan of God goes inexorably on, and through Samson, tragic figure though he is, the Spirit of the Lord brings about the salvation of his people. He cannot in the end "be like any other man", as he thought he would be once the secret of his strength was betrayed (16:7, 11, 13, 17). That is why he is said, twice and truly, to have "judged" Israel; why he rightly appears in Hebrews 11; and why his birth and death really are a reflection, however dim, of that other birth and death centuries later.

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **The Consequences of Doing what is Right in Your Own Eyes**
Introduction: Illustration: Titanic -- One historian says the iceberg was not the real problem. The real problem was the confidence that refused to heed the warnings. That statement could be written over the life of Samson. You might say that Samson thought that his life was unthinkable. He was a mighty man. And when we get to this stage of his life, we see that he ignored warning after warning. He had crossed the boundaries that God had established. He trusted in his own judgment and followed his own desires. And he believed that he could manage sin without consequences. So here in Judges chapter 16, we see the story of his downfall. Now the thing about Samson that you have to remember was that he was a man who walked by sight. He was controlled by the lust of his eyes.

Why was God so patient with Samson? Well, because it's an illustration of the fact that God was so patient with the people of Israel, with the nation of Israel. Why did God continually let the Spirit of God come upon Samson even though Samson walked in disobedience at times? Well, because God in His grace continued with His Holy Spirit to minister to Israel even though at times they were disobedient.

Big Idea: **Seven consequences of doing what is right in your own eyes**

I. You treat holiness as optional instead of essential.
He deliberately places himself in a place he shouldn't have been. We see that constantly in his life. Again, it begins with his eyes. He sees this woman, he desires her, and notice the progression. He saw, he desired, and then he acted.

It's an incredible feat of strength. Barrick says this, these figures do not include the bar nor the bronze plating. If the plating were included, it would practically double the weight of the gates. The gates of Gaza could have weighed in the vicinity of 5 to 10 tons. Now, when you think about that, and if you think about the fact that he put these gates on his shoulders and he climbed up a hill, even a nearby hill, I mean, that's incredible. But to go 40 miles with this thing on his back? and to put them in there in the vicinity of Judah, that would have been, well, it's just incredible. And this definitely takes on a miraculous idea here. It's a miraculous act because

either way, this is something that is beyond human ability. This was something that God had to do with him.

In ancient times, the city was considered not secure without the gates in place. Gates were considered to be a symbol of the city's strength. And the city gates was not only a place of protection, it was also where the judges met. And the idea to possess the gate of your enemies, that was a metaphor used in the Old Testament to defeat your enemies, to literally shame them, to utterly defeat them. And by removing these gates, Samson left that city in a state of complete shame and defeat and humiliation. And by the way, this foreshadows the perfect deliverer, Jesus. Remember what Jesus said? The gates of hell shall not, what? Prevail against the church. That was picturing victory over Satan's forces. And Christ will bring us that.

II. You live by passion instead of principle. Vs. 4

He couldn't resist Philistine women. He again gives into his passion. I mean, here's a man that has remarkable strength, but he has very little moral strength. Excuse me, Warren Worsby said, Samson had strength to conquer lions, but he could not conquer his own lusts. And here he meets a woman by the name of Delilah.

I think there's a play on names here in the Hebrew. Samson's name actually is the Hebrew word which is related to the sun or the sun rising. Some commentators nickname him sunny because of that. Shemesh literally means sun. He was from Beth Shemesh. The town, that was the name of his town, literally means house of the sun. The name Delilah comes from the Hebrew lilay which could be the word for night or darkness. And so the sun is setting. It's being overcome by the darkness.

She's not motivated by love here, but greed. And yet Samson is so blinded in his emotions. He's governed by passion, not by principle. He knows what he's doing is a violation of his calling. He knows it's a violation of his Nazarite vows of separation. He knows he's violating the law of God. But nevertheless, all this feels right for Samson.

One of the most dangerous things a believer can do is allow their emotions and feelings to replace truth, to replace God never intends for us to be guided by our emotions. Emotions make wonderful servants, but terrible masters. The Bible says in Proverbs 14, 12, there is a way that seemeth right unto man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. Samson is following what feels right.

III. You play with temptation instead of walking in truth.

Some commentators suggests that Samson is kind of mocking here. He's kind of playing, you know, with this idea of him being set apart, with the idea of his Nazarite vow, though not really directly revealing the secret of his strength. But he's coming real close. He's kind of playing with temptation, isn't he? He's playing around. Instead of walking in truth, he's playing with temptation. One commentator, Gary Ingrid wrote this, Samson thought playing with Delilah was a game. It turned out to be Russian roulette and he bought the bullet.

You cannot trifle with sin in your life. If you're like Samson flirting with a Delilah, believing that you can keep sin inbounds, let me warn you that you're playing with a lion. So at this point, Samson has to know. I mean, don't you think that she can't be trusted? I mean, he has to know that. And yet, instead of fleeing from temptation, he's continuing to toy with it.

We see the progressive nature of temptation, the green cords, the new ropes, now the hair, He's getting a little bit closer and closer. He's compromising a little bit more and more.

IV. When you're governed by deception instead of discernment. Vs. 15
Now three times she tried to capture him or have him captured. And again, he's not using any discernment here. He's allowing himself to be deceived.

The hair was merely a symbol of his Nazirite vow. It was a symbol. According to this idea, Samson's strength came directly from the Lord. It didn't come from his hair. It came from the Lord. The hair was an outward sign of this Nazarite dedication to God.

And we can see this by reading earlier where it says repeatedly that it was the spirit of the Lord that came upon Samson. We see this in chapter 13, verse 25. The Spirit of the Lord began to move upon him. We see it in chapter 14, verse 6. The Spirit of the Lord came mighty upon him. Before every one of these feats of great strength, it says that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. So his strength was from the Lord.

V. You end your life in slavery instead of strength. Vs. 21
Sin blinds. The loss of his eyes becomes a fitting judgment for a man who lived by the lust of the eyes.

Sin also binds him.

VI. your enemies are glorified instead of God. Vs. 23
Here are the enemies of God rejoicing. His failure gave God's enemies an opportunity to mock the name of God. This is one of the most sad consequences of sin. When believers fall into sin, the world mocks and they rejoice. And God's name is disgraced instead of glorified. Samson's failure gave glory to Dagon. And that's a terrible, terrible consequence.

VII. You focus on personal vengeance instead of spiritual victory. Vs. 25
Now, evidently, this whole temple was supported by two huge pillars in the middle. Now, for years, skeptics mocked the story of Samson. And this is what they said. They said, no building is held up by two pillars that a man could push over. I mean, that's crazy, they would say.

But then in the early 1970s, archaeologists excavated a Philistine temple near a place called Tell Qasil. And what did they find? Two central pillars supporting the roof exactly as described in the Book of Judges. exactly the way it's described here. Later discoveries at Ekron and Gath also revealed the exact same design of a Philistine temple supported by two huge pillars in the middle. These archaeologists didn't set out to prove the Bible right. They just discovered that and found out, guess what? The Bible is right.

I think there are evidences in the text that he prays in faith, that he has repented. First of all, he acknowledges that truly God is a source of his strength. That's why he prays to God, because he knows God is the one who strengthens him. So now he's acknowledging that, God, you strengthen me, and I'll ask you to do this one last time. He's willing to be a martyr for Israel. He's willing to give his life to bring down the enemies, the Philistines. This is not suicide. This is him willing to die to bring down the enemies of God.

And he also asks for mercy when he prays, remember me, remember me. This is the same words used by the thief on the cross. He doesn't ask for fame or pleasure, only for God's strength one last time. Maybe it's possible in the end, even though I've messed up, that I can fulfill my calling after all, which is to be a deliverer of God's people over the Philistines. Maybe in this one act, I can be used. So he asked God for mercy, really. Repentance begins when we stop making excuses and start crying out to God for mercy. And I think he does this here.

God hears the prayer of the humble. The Bible says a broken and a contrite heart God will not despise. And there's something else in the text that we can look at that helps us to indicate that Samson's coming around and he's coming back to true repentance or dedication to the Lord. Back up to verse number 22 and notice what it says in verse 22.

How be it the hair of his head began to what? Began to grow again after he was shaven. Now again, this doesn't mean that his strength was in his hair. This verse functions as a ray of hope in this otherwise dark narrative. It signals to the reader what? God is not done with Samson just yet. Yeah, he messed up. Yeah, he's been living by his passions. Yeah, he's been living according to what's right in his own eyes. and yet there's a foreshadowing in verse 22. The author is preparing us for Samson's final act of faith.

Did you know in Numbers chapter six, whenever a Nazarite violated their vows, you know what they had to do to renew themselves and to get back on the road to consecration? You know the first thing they had to do after they messed up and they violated their vows? They had to shave their head and then start over. There's a sense in which that Philistine barber did Samson a favor. By shaving his locks, there is a sense in which he was fulfilling that old mandate given by God that since you messed up as a Masorette, you shave your head and you start over.

The man who had failed most of his life died in faith, trusting God, for his strength, trusting in God to give him that final victory, and God does. God is so merciful and gracious that even though we make so many mistakes and we fail so many times, even when sin has left wreckage in our life, God can redeem what remains and God can bring victory out of even that. And that's what we see here with this. Spurgeon said, by grace, Samson's last prayer reached higher than all of his previous exploits. God honors those that return to him. Look at verse number 31.

TEXT: Judges 17:1-13

TITLE: COUNTERFEIT, MAN-MADE SPIRITUALITY

BIG IDEA:
COUNTERFEIT, MAN-MADE SPIRITUALITY REINFORCES ITS OWN CYCLE OF SELF DECEPTION
(AND OFFENDS GOD BY REPLACING OBJECTIVE DIVINE STANDARDS WITH ANARCHY AND MORAL RELATIVISM)

INTRODUCTION:

With Chapter 17 we arrive at the third and final section of the Book of Judges:

I. (1:1 – 3:6) Justification for the Lord's Anger --
II. (3:7 – 16:31) Journal of Repeated Cycles of Apostasy and Deliverance Highlighting the Faithfulness of a Long Suffering God –
III. (17:1 – 21:25) Jumbled Mess of Religious and Moral Depravity

No longer are we talking about the cycle of sin, suffering, and salvation through a designated judge raised up by God. The stories of Deborah, of Gideon and of Samson fade into the background. Instead we are presented with a couple of very depressing pictures of the depths of Israel's depravity – both from a religious standpoint and a moral standpoint. The secularization of God's people has yielded the inevitable result of governmental anarchy and moral relativism and confusion. Everyone is making their own decisions about right and wrong, having rejected God's divine counsel. Israel has hit rock bottom and the picture is jarring. You won't find any "feel good" moments in these final chapters. God intends for us to be both shocked and yet disgusted by the parallels we see in our own contemporary situation.

We are going to see two very serious deviations from God's prescription for true worship for the nation of Israel:

1. The Man-Made Establishment of a Counterfeit Worship Sanctuary (17:1-6)
2. The Man-Made Establishment of a Counterfeit Priesthood (17:7-13)

You can hardly offend the covenant keeping God of Israel more if you tried. These are grievous errors with far-reaching consequences.

COUNTERFEIT, MAN-MADE SPIRITUALITY REINFORCES ITS OWN CYCLE OF SELF DECEPTION
(AND OFFENDS GOD BY REPLACING OBJECTIVE DIVINE STANDARDS WITH ANARCHY AND MORAL RELATIVISM)

George Barna (Boiling Point): Many Americans, Barna says, now cling to the values that best align with relativism -- that is, independence, personal happiness, tolerance, comfort, instant gratification, the right to make one's own choices -- all of this centers on the individual. . . Convenience, comfort, and emotion tend to be the values that drive today's spirituality.

SEVEN RED FLAGS OF COUNTERFEIT, MAN-MADE SPIRITUALITY

I. (:1-2) BASED ON A WRONG FOUNDATION = POOR PARENTING AND LACK OF INTEGRITY

> "*Now there was a man of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah. And he said to his mother, 'The eleven hundred pieces of silver which were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse in my hearing, behold, the silver is with me; I took it.' And his mother said, 'Blessed be my son by the LORD.'*"

A. Poor Parenting

Lots of meaningless cursing and blessing – but no discipline and accountability; raised a thief
Using the name of the Lord in vain; mouthing a lot of spiritual platitudes

The classic Enabler for her son's irresponsibility and criminal behavior – What does an Enabler look like?

- An enabler is someone who promotes a specific type of behavior in another person. The term is most often associated with people who allow loved ones to behave in ways that are destructive
- one who enables another to persist in self-destructive behavior (as substance abuse) by providing excuses or by making it possible to avoid the consequences of such behavior.

Sad when parents have no values to communicate to the next generation; look at the problem faced by school teachers when parents don't properly discipline their children

Legitimate questions: Who trained you? What was the content and methodology of your spiritual training? What course of study did you submit to?

1100 pieces of silver is a significant amount – very wealthy family; son never learned the proper work ethic; had everything handed to him (vs. 10 – look how happy the Levite was to work for annual wages of 10 pieces of silver); equals the amount each of the Philistine lords had pledged to give as a bribe to Delilah to engage her services in entrapping Samson

B. Lack of Integrity

Stealing from your parents is about as low as it gets; this is not some child

Micah = "who is like the Lord"

No conviction of sin; no real fear of the Lord; no concern for the Lord's commandments and directives regarding worship

Character must be the key to spiritual leadership (cf. qualifications for elders and deacons); Not academics or charisma or ministry success measured by marketing metrics

II. (:3-5a) PRACTICED VIA HYPOCRITICAL DEDICATION = EXTERNAL RELIGIOUS TRAPPINGS OF IDOLATRY

> "*He then returned the eleven hundred pieces of silver to his mother, and his mother said, 'I wholly dedicate the silver from my hand to the LORD for my son to make a graven*

image and a molten image; now therefore, I will return them to you.' So when he returned the silver to his mother, his mother took two hundred pieces of silver and gave them to the silversmith who made them into a graven image and a molten image, and they were in the house of Micah. And the man Micah had a shrine and he made an ephod and household idols"

Look at all of the Ten Commandments that Micah and his mother broke – all without even leaving home! Quite a record of lawlessness! Exodus 20

1. **Polytheism** -- I am the Lord, your God. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. **Idol worship** -- Thou shall bring no false idols before me.
3. **Swearing** -- Do not take the name of the Lord in vain.
4. **Sabbath Observance** -- Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.
5. **Honoring and Obeying Parents** -- Honor thy father and thy mother.
6. Murder -- Thou shall not kill/murder†.
7. **Adultery** -- Thou shall not commit adultery.
8. **Stealing** -- Thou shall not steal††.
9. **False Witness** -- Thou shall not bear false witness against your neighbor
10. **Coveting** -- Thou shall not covet‡ your neighbor's wife (or anything that belongs to your neighbor).

Brensinger: This act of dedication involves the construction of an idol of cast metal. The Hebrew phrase is an example of hendiadys, where *and* connects two words referring to the same thing. The second noun explains the first. Thus, what is envisioned here is likely not a pair of figures but a single image. Both the singular pronoun *it* in 17:4 and the references to a single image elsewhere in the narrative (18:20, 30:31) support such a view. The figure is perhaps carved from wood and subsequently covered with metal.

But **Judges 18:18** seems to indicate there were two distinct objects created!

Inrig: He established a full-fledged shrine in his home, complete with a priestly garment (the ephod), a molten image (an idol of poured silver), a graven image (a carved idol coated with silver), and a number of portable household gods, called teraphim. . . **Judges 18:31** "*So they set up for themselves Micah's graven image which he had made, all the time that the house of God was at Shiloh*." The tabernacle was at Shiloh. A quick look at a map reveals the fact that Shiloh was in the hill country of Ephraim, only a short journey from Micah's house. Micah's idolatry had nothing to do with the unavailability of God's house. It had everything to do with his refusal to follow God's Word.

Wolf: Scripture consistently condemns the use of terraphim (cf. 1 Sam 15:23). Like the ephod . . . the terraphim could be used for divination purposes (Ezek 21:21).

Is. 44:9-20 mocking the foolishness of idolatry

Adam Clarke: Perhaps the whole of this case may be stated thus: Micah built a house of God-a chapel in imitation of the sanctuary; he made a graven image representing the ark, a molten image to represent the mercy-seat, teraphim to represent the cherubim above the mercy-seat, and an ephod in imitation of the sacerdotal garments; and he consecrated one of his sons to be priest. Thus gross idolatry was not the crime of Micah; he only set up in his own house an epitome of the Divine worship as performed at Shiloh.

Richard Tow: I can see this woman living today with a fish symbol on her lapel, a shinny cross on her necklace, and wearing a "what would Jesus do" bracelet yet doing nothing that Jesus would do. Wear the symbols. Talk the talk. But if you're going to do that then walk the walk.

Hard for us to identify with the sin of idolatry – we don't make little silver figures that we worship; how can we identify with the error being exposed here?
Dale Ralph Davis: One form such syncretism takes is that of sacramentalism, believing that some degree of conformity in religious externals will surely draw down the divine approval . . . Another example would be our modern tendency to deny the traditional belief that "faith, worship, and religion are rather regulated by royal revelation and subject to sovereign prescriptions" . . .we prefer to worship as we please.

III. (:5b) LED BY FALSE PRIESTS APPOINTED ON THE BASIS OF EXPEDIENCY AND SELF PROMOTION WITHOUT REGARD TO DIVINE ORDINATION

"*and consecrated one of his sons, that he might become his priest.*"

A. Expediency

I need a priest; I will make someone a priest

Brensinger: More literally, he "*filled the hand of*" his son, a technical expression for ordination, rooted in the actual filling of the priest's hands with portions of a sacrifice (Exod. 28:41; 29:9; Lev. 8:33; 16:32; 1 Kings 13:33; cf. Exod. 29:24).

Block: it involved the placement of some symbol of authority into the hands of the person being installed. This action posed a direct challenge to the officially authorized Aaronic priesthood.

B. Self Promotion

Richard Tow: This man has found a way to do spiritual things—even have his own church—keep his own tithe in the family—and stay in control of the situation. It all looked spiritual but in reality it was all a sham and contrary to the commandments of God.

What is lacking in this personal shrine is any focus on **the Word of God** – certainly his son was not going to be equipped to bring such instruction to the family

IV. (:6) BLINDED BY THE ARROGANCE OF ANARCHY AND MORAL RELATIVISM

"*In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own*

eyes."

A. Anarchy

Timestamp – "*no king in Israel*" – not that a king would have solved all of their moral and spiritual failings – a righteous king would have made a difference – certainly they had the opportunity to function as the theocracy that God had instituted – but without the fear of God and the submission to His revealed Word, they were rudderless and living in lawlessness and anarchy

B. Moral Relativism

Inrig: The Israelites did not do what was wrong in their own eyes. On the contrary, they were convinced that they were doing what was right. It was a society filled with violence, idolatry, gross immorality – utterly pagan – and yet these people thought that what they did was right. Their value systems, moral standards, religious doctrines, and practices had lost all touch with reality and absolute truth. As a result, only the swamp of relativism was lift. That is what makes Judges so practical to twentieth-century Christians; for we, too, live in a society that has not standards. The basic life philosophy of the modern man is, "If it is right to you (i.e. in your own eyes), do it."

V. (:7-9) UNSETTLED BY SELFISH AMBITION

> "*Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite; and he was staying there. Then the man departed from the city, from Bethlehem in Judah, to stay wherever he might find a place; and as he made his journey, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah. And Micah said to him, 'Where do you come from?' And he said to him, 'I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to stay wherever I may find a place.*'"

From **18:30**, we learn that this young Levite was named **Jonathan**, son of Gershom who was the son of Moses – who was from the tribe of Levi, specifically through the line of Kohath; probably already somewhat of a drifter and an opportunist

How can you both be from the tribe of Judah and be a Levite?? Maybe just resided in the territory of Judah

Inrig: Levites were men who had the **call of God** upon their lives. They were not to be opportunists moving from place to place, looking for a job. They had been assigned specific cities in which to live and that is where they were to reside and serve God. As a matter of fact, this man probably should not have been in Bethlehem in the first place, since it was not a Levitical city. Here was a man who refused to be satisfied with God's arrangements for his life. . . he was committed to self-promotion and to personal betterment.

Wolf: Bethlehem was not one of the forty-eight Levitical cities assigned by Moses. The Levites were doubtless scattered because of lack of support, a situation that prevailed all too often in Israel's history (cf. Neh 13:10). In an attempt to improve his situation (v.8), the young Levite traveled north and found Micah eager to hire a more "legitimate" priest.

VI. (:10-12) SECULARIZED BY MATERIALISTIC GREED – SERVING AS A HIRED

GUN

> "*Micah then said to him, 'Dwell with me and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year, a suit of clothes, and your maintenance.' So the Levite went in. And the Levite agreed to live with the man; and the young man became to him like one of his sons. So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest and lived in the house of Micah.*"

Micah knew enough of the God's standards to feel insecure in his employment of his own son in the capacity of priest; this was definitely sub-standard; when the opportunity presented itself for a significant upgrade – a Levite no less – he jumped at it – even if it meant shoving his son into the background

"*father*" – in a position of honor and leadership in the home

Where did this concept of a <u>personal priest</u> come from? Micah designed a religious system where he was in **control** because he had the money and could afford it; he could dictate the terms; nothing that disturbed his conscience or made him uncomfortable; he could worship at his convenience

Levite served as a "*hireling*" – **John 10:12-13** – not a true shepherd; went where he could get the best contract; no sense of divine calling or mission

"*Micah consecrated the Levite*" – talk about the pot calling the kettle black!
(an idiom used to claim that a person is guilty of the very thing of which they accuse another.)

Inrig: Cf. **Numbers 16** – when an ordinary Levite named Korah tried to act as a priest, God intervened by causing the ground to open up and swallow him.

James Jordan: This story is a parody of the story of the establishment of true worship at the exodus from Egypt. Virtually every detail found here is also found there, but here it is perverted. . . The "*suit of clothes*" is mentioned in verse 10 as a parody of Aaron's garments of glory and beauty.

VII. (:6) <u>MOTIVATED BY A PROSPERITY GOSPEL</u> = RABBIT'S FOOT APPROACH TO SPIRITUALITY

> "*Then Micah said, 'Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, seeing I have a Levite as priest.*'"

No orientation towards <u>glorifying the Lord</u>
Treats this Levite like a **good luck charm**

The ultimate in **Self Deception**

James Jordan: Like the Philistines ridiculed by Samson, Micah believes in magic. Like a Baalist, Micah believes that the essence of religion is the **manipulation of God**, not submission to Him. Now that he has some gods under his control, Micah believes that the Lord will bless him for sure. He is about to be relieved of that misconception.

CONCLUSION:
We have been called to worship God "*in spirit and in truth*." God desires worshipers – those that would worship in a genuine fashion – not counterfeit. Those that would submit to the divine leading of His Holy Spirit – not promote their own man-made agenda. Worship is not about convenience. It is not about entertainment. It is not about anything goes or exalting man's individuality or creativity. We have been privileged to be made a kingdom of priests. We approach God through our Lord Jesus Christ, the one Mediator between God and man without the need for any Aaronic priestly order or complex sacrificial system. Yet that doesn't mean that God has not revealed standards – standards for the leaders in His church – for the elders and deacons – and standards for those who would assemble together as the *ekklesia* to worship God "*in spirit and in truth*."

Is your Worship pleasing to the Lord or are you Self Deceived?
1) Check out your Foundation – how have you been instructed … are you characterized by integrity?
2) Check out your Dedication – is it sincere and complete or hypocritical? Is it oriented towards heart righteousness or just external religious trappings?
3) Check out your Church Leadership – do they meet the divinely revealed qualifications for ordination or are they self promoters
4) Check out your Submission to God's Authority – or are you operating on the basis of what looks good in your own eyes? Are you a moral relativist or one who believes in the absolute truths revealed in God's Word?
5) Check out your Contentment with God's methodology for fulfilling the Great Commission today through the program of His church – or are you motivated by Selfish Ambition – drifting from church to church to find what is most comfortable and secure and entertaining
6) Check out your Treasure Orientation – are you driven by laying up treasure in heaven or by materialistic earthly possessions and security
7) Check out your Motivation – is it personal prosperity or that Jesus Christ might be glorified in all things

Don't settle for **Counterfeit, Man-Made Spirituality** that might make you feel good for a short while.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) As parents where have we functioned inappropriately as enablers for wrong decisions on the part of our children?

2) Is our worship characterized by submitting to God's revelation or by trying to manipulate and control God?

3) In terms of church leadership, do we encourage a "hired gun" type of contract approach or promote those genuine servant models who are committed to the shepherding of the flock irregardless of their personal gain?

4) Do we ever resort to some version of "Rabbit Foot" Christianity where our own personal

prosperity usurps our motivation to see God glorified?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Calvin: A true image of God is not to be found in all the world and hence His glory is defiled, and His truth corrupted by the lie, whenever He is set before our eyes in visible form. Therefore to devise any image of God is itself impious: because by this corruption His majesty is adulterated and He is figured to be other than He is.

Pastor Steve: Having confessed his sin of stealing, according to Leviticus 6:1-6, Micah was required to do the following. He was to present his guilt offering to the Lord at the tabernacle. Another word, he was to confess his sin before the Lord and offer a guilt offering through the priest to receive forgiveness of his sin. And, on the same day, he was to pay back a fifth of the value on the top of the principal to his mother whom he stole from. The only thing he did was to pay back the principal he stole from his mother. His mother didn't say anything about what he didn't do right, what he needed to do to make things right, how he could walk in God's way. http://pstevekim.blogspot.com/2007/04/judges-17-18-what-happens-when-you.html

Chuck Smith:
1. Who has set the standards by which you live?
    a. Have they been set by Hollywood?
    b. Are they set by your college professors?
    c. Have you set your own standards?

http://www.tellinitlikeitis.net/2008/03/are-you-an-enabler-identifying-early-warning-signs-of-enabling-behaviors.html

Early Warning Signs Of Enabling Behaviors

There are times in relationships when we cross that sometimes invisible line between truly being helpful and supportive and acting as enablers, or becoming co-dependent with another person. Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse, in her work with families, suggests that 96% of the general population, and persons in helping professions especially, exhibit some forms of co-dependent behavior at one time or in fairly consistent patterns or both. What does that behavior "look like"?

1. Do you find yourself worrying about a person in ways that consume your time, or do you find yourself trying to come up with solutions to his/ her problems rather than letting that person do the solving?

2. Do you find yourself afraid for this person, or convinced that he/she "cannot handle" a situation or relationship without "falling apart"?

3. Do you ever do something for a person which he/she could and even should be doing for him or herself?

4. Do you ever excuse this person's behavior as being a result of "stress, misunderstanding, or difficulty coping," even when the behavior hurts or inconveniences you?

5. Have you ever considered giving/given this person money, your car, or talked to someone for this person as a way of reducing this person's pain?

6. Do you feel angry if this person does not follow through with something you have suggested – or do you worry that you may not be doing enough for this person?

7. Do you ever feel you have a unique and special relationship with this person, unlike anyone else they may know?

8. Do you feel protective of this person – even though he/she is an adult and is capable of taking care of his/her life?

9. Do you ever wish others in this person's life would change their behavior or attitudes to make things easier for this person?

10. Do you feel responsible for getting this person help?

11. Do you feel reluctant to refer an individual to a source of help or assistance, uncertain if another person can understand or appreciate this person's situation the way you do?

12. Do you ever feel manipulated by this person but ignore your feelings?

13. Do you ever feel that no one understands this person as you do?

14. Do you ever feel that you know best what another person needs to do or that you recognize his/her needs better than he/she does?

15. Do you sometimes feel alone in your attempts to help a person or do you feel you may be the only person to help this individual?

16. Do you ever want to make yourself more available to another person, at the expense of your own energy, time, or commitments?

17. Do you find yourself realizing that an individual may have more problems than you initially sensed and that you will need to give him/her your support or help for a long time?

18. Do you ever feel, as a result of getting to know this person, that you feel energized and can see yourself helping people like him/her to solve their problems?

19. Have you ever begun to "see yourself" in this person and his/her problems?

20. Has anyone ever suggested to you that you are "too close" to this person or this situation?

If you have answered "yes" to two or more of these questions, it is likely that, at one time or another – or on a regular basis – you have crossed the line from being supportive to being an enabler or co-dependent.

Dale Ralph Davis: **Deut. 27:15** stands first in a series of twelve curses and pronounces "cursed the man who makes a *pesel* or *massekah* – an abomination to Yahweh." Hence even though his mother's curse can be evaded or countered, Micah and the Danites rest under a divine curse which cannot be retracted and under a threat that will in no way be neutralized. . . Micah is living proof that it is possible to be set on a course of religious faith and/or ministry which exudes success in every respect and yet to rest under the curse of God's judgment.

James Jordan. This paragraph also begins the "Bethlehem theme" in the Bible. Beth-Lehem means "house of bread." Bethlehem should have been feeding the True Bread of Life to Judah and Israel. Instead, everything coming out of Bethlehem is defiled. The false Levite of Judges 19 also comes from there, and the traitor Elimelech departs Bethlehem for Moab in Ruth 1. Only with the birth of David is Bethlehem "redeemed," and only in the Greater David does Beth-Lehem truly become a House of Bread.

Brensinger: In the NT, Jesus similarly rejects the notion that external behaviors or characteristics alone in some way earn God's favor. Whether it be praying, fasting, Sabbath observance, or social action – the condition of the human heart takes on paramount importance (Matt. 5:7; 12:1-8; Mark 7:1-23). The same holds true for Paul, who elevates internal circumcision over the simple circumcision of the body (Rom. 3; Gal. 5:6). If anyone can place confidence in external criteria, Paul argues that he can (Phil. 3:1-11). Such things, however, are relatively worthless in and of themselves. Of greater importance is this: "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and all your mind, [and] your neighbor as yourself*" (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:37-39).

Motyer: The two tales look dispassionately at what it meant in practical terms to live as a weak, faithless, sinful people who no longer had a Joshua, and did not yet have a David, to keep them straight. The story of Micah and Jonathan and the men of Dan (chapters 17-18) conveys the view from above, the surface of things, the top side of life in the days of the judges. The story of the other Levite and his concubine, and the dire consequences of it (chapters 19-21), show how things were beneath the surface, the substance of them, the under side of life in those disconcerting times. The second will make plain how wrong were the underlying attitudes taken up by God's people. But before that stone is turned over and we see all the nastiness scurrying about underneath, the first story will show that superficially everything was as it should be, in that happy state of affairs which is a blend of ignorance and hypocrisy.

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **The Dangers of Do-It-Yourself Religion**
Introduction: So I want you to imagine that you're on an airplane and it's going to crash. Your only way to avoid death is through a parachute. The pilot offers you a professionally designed parachute. This is a proven parachute. It has been tested thousands of times. It was engineered very well. Every stitch, every strap, every panel of fabric has been tested to be good. Lives have depended on it and they have been saved by it.

But let's just suppose there's someone beside you and he says, you know what, I got a parachute that I would like to offer you. I made it myself. And you look next to you and you see some bed sheets sewn together with some ropes tied onto it. You see some homemade straps that he put in there, and also a backpack held together by duct tape. So let me ask you a question. Which parachute are you going to choose?

That's kind of a no-brainer, isn't it? Some things are too important to be done your own way. Now, because of Adam's sin, all of humanity is headed to a fiery destruction, and God has provided a way of escape. But sadly, Some people, rather than choosing God's way, choose their own way. I mean, you would never trust a homemade parachute to save your life, would you?

And yet there are some people that trust their own way, their own homemade religion, we could say, the do-it-yourself religion. They decide for themselves what worship should look like. They pick and choose what they want to believe. They pick and choose the parts of Scripture they

want to obey. They assume that if they're sincere that God will accept them because of their sincerity.

Big Idea: **When people abandon God's word as the authority for worship, and they will create a religion of their own making, and it's very, very dangerous.**
Six dangers of do-it-yourself religion.

I. Replaces God's Word with human preference.
Micah -- He's a contradiction because his name means, who is like Yahweh? That is to say, there's no one like Yahweh and yet here's a man who creates idols to try to tell people what he's like. That's kind of a contradiction. contradiction. He makes a carved image, a molten image. He wants God's blessing. We see this in verse 13, and yet he violates the clear commandments of the Word of God.

If you look at these verses very carefully, what you're going to see is just about every one of the commandments is broken. Stealing, here's a son who steals from his mother. You certainly don't honor your father and mother by doing that, right? So that commandment is broken. The commandment about a graven image, that's broken as well. About bearing false witness, she lies. About taking God's name in vain, she utters a curse in the name of Yahweh. That's taking His name in vain. About covetousness, both the mother and the son display this covetous attitude towards money.

And then as far as putting other gods before me, there's idolatry being practiced here. and with regard to Sabbath day worship, they don't worship on the Sabbath, they have their own religion. So they're not really obeying any of God's laws with respect to religion. Really the only two commandments here that are not violated is adultery and murder, and that's going to happen later on in chapter 19. So basically, the whole family and the whole society has ignored the commandments of God.

II. Replaces God's methods with human innovation. Vs. 5
He's rejecting everything that God revealed about worship and the way he wanted to be worshiped. He's doing everything the way he wants to do it. His own shrine, his own idols, his own ephod, his own priest, his own religious system. These were all his innovations, all the things that he added to worship.

So why does Micah do all this? Well, again, look at verse 6. You know it well. In those days, there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes. And this, again, applies even to religion, the worship, the true worship of God. They were doing what was right in their own eyes. They were putting their personal preference above God's authority. They were using human innovations instead of sticking to God's method. of worship that God had established.

III. Replaces biblical qualifications with practical convenience. Vs. 7
So why is this guy wandering around? That's the question that you might want to ask as you're looking at this passage of Scripture. Why is this guy wandering? Why is he looking? And it gives the idea that the whole religious system there is broken at this time. Perhaps maybe the people aren't giving and supporting Levites. And this man has to go out and he has to find his own place. He's got to really sell himself to be a priest somewhere to somebody. And so maybe that was what was going on in that time.

And so here the priesthood had become employment instead of a calling. And he was willing to serve wherever the money was. Later in Judges 18, we'll find that he will leave this place because a better opportunity opens up. When a more prosperous, better opportunity opens up, he's going to jump on that quickly. But what happens here is that this man is willing to sell the truth for whatever is best for him. Ministry to him was really transactional. It was more of a business relationship than a calling.

IV. Replaces conviction with comfort. Vs. 11

Everyone is comfortable. Everyone is satisfied. Everything looks good. But the only problem is everybody's dead wrong. None of this is what God wants. It might feel good to them. Compromise often is disguised with comfort. And so when God's people abandon authority, they find leaders who will tell them what they want to hear, rather than what the truth of God's word is.

V. Creates the appearance of spirituality without genuine obedience. Vs. 12

If you compare what Micah does, you'll see that, you know, he's the one who chooses the priest, not God. He goes by his own personal preference, not by divine command. And he hires this random Levite that just happened to come into his territory. And he does it all in his private household. It's not public. It's not before anyone. There's no mention of any sacrifices or anything like that. There's no sign of divine approval. Micah just assumes that God's happy with all this. And of course, God isn't.

This may have looked very religious. It may have looked very spiritual. People who saw it may have been very impressed by it all. But the whole thing was an offense to God. It was an abomination in the sight of God. And so this reminds us that there can be all kind of religious activity. Everything can look really good. And yet it be a sin in the sight of Almighty God. We can appear deeply spiritual, yet at the same time, be very, very, very far from God. And that's where this man was.

VI. Mistakes God's patience for God's approval. Vs. 13

So this man has consecrated this young priest. He becomes his priest in the house of Micah. And look what Micah says in verse 13. Then said Micah, now know I that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest. Wow, God's really blessing me. This is all working out here. I know God's going to do me good now.

This shows how self-deceived that Micah is. He's sincere. He believes that he's making God happy. But all of this is his own do-it-yourself worship and religion. He thinks God's pleased. God approves of his religion. but nothing could be further from the truth. What is he basing his confidence on? It's on circumstances, it's on feelings, it's on the appearance. None of it is based on God's revealed word. None of it is based on scripture.

There are many people that are like that. They're sincere, they're moral, they're deeply religious, but they're lost in a false religious system because they don't know Jesus Christ. False religion on the outside appears attractive. It appears good. It may include tradition and all these other things, morality and human effort.

But all of it, if it's not rooted in the gospel and who Jesus is, it is dangerous. It is wrong.

TEXT: Judges 18:1-31

TITLE: THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL – COUNTERFEIT, MAN-MADE SPIRITUALITY

BIG IDEA:
DON'T CONFUSE MATERIAL PROSPERITY WITH THE BLESSING OF THE LORD

INTRODUCTION:

I Timothy 6:3-10 *If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, 4 he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, 5 and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. 6 But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. 7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. 8 And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang.*

Our study of **Judges 18** this morning will expose the roots of a gospel perversion which has swept across American evangelicalism in the past century. You have heard it criticized under the label of the **Prosperity Gospel** -- Essentially the philosophy that equates material gain with the blessing of the Lord. Other names you may recognize: the "name it and claim it" gospel, the "blab it and grab it" gospel [I personally like that one!], the "health and wealth" gospel [usually some emphasis on faith healing and physical health is associated with the movement], the "word of faith" movement, the "gospel of success," and "positive confession theology."

The central tenet of this perversion is quite simple: God intends for every Christian to experience material prosperity in this life. A sidebar that is often correlated to this mindset is the ministry philosophy: Since we are God's children, we should always go first class, we should have the biggest and the best. Only this brings glory to God! Look at the TV sets of the famous tele-evangelists and proponents of this movement. Look at their Crystal Cathedrals and large, majestic halls of worship that seat so many thousand worshippers. Look at all the glitz of the religious trappings to say nothing of their personal wealth and lavish lifestyles and fancy suits and jewelry. Outwardly they present an impressive appearance.

Just look at the titles of the books the proponents of this philosophy produce and you will immediately see how far off they are from the message of the cross – a message that includes a call to share the sufferings of Christ; a message that exalts faithfulness to being a disciple of Christ over a selfish desire for comfort and prosperity:

Norman Vincent Peale: List of books he authored:

- *The Power of Positive Thinking*
- *The Art of Living*

- *A Guide to Confident Living*
- *The Tough-Minded Optimist*
- *Inspiring Messages for Daily Living*

Robert Schuller: famous Crystal Cathedral – "If you can dream it you can do it"

List of books he authored:

- *Way To The Good Life* (1963)
- *Move Ahead With Possibility Thinking* (1967)
- *Self-Love* (1975)
- *You Can Be The Person You Want To Be* (1976)
- *Toughminded Faith for Tenderhearted People* (1979), Thomas Nelson
- *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation* (1982)
- *Tough Times Never Last but Tough People Do* (1983)
- *The Power of Being Debt Free* (1985); Thomas Nelson Publishing
- *Living Positively One Day At A Time* (1986)
- *Success Is Never Ending, Failure Is Never Final* (1990)
- *Life's Not Fair, But God Is Good* (1991)
- *Prayer: My Soul's Adventure with God* (1995)
- *My Journey: From An Iowa Farm To A Cathedral Of Dreams* (2001)
- *Hours of Power* (2004)
- *Don't Throw Away Tomorrow* (2005)

Joel Osteen: Lakewood Church -- books he has authored:

- *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential (2004)*
- *Become a Better You: 7 Keys to Improving Your Life Every Day (2007)*

Millions of people are impacted by this watered-down, self-help babble that has stripped the gospel of its genuine spiritual power and reduced God to some type of genie that you rub like a rabbit's foot to try to extract personal blessings. This stuff should make you sick. Hate evil!

Structure of Chapter 18: **Two trips** recorded in this chapter:

(:1-10) The mission of the five spies sent to check out the land – very parallel to the mission of the 12 spies sent out by Moses – where only Joshua and Caleb had a vision of faith – people were unwilling to trust the Lord to take the Promised Land – contrast between a divine mission which the people rejected and a mission of human initiative which the people enthusiastically embraced

(:11-31) The military mission of the 600 troops to seize and destroy Laish and then repopulate and possess it
In both cases there was a significant stop at the house of Micah.

Remember last week's message about the **7 red flags** of counterfeit, man-made spirituality

- Wrong Foundation
- Hypocritical Dedication
- Expediency and Self Promotion
- Anarchy and Moral Relativism
- Selfish Ambition
- Materialistic Greed
- Personal Prosperity

FOUR DECEPTIONS OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

I. (18:1-6) ITS ATTRACTIVENESS -- THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL FAILS IN ITS DIAGNOSIS OF WHAT PATH HAS THE LORD'S APPROVAL – FIVE DANITE SPIES SOLICIT THE LORD'S BLESSING FROM MICAH'S PRIEST

A. (:1a) Moral Relativism Undermines Biblical Conviction

"*In those days there was no king of Israel;*" shortened version of same refrain

Who is there to lay down the law regarding the path of righteousness?

Wiersbe: society filled with competition and confusion

Everybody doing what is right in their own eyes – and yet wanting to affirm that their conduct has God's stamp of approval; they are not rejecting the faith from their perspective; they are silencing their conscience, ignoring biblical convictions and convincing themselves that God supports their path of comfort and prosperity

B. (:1b-2) Opportunism Advances Selfish Agendas

"*and in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for themselves to live in, for until that day an inheritance had not been allotted to them as a possession among the tribes of Israel. So the sons of Dan sent from their family five men out of their whole number, valiant men from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and to search it; and they said to them, "Go, search the land." And they came to the hill country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there.* " (parallel to **Josh. 2:1**)

Tribe of Dan seeking out an opportunity to improve their situation; not content to trust the Lord for the territory He had called them to conquer

Not out to advance the kingdom of God; out to secure an inheritance for themselves; to feather their own nest; they preferred a life of ease and comfort to fighting the battles that the Lord had called them to fight; to ease their conscience in choosing this path of attractiveness, they began worshipping idols

Zorah and Eshtaol = two cities near the western border of Benjamin; up in the hilly country; too small of an area and not affording them the agricultural opportunity of the lowlands

Wiersbe: Though not a large tribe (Num. 1:39), it was given choice territory when the tribal boundaries were assigned (**Josh. 19:40-48**). The Danites, however, weren't able to defeat and dispossess the enemy (Judg. 1:34), thus they decided to go north and relocate. . . the Danites coveted somebody else's land instead and took it in a violent manner.

James 4:1-4 "*What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility towards God*?"

MacArthur: The tribal allotment was a narrow, roughly U-shaped strip just N of Judah's claim and S of Ephraim's. The Mediterranean coast lay on the western arm of the "U." Joppa was on the coast near the N end.

Brensinger: extreme pressure from both the Amorites (1:34) and the Philistines (Judg. 13-16)

Inrig: We are not to understand from that statement that Dan had been omitted when Joshua divided up the land. Joshua 19 makes it clear that their assigned portion was between Ephraim and Judah, stretching out to the Mediterranean. Dan had refused to trust God by driving out the Amorites. As a result, Judges 1:34 indicates that Dan was forced into the hills and reduced to living in two towns.

Dan was left with two choices. As a tribe, they could repent of their unbelief and trust God to keep His Word as they entered into battle against their enemies. That was God's will. Or they could look for a new area, a comfortable place where the natives were unprepared, undefended, and vulnerable to a sneak attack. . .

In the book of 1 Chronicles, when the list of the tribes and families in Israel is given, Dan is the only tribe which is totally ignored. They had vanished into obscurity, probably because of intermarriage with the Philistines. Dan did not take what God had given to them, and they took what God had not given them. In the process, they lost all that they had.

Block: The narrator's point here is simply that the land allotted as the grant of the tribe of Dan in Josh 19:40-48 had not come into their possession. According to **1:34-36** the Danite efforts at taking the land had been ineffective because the Amorites had repulsed them and sent them into the hills.

C. (:3-4) Worldly Success Masquerades as Spiritual Authority

> "*When they were near the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young man, the Levite; and they turned aside there, and said to him, 'Who brought you here? And what are you doing in this place? And what do you have here?' And he said to them, 'Thus and so has Micah done to me, and he has hired me, and I have become his priest.*'"

Shocking to find a Levite ministering in this context! They were on a mission of expediency, hoping to justify their actions by some spiritual authority and here they find a like-minded soul.

Look at my fancy clothes … look at my comfortable lodging … look at the opportunity I have to minister as I please … what a deal

This Levite has found the secret to professional success and personal prosperity; and he did not have to reject his religious façade – perfect.
They seize upon some marketing strategy that seems to have been successful and take it to an entirely new level; we will become our own spiritual authority so that we can control and manipulate our religious practice.

Of course the fact that he has already been compromised by being hired by Micah sets the stage for him being bribed with a higher wage to switch his loyalties to the tribe of Dan.

2 Cor. 2:17 "*For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.*"

Satan has his agents masquerading as agents of light
2 Cor. 11:12-15 **"***But what I am doing, I will continue to do, that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting. 13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds.*"

D. (:5-6) Personal Preference Trumps the Will of God

> "*And they said to him, 'Inquire of God, please, that we may know whether our way on which we are going will be prosperous.' And the priest said to them, 'Go in peace; your way in which you are going has the LORD's approval.'*"

The Prosperity Gospel tells people what they want to hear
Didn't take the Levite much time to inquire of God … just going through the motions – using his ephod probably; not much different from tarot card reading; has degenerated into superstition and wishful thinking

These large mega-churches of our day point to their numbers as proof that they have the Lord's approval; look at all they are accomplishing; note that they do not point to a life of holiness on the part of their constituents – Only the Holy Spirit can produce the genuine fruit of the Spirit – but phony love, peace and joy can be trumped up via emotionalism and the mantra of positive thinking

Block: Like Micah in **7:10-13**, the Danites immediately recognize their good fortune in this surprise encounter. Just as Micah's cult had lacked credibility and authority until the Levite arrived, so the mission of these scouts lacks authority without an oracular authentication from deity.

II. (18:7-10) ITS MISSION -- THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL ORIENTS ITS MISSION AROUND THE WRONG OBJECTIVES – IF IT SEEMS GOOD TO YOU, GO FOR IT!

A. (:7) Exploiting People Who are Vulnerable

> "*Then the five men departed and came to Laish and saw the people who were in it living in security, after the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure; for there was no ruler humiliating them for anything in the land, and they were far from the Sidonians and had*

no dealings with anyone."

Laish is probably included in the territory allotted to the tribe of Naphtali

You see the desire of the tribe of Dan – to find a geographic pocket where they could live a life of ease, safe and secure from the pressure of surrounding enemies; not engaged in God's kingdom purposes but enjoying tranquility and comfort – sounds attractive, doesn't it … compared to "Onward Christian Soldiers …" compared to "endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" … compared to being challenged to fulfill the Great Commission -- "Go into all the world and make disciples" – who wants to be challenged when we can be coddled?

Brensinger: a peaceful way of life that emphasizes commerce over combat. Sidon was a Phoenician settlement on the Mediterranean coast known primarily for trade and commerce rather than war. Second, Laish is relatively isolated, both geographically and politically … have no allies who can readily offer assistance

Block: With its pleasant climate and watered by copious springs that feed into the Jordan River, this site at the foot of Mount Herman was the most productive region of the country.

B. (:8-10) Coveting Power and Possessions

"*When they came back to their brothers at Zorah and Eshtaol, their brothers said to them, 'What do you report?' And they said, 'Arise, and let us go up against them; for we have seen the land, and behold, it is very good. And will you sit still? Do not delay to go, to enter, to possess the land. When you enter, you shall come to a secure people with a spacious land; for God has given it into your hand, a place where there is no lack of anything that is on the earth.*"'

Brings us back to the memory of the 12 spies reporting back to Moses and the people about taking possession of the Promised Land
They pass off their personal coveting as the will of God – "God has given it into your hand" – how can they be confident of this? They have the assurance of a compromised Levite who told them what they wanted to hear

III. (18:11-26) ITS TREACHERY -- THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL JUSTIFIES ITS PERVERSION BY MEANS OF AN EXPEDIENT, COUNTERFEIT, MAN-MADE RELIGIOUS SYSTEM ---
600 DANITES ARE MOBILIZED TO ATTACK LAISH

A. (:11-13) Mobilizing the Troops for Their Military Mission of Human Initiative

"*Then from the family of the Danites, from Zorah and from Eshtaol, six hundred men armed with weapons of war set out. And they went up and camped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. Therefore they called that place Mahaneh-dan to this day; behold, it is west of Kiriath-jearim. And they passed from there to the hill country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah.*"

600 men does not seem like a very large army – they knew the mission was a cakewalk; not all of the tribe was going to relocate apparently

Kiriath Jearim = place where the ark of the Lord ended up after it was returned by the Philistines

(1 Sam. 7:2); 7 miles NW of Jerusalem; called it Camp of Dan – constantly infusing their human agenda with spiritual significance

James Jordan: Again we are reminded of Samson, who was from Mahaneh-Dan (Jud. 13:25), in order once again to make the contrast between that mighty man and these Danites.

Why did they stop at the house of Micah? Seeking to justify their mission as divinely ordained; they wanted assurance of the blessing of the Lord

B. (:14-20) Installing an Impressive Counterfeit Religious System

1. (:14-17) Appropriating Religious Trappings

> "*Then the five men who went to spy out the country of Laish answered and said to their kinsmen, 'Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod and household idols and a graven image and a molten image? Now therefore, consider what you should do.' And they turned aside there and came to the house of the young man, the Levite, to the house of Micah, and asked him of his welfare. And the six hundred men armed with their weapons of war, who were of the sons of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate. Now the five men who went to spy out the land went up and entered there, and took the graven image and the ephod and household idols and the molten image, while the priest stood by the entrance of the gate with the six hundred men armed with weapons of war*."

2. (:18-20) Propositioning a Religious Leader –

Let selfish ambition overrule your conscience and convictions

> "*And when these went into Micah's house and took the graven image, the ephod and household idols and the molten image, the priest said to them, 'What are you doing?' And they said to him, 'Be silent, put your hand over your mouth and come with us, and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be a priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?' And the priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod and household idols and the graven image, and went among the people*."

Let's make a deal approach to spiritual leadership;
Buying someone out and silencing their prophetic voice – what type of instruction and leadership was this priest going to provide? He has been totally compromised.
What does it take to buy your silence??
Should a pastor always jump at the opportunity to preach to greater numbers?
No honor among thieves; no integrity on the part of this Levite priest

C. (:21-26) Intimidating Any Opposition

> "*Then they turned and departed, and put the little ones and the livestock and the valuables in front of them. When they had gone some distance from the house of Micah, the men who were in the houses near Micah's house assembled and overtook the sons of Dan. And they cried to the sons of Dan, who turned around and said to Micah, 'What is the matter with you, that you have assembled together?' And he said, 'You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and have gone away, and what do I have besides? So how can you say to me, 'What is the matter with you?' And the sons of Dan said to him, 'Do not let your voice be heard among us, lest fierce men fall upon you and*

you lose your life, with the lives of your household.' So the sons of Dan went on their way; and when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his house."

Put the women and children in front because that would be the safest spot since they expected to be attacked from the rear – whatever posse would be chasing them for what they had stolen from Micah's household

Brensinger: "*hot-tempered m*en", literally, "bitter of soul," elsewhere denotes a wild bear robbed of her cubs (2 Sam. 17:8)

Block: in the providence of God the Danite treatment of Micah may be interpreted as the divine response to Micah for his abominable behavior. With delightful irony the despised Danites serve as agents of judgment upon this representative of the high and mighty Ephraimites.

IV. (18:27-31) ITS RESULTS -- THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL CAN PRODUCE SHORT TERM RESULTS THAT LOOK IMPRESSIVE BUT ARE AT ODDS WITH GOD'S KINGDOM PROGRM -- DANITES CONQUER LAISH, SETTLE THERE AND ESTABLISH THEIR OWN WORSHIP CENTER AND PRIEST

3 Key Philosophies of the Prosperity Gospel Movement:

A. (:27-28a) What's Yours Is Mine Philosophy

"*Then they took what Micah had made and the priest who had belonged to him, and came to Laish, to a people quiet and secure, and struck them with the edge of the sword; and they burned the city with fire. And there was no one to deliver them, because it was far from Sidon and they had no dealings with anyone, and it was in the valley which is near Beth-rehob.*"

- Some people live by the very selfish philosophy: What's mine is mine and I am not going to share

- Very few people live by the servant philosophy: What's mine is yours and I am going to minister to your needs

B. (:28b-29) Name and Claim It Philosophy

"*And they rebuilt the city and lived in it. And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father who was born in Israel; however, the name of the city formerly was Laish.*"

No wonder that they advocate that others live by this mantra; this is how they got to the top of the heap

They could call the city whatever they wanted; but God knows that it still is Laish

C. (:30-31) External Religious Trappings Philosophy

"*And the sons of Dan set up for themselves the graven image; and Jonathan, the son of*

Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land. So they set up for themselves Micah's graven image which he had made, all the time that the house of God was at Shiloh.

- Have to wear the fanciest suits and the wives have to be dolled up with the fanciest clothes and jewelry

- Have to worship in fancy cathedrals; TV sets have to be expensive and impressive

    - Cf. the Crystal Cathedral
    - Cf. Joel Osteen's worship center

- Music and entertainment have to be of the highest performance quality

Block: In the end the Danites have a territory they may claim as their home, but they have sold their souls to Canaanite values.

CONCLUSION:
The refutation of the Prosperity Gospel is quite simple:

Life of Christ:
Matt. 8:20 "*And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head*."

2 Cor. 8:9 "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich*."

Example of the Apostles:
Acts 3:6 "*But Peter said, 'I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene-- walk!'*"

Acts 20:33-35 "*I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive*.'"

John Piper – excellent video on YouTube decrying the Prosperity Gospel:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTc_FoELt8s
"God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied with Him in the midst of loss not prosperity."

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Do I embrace suffering as the will of God or imagine that my pathway should always be one of material and physical prosperity?

2) What type of prosperity gospel is America exporting to the poor people of Africa and Asia? What types of false promises and expectations are being presented?

3) When have I sought to define a mission after my own lusts and selfish preferences rather than submit to God's will for my life?

4) How do I determine whether my path has the Lord's approval?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: The tribe of Dan was the first tribe in Israel to officially adopt an idolatrous system of religion. Even though there was a house of God in Shiloh, they preferred their images and idols. Years later, when the kingdom divided, Jeroboam I of Israel would set up golden calves in Dan and Beersheba and encourage the whole nation to turn away from the true and living God (1 Kings 12:25-33).

Brensinger: Contrast between Conquest of the Promised Land by the Israelites under Joshua and the territory expansion of the Danites:

Israel	**Danites**
Advancing	Retreating
Claiming an inheritance	Seeking a more attainable alternative
Yahweh involved	Yahweh has withdrawn (2:20-21)
Encounters great, fortified cities	Attacks isolated, defenseless prey
Joshua and Caleb as faithful spies	Exploitation advocated by 5 faithless spies

The actions and achievements of the Danites, in other words, constitute the direct antithesis of the Israelites' march to the Promised Land.

Block: Especially impressive is the present narrator's attribution of the Danite adventure entirely to human initiative and human effort. . . Whereas in the original event the people had refused to enter the land despite its attractiveness and the promise of divine presence, the Danites respond to the scouts' report with enthusiastic entry into the fray.

Robert Schuller: "If you can dream it, you can do it" – positive thinking --
Former **Crystal Cathedral** pastor Robert A. Schuller is renting out rooms in his pristine Laguna Beach, Calif., home for $700 a night, or $5,000 a week, as part of a spiritual retreat package.

The former pastor turned television executive has placed an advertisement for his South Laguna home on the popular online service Airbnb.

Airbnb matches people seeking vacation or short-term rentals to those, generally private parties, who have accommodations to offer.

"Enjoy a private spiritual retreat with Rev. Dr. Robert A. Schuller and wife, Donna," the Airbnb listing reads. "Enjoy a 2-7 day retreat in their beautiful four bedroom, four bath 180' ocean view home located in a very unique, private gate-guarded beach community in Laguna Beach,

California."

The ad reveals that "Robert and Donna specialize in leadership training, marriage renewal, financial counseling, mentoring, friendship building, nutritional and exercise coaching."

The private stay comes included with two hours of counseling per day and a "delicious and healthy daily continental breakfast," according to the ad. . .

Schuller is the only son of the Rev. Robert H. Schuller, who founded the Crystal Cathedral Ministries five decades ago in a Southern California drive-in movie theater. Schuller's ministry eventually became one of America's most notable megachurches with a congregation that had up to 10,000 members at the height of its popularity.

Robert A. Schuller grew up in the ministry and was seen for 32 years on the church's internationally televised "Hour of Power" worship program. He served as senior pastor at Crystal Cathedral following his father's retirement in 2006. However, he left the church in 2008 in a highly public family split.

Schuller has alleged that he was ousted by his older sisters and brothers-in-law in a bid to maintain "job security," and that Crystal Cathedral Ministries, which has ousted every Schuller family member, was brought down by sibling rivalry.

The Crystal Cathedral has been undergoing major changes in recent years with every last member of the Schuller family having departed the ministry. The megachurch also filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in October 2010 and its landmark campus was sold on a bankruptcy court's order in February to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange County.

Read more at http://www.christianpost.com/news/former-crystal-cathedral-pastor-robert-a-schuller-renting-out-home-as-spiritual-retreat-73201/#R7vS5uMZeUohUQpB.99

http://www.christianpost.com/news/former-crystal-cathedral-pastor-robert-a-schuller-renting-out-home-as-spiritual-retreat-73201/

Schuller's mentor was Norman Vincent Peale, who taught a lot of the same self-esteem gospel. Schuller is also the root of the whole market-driven, seeker-sensitive philosophies, and is a mentor of Rick Warren and many others in those churches.

http://watchmansbagpipes.blogspot.com/2008/03/robert-schuller-heretic.html

Joel Osteen:

Born in Houston, Texas, Osteen is one of five children of John Osteen and Dolores ("Dodie") Pilgrim. His father, a former Southern Baptist pastor, founded Lakewood Church where Osteen is the current senior pastor.[4] Osteen married his wife, Victoria L. Iloff, on April 4, 1987.[5] They have two children, Jonathan and Alexandra. His older siblings, Paul, Lisa, and Tamara, and his younger sister, April, are also involved in full-time ministry.[6] His half-brother Justin does missionary work out of New York.[7]

After 17 years producing the church's television program, Osteen succeeded his father on October 3, 1999, as pastor of Lakewood Church. He had only preached once in his life, the week

before his father's death.[7] Today, Lakewood Church services, led by Pastor Joel Osteen, are seen in over 100 nations around the world.[8] Joel Osteen's first book, *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential*, was released in October 2004. In December 2006, he was named one of the year's "Ten Most Fascinating People" by Barbara Walters.[9] Former presidential candidate John McCain has described Osteen as "inspirational".[10]

Currently, Osteen and several Lakewood Church personnel travel across the nation, presenting programs in large arenas. The event, titled "A Night of Hope", includes worship music led by the church's music ministry, a sermon from Osteen and a testimony by his mother, Dodie. In 2007, the tour expanded to include stops in several other countries, including Canada, England, Northern Ireland and Israel.[11] Osteen released his second book, titled *Become a Better You: 7 Keys to Improving Your Life Every Day* in October 2007, which also topped the New York Times Best Sellers List with a first printing of four million copies.[12][13] Osteen told Larry King the new book will focus more on relationships and not getting stuck where we are in life. "Just my basic message of becoming all God's created you to be," he added.[14]

Osteen's popularity led to him being featured as one of ABC News' "10 Most Fascinating People of 2006",[15] and was named "Most Influential Christian in America" in 2006 by *The Church Report*.[16] Osteen is one of five children of John Osteen and Dolores "Dodie" Pilgrim.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joel_Osteen

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **The Levite Who Led the Nation Astray**
Introduction: Judges 18 kind of ends with that same shock. This is kind of one of these stories in the Bible where we're introduced to a character. We don't know who this person is. He remains unnamed until you get to the end of the chapter. And when the name is finally given at the end of the chapter, it's supposed to shock you. It's supposed to make you kind of drop, open your mouth and say, are you kidding me? It can't be that person.

And so this whole story centers on this Levite priest. Israel is a nation that's in the midst of apostasy and false religion. They were turning away from the Lord. They were doing the very things that God warned them not to do. In fact, when you come to Judges chapter 17 and chapter 18, nearly everything that they do was things that were warned against by Moses in the book of Deuteronomy. Things like worshiping false gods, graven images, unauthorized worship, doing what's right in your own eyes. All of this comes right out of the warnings that are given in the book of Deuteronomy. For example, in Deuteronomy 12, 8, Moses said, ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day. Every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes. Moses warned them, look, when you get into the land, don't do whatever is right in your own eyes. And what do we find Israel doing? What's right in their own eyes.

The very thing that Moses warned against. He said, take heed to thyself that you don't offer burnt offerings in every place. That is, you have one central place of worship that God will put his name upon. Don't go all over the land and build your own shrines and do your own thing.

And what do we find happening in the book of Judges? That's exactly what they're doing. They're building their own shrines, they're all kind of worship that is bizarre, that is syncretism with the Canaanite religion, religions there in the land of Canaan.

I. Act #1 – The Priest Recognized – Vs. 1-6

Rather than worshiping at the tabernacle at Shiloh, which is just a few miles away, it's right there in the middle of the land of Israel in Ephraim, he decides to make his own shrine. He decides to make molten images out of silver that he originally stole from his mother. And then he also makes his son the priest until this Levite comes along, and then he decides to hire this Levite priest.

Recognition is not the same thing as faithfulness. Many people are known, many people have a big name, they're admired, but don't confuse that with godliness. Never evaluate a spiritual leader based on popularity, personality, influence, or reputation. But here the Danites, they have confidence in him, and they rely on his counsel.

First of all, they're not really seeking the will of God, they're seeking confirmation for their own decision. The will of God was already made known to them, and what was it? You already have an allotted land, go take possession of that land. But they made a decision to do their own thing. If they really wanted to know God's will, they could go to the tabernacle in Shiloh, which is just a few miles away, and they could ask a priest there. But they really weren't seeking God's will. They were really wanting affirmation on the decision they already had made.

He tells them exactly what they want to hear. This guy is the Joel Osteen of the Old Testament here. No warning, no correction, no rebuke, no call to repentance, just affirmation. False religion frequently tells people exactly what they want to hear. Faithful shepherds will at times comfort you, but a faithful shepherd will also confront you when you needed to be confronted.

II. Act #2 – The Priest Recruited – Vs. 7-21

This second act really shows the corruption of this priest.

But the priest, when he hears all of this, greater audience, greater prestige, greater influence, bigger salary. Look at verse number 20, what it says, and the priest's heart was glad. And he took the ephod and the teraphim and the graven image and it went in the midst of the people.

You didn't have to ask him twice. When they ask him, oh, let me help you. I'll help you carry this stuff out. So he takes all of it, he's ready to go. There's no sense of loyalty to Micah who hired him in the first place. Just an opportunity for him to better himself. I mean, if you want to see what a hireling looks like, here it is. Here's a hireling shepherd. He flees when a better opportunity comes. One of the greatest tests of character is what happens when opportunity collides with conviction. And here this man, he just is willing to throw away anything. He's really a pragmatist. You know, whatever works for me. Whatever helps me.

III. Act #3 – The Priest Revealed

A. <u>The Attempted Rescue</u>

Micah, when he finds out that all of his things were stolen and his priest went with him, he gathers up the neighbors and he goes after them. Look at verse 22, and when they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men that were in the house near to Micah's house were gathered together and overtook the children of Dan. So they all kind of get together, he calls all the neighbors, they all come out, and they're all going after this tribe of Dan to retrieve their gods.

B. The Awful Raid

In verses 27 and verse 29, the 600 men from Dan, they raid this little town of Laish. This peaceful little town. They overrun it. Look down in verse number 27. It says, And they took the things which Micah had made, and the priests which he had, and came unto Laish, unto a people that were quiet and secure.

And they smote them with the edge of the sword, and they burned 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 Beth Rehob. And they built the city and dwelt therein. And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name Dan of their father, who was born unto Israel. Howbeit the name of the city was Laish at the first. So they basically take over this little city. They rename it. They call it Dan.

C. The Astonishing Revelation

And this is the next part of this act here, the astonishing revelation. The first thing they do after they conquer the city is they set up their new false religion. And then when you get to verse 30, then comes the shocking revelation. Verse 30, and the children of Dan set up the graven image, and now we're going to find out who this Levite was that basically was complicit in all of this, and that helped start this new religion, this false religion, that led these people away from God, instead of to God, instead of being a faithful Levite priest, teaching the word of God and the law of God, and being faithful to the covenant, he does the opposite.

He does whatever's best for him. He helps invent this false religion. Who is this Levite priest? Well, look in verse number 30. Textual problem with the name -- many scholars believe that Jewish rabbis and Jewish scholars were so embarrassed by this that they wanted to save Moses some embarrassment. They wanted to honor Moses' name. They were so embarrassed that this was the grandson of Moses that they put in the raised *nun* to change it to **Manasseh** in honor of **Moses.** All right? So they changed it.

I believe that the original name here should be Moses. And why? Because again, if it's Manasseh, you lose the whole shock value of this story. And this whole story is supposed to shock you. So if you're reading along and you say, Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, you say, okay, who's that? But if you're reading along and you say, Jonathan, son of Gershom, son of Moses, then you go, whoa. Are you telling me that the **grandson of Moses** was the one who led Israel astray in this false religion? Now that's astonishing. And by the way, Moses had a son named Gershom in Exodus 2.22 and Exodus 18.3. It's also confirmed in 1 Chronicles chapter 23. That he had a son named Gershom, who had a son named Jonathan. So this is the grandson of Moses.

And so the writer wants to really convey some things. That is to show that in just a short time, the nation of Israel had been so canonized by the culture that it has infected every household. Even the most influential households in Israel have been affected by this apostasy. It also

emphasizes the timeframe. One generation removed from Moses, there's apostasy already in Israel. Just 100 years, Israel has been spiraling downward, given to idolatry.

Later on in scripture, you will notice that when the 12 tribes are mentioned, the tribe of Dan does not appear on the list. It's not on the list of the 12 tribes in Revelation chapter 7, that's supposed to produce 12,000 godly Israelite witnesses during the tribulation period. If you notice that list, Dan is not mentioned on that list.

You know why? Because of their part in the idolatry. What they did caused this whole tribe to cease. They were absorbed into the Canaanite culture, and the tribe of Dan just simply went out of existence. It was gone. They brought a curse down on the nation of Israel, and because of that, the curse that God promised and Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 was fulfilled on this one tribe of Dan because they led the people away. And remember where this all started. It started in the home of a woman who had money stolen from her by her son who later used this same silver to set up a false image. So, real quickly, what are the applications here?

A godly heritage does not guarantee godly descendants. Spiritual privilege is a blessing, but it's not an automatic protection. I got to go through these quickly because we're really out of time. Number two, ministry background does not equal spiritual faithfulness. I mean, Jonathan came from a Levitical background.

He had a lot of knowledge, but he used them not in a good way. A famous name cannot sanctify a false ministry. This guy had a name that everybody knew. He was recognized. And yet he led these people into idolatry. One compromising leader can mislead many people. And he did indeed do that. Another lesson is spiritual decline can happen close to great truth. He was close to this family, Moses, that originally gave Israel the law. It's just so very sobering.

Being near the Bible, being near preaching, being near church doesn't mean that a person is surrendered to God and godly. A lot of apostates come out of church ministries where they hear the truth. Another thing is parents and leaders must pass on conviction, not just information. The next generation needs more than just Bible facts.

The grace of God is still needed in the best families. Even the family of Moses was not beyond failure, and they needed the grace of God. And so do all of us. We need the grace of God. Just because your parents and grandparents were godly doesn't mean that the grandchildren will be godly. And every person has to find their own faith. You can't live off the faith of your parents and your grandparents. Jesus Christ has to be real to you personally in your heart. You have to know him yourself. He has to be your God, not just the God of your parents. And so we have to remember that and we have to beg God for his mercy in our own family. And we have to instill in them that they must have their own personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

TEXT: Judges 19:1-30

TITLE: SHOCKING DEPTHS OF MORAL DEPRAVITY

BIG IDEA:
WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO SHOCK GOD'S PEOPLE INTO OUTRAGE OVER DEPRAVED WICKEDNESS?

INTRODUCTION:

Today's text reads like an X rated Hollywood script. Unfortunately we have been exposed to so much depravity in our culture that it is difficult to shock us anymore. That is a sad reality for the people of God. We have far too much in common today with the children of Israel back in the days when there was no king. That explains why God goes to such great lengths in this surprising text to shock us out of our moral lethargy. Somebody needs to take a stand for the cause of righteousness. Somebody needs to speak against the evil of our day. Somebody needs to cry out that Moral Depravity must be checked. Our society has fallen and we can't seem to get up.

Chapters 17-18 spoke of religious decline in the nation of Israel. They tried to combine the worship of God with elements of idolatry from the pagans who lived with them in the Promised Land – the sad consequence of failing to obey God's directive to fully conquer the land and drive out their enemies. They adopted a man-made, counterfeit system of worship where they set up regional shrines and high places and ordained their own priests. Inevitably religious decline is linked to moral decline in a society – that is what we will see in these concluding chapters 19-21.

Inrig: Illustration: Up until April 3, 1977, few people knew anything about a place called Tenerife. In fact, most of us probably were not very sure of the location of the Canary Islands. But, on that day, at a little airport, two 747s collided on the runway. That accident left 575 people dead, thousands mourning, and Tenerife at the focal point of world attention.

There are some questions about that tragedy which will never be answered, although the chief facts are clear. . . It was a foggy day, and the two pilots could not see one another, but, for some inexplicable reason the Dutch pilot began his takeoff without clearance from the control tower. Obviously, he thought he was doing the right thing, but he was not. The other plane was in the way, and he was unable to avoid it. As a result, hundreds of people were killed.

Every pilot is taught one very basic lesson at the beginning of his training. In an air traffic control zone, you do not do what seems best in your eyes: you do what the control tower tells you to do. That is always true, but it is especially true when the visibility is bad. The reason is, of course, very simple. The controller knows things that you do not know. He has better information and a better perspective to guide a pilot safely to his destination. To act on your own causes disasters.

That is an obvious principle of aviation, but it is also an important principle of life. We live at a time when a thick moral fog has settled upon our society. The old moral landmarks have been obliterated, and no one seems to know the difference between right and wrong. Ethically and morally, the visibility is nil, and people are groping for anything that will help them find their directions. It is very tempting, at such a time to fly by the seat of your pants, living by your own standards, doing whatever is right in your own eyes. The passage of Scripture we are going to study gives us a vivid picture of what happens when we follow that method.

The other alternative is to be guided by Someone who can see what we cannot see and who

knows what we do not know. The great promise of god's Word is that, if we commit ourselves to doing what is right in God's eyes, we will be directed safely through the moral fog. The Lord is not a controller who makes mistakes. He is the omniscient, loving Father who wants only the best for His children.

FOUR SHOCK WAVES TO WAKE GOD'S PEOPLE FROM THEIR MORAL LETHARGY

I. (:1-9) SHOCKING LIASON WITH A CONCUBINE BY A LEVITE – COMPROMISE PAVES THE WAY FOR MORAL DECAY

A. (:1-2) Seesawing Relationship – Up and Down Roller Coaster

1. (:1) Hooking Up With a Concubine

> "*Now it came about in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite staying in the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim, who took a concubine for himself from Bethlehem in Judah.*"

PreceptAustin: This event appears to have occurred early in the period of the judges, because Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, was still ministering as high priest (Jdg 20:28; cf. Nu 25:7, 11)

Block: Because Israel refuses to acknowledge Yahweh as king, the nation lacks a theological reason for not sinking to the ethical level of the Canaanites at the personal, tribal, and national levels.

Levites should be the spiritual leaders of the nation; what was this Levite doing living in some remote outpost? Out of place; not connected with any sense of mission; not fulfilling his divine calling; rudderless

You hear about big name pastors who fall into some type of outrageous sexual sin; you must understand that decay happens slowly over time; there were a lot of little compromises that went unseen that led up to the more public, attention-grabbing transgression

"Slow Fade" – Casting Crowns

It's a slow fade when you give yourself away
It's a slow fade when black and white have turned to gray
Thoughts invade, choices are made, a price will be paid
When you give yourself away
People never crumble in a day
Daddies never crumble in a day
Families never crumble in a day

2. (:2) Harlotry Creates Separation

> "*But his concubine played the harlot against him, and she went away from him to her father's house in Bethlehem in Judah, and was there for a period of four months.*"

Context of unfaithfulness is not surprising in the overall climate of moral degradation

She probably feared how her husband/master would react to her unfaithfulness and fled for refuge back to her father's house

Four months is a long period of separation; husband was waiting, expecting her to possibly return

B. (:3) Seeking Reconciliation

"*Then her husband arose and went after her to speak tenderly to her in order to bring her back, taking with him his servant and a pair of donkeys. So she brought him into her father's house, and when the girl's father saw him, he was glad to meet him.*

PreceptAustin: A priest was not allowed to marry a harlot...
"*A widow, or a divorced woman, or one who is profaned by harlotry, these he (the priest) may not take; but rather he is to marry a virgin of his own people*" (**Lev 21:14**)
Clearly this Levite's ministry was greatly compromised from the beginning. Not surprisingly (especially as you read the following lines) that he made little of her sin and separation and sought her back sympathetically as explained in the next verse.

Taking sin way too casually – not dealing with things according to God's revelation

Why was the father so glad to see the Levite? His daughter would live in isolation and disgrace if she could not be accepted back into the family relationship with her estranged husband; would cause shame to fall on the entire household

C. (:4-9) Sidetracked by Excessive Partying

1. (:5-7) Delayed for Three Days

"*And his father-in-law, the girl's father, detained him; and he remained with him three days. So they ate and drank and lodged there.*"

Must understand the Oriental mindset here – life does not run according to a strictly programmed timetable of appointments where one must hurry from one commitment to another; they gave priority to hospitality and times of feasting and celebration; they were able to set aside the normal responsibilities of the day and spend time enjoying each other's company

2. (:5-7) Delayed on the Fourth Day

"*Now it came about on the fourth day that they got up early in the morning, and he prepared to go; and the girl's father said to his son-in-law, 'Sustain yourself with a piece of bread, and afterward you may go.' So both of them sat down and ate and drank together; and the girl's father said to the man, 'Please be willing to spend the night, and let your heart be merry.' Then the man arose to go, but his father-in-law urged him so that he spent the night there again.*"

It is significant that the Levite lives without any sense of divine mission – such a carefree existence that fit into the culture around them of almost a party-type atmosphere

3. (:8-9) Delayed on the Fifth Day

"*And on the fifth day he arose to go early in the morning, and the girl's father said, 'Please sustain yourself, and wait until afternoon'; so both of them ate. When the man arose to go along with his concubine and servant, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said to him, 'Behold now, the day has drawn to a close; please spend the night. Lo, the day is coming to an end; spend the night here that*

your heart may be merry. Then tomorrow you may arise early for your journey so that you may go home."'

Providence has directed that the Levite has now put his travelling party in a precarious state

II. (:10-21) SHOCKING LACK OF HOSPITALITY – COMMON COURTESY DISAPPEARS AS SOCIETY DEGENERATES

A. (:10-15) Hospitality Denied

1. (:10) Departure at Last

"*But the man was not willing to spend the night, so he arose and departed and came to a place opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). And there were with him a pair of saddled donkeys; his concubine also was with him.*"

Block: In this chapter timing is everything, and it is the unfortunate timing of the Levite's departure from his father-in-law's house that precipitates the crisis that follows.

Departure late in the day was more dangerous – especially as it became dusk

2. (:11-13) Distinction Between Foreigners and Countrymen

"*When they were near Jebus, the day was almost gone; and the servant said to his master, 'Please come, and let us turn aside into this city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it.' However, his master said to him, 'We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners who are not of the sons of Israel; but we will go on as far as Gibeah.' And he said to his servant, 'Come and let us approach one of these places; and we will spend the night in Gibeah or Ramah.*"'

They had travelled about 6 miles late in the day and now would proceed further north another 6 miles to an Israelite occupied city where they would spend the night and expect to receive hospitality and safe refuge

Motyer: not until the early days of the monarchy that David finally took possession of it, and it became Jerusalem, "*the city of the great king*."

3. (:14-15) Disappointing Rejection by Men of Gibeah

"*So they passed along and went their way, and the sun set on them near Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin. And they turned aside there in order to enter and lodge in Gibeah. When they entered, they sat down in the open square of the city, for no one took them into his house to spend the night.*"

What a contrast to the overflowing hospitality that the Levite had experienced at his father-in-law-s house; they set themselves up just inside the city gates in the open square where people returning from their daily work would be sure to see them

Significance of Obligation of Hospitality:

"*When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.*" (**Lv19:33-34**)

Heb. 13:2; Rom. 12:13; requirement for elders – are we living as stewards or possessors of God's gifts?

B. (:16-21) Hospitality Offered

1. (:16) Identification of the Hospitable Old Man – Point of Commonality

"*Then behold, an old man was coming out of the field from his work at evening. Now the man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was staying in Gibeah, but the men of the place were Benjamites.*"

2. (:17-19) Introductions – Provisions are not the Issue

"*And he lifted up his eyes and saw the traveler in the open square of the city; and the old man said, 'Where are you going, and where do you come from?' And he said to him, 'We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim, for I am from there, and I went to Bethlehem in Judah. But I am now going to my house, and no man will take me into his house. Yet there is both straw and fodder for our donkeys, and also bread and wine for me, your maidservant, and the young man who is with your servants; there is no lack of anything.*'"

Block: With his comment the Levite verbalizes the social malignancy in Israel. The mores of the nation have been infected at the most fundamental level – the people of one tribe sense no obligation to the members of another. There is no sense of community.

3. (:20-21) Invitation to Lodge – Peace instead of Danger

"*And the old man said, 'Peace to you. Only let me take care of all your needs; however, do not spend the night in the open square.' So he took him into his house and gave the donkeys fodder, and they washed their feet and ate and drank.*"

This seemingly private story about one man and his party's journey back to his home in the remote hill country of Ephraim is now going to explode into an incident of national significance; when all is said and done, the tribe of Benjamin will almost be totally wiped out – only 600 men and no women to marry them will remain after the devastation is over

III. (:22-26) SHOCKING LUSTFUL SEXUAL ATTACK – CALLOUSNESS DEVELOPS IN THE CONTEXT OF UNRESTRAINED DEPRAVITY

(cf. **Gen. 19:4-8** story of depravity at Sodom and Gomorrah)

A. (:22) Brazen Demand

"*While they were making merry, behold, the men of the city, certain worthless fellows, surrounded the house, pounding the door; and they spoke to the owner of the house, the old man, saying, 'Bring out the man who came into your house that we may have relations with him.*'"

B. (:23-24) Bargaining Attempt / Bizarre Offer

"*Then the man, the owner of the house, went out to them and said to them, 'No, my fellows, please do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not commit this act of folly. Here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. Please let me bring them out that you may ravish them and do to them whatever you wish. But do not commit such an act of folly against this man.*'"

PreceptAustin: "*Where there is no vision* (word from God), *the people are unrestrained* (run wild as we see in Judges 19), *but happy is he who keeps the law*." (**Pr 29:18**)

C. (:25a) Barbaric Act of Cowardice and Self Preservation

"*But the men would not listen to him, so the man seized his concubine and brought her out to them.*"

D. (:25b) Brutal Attack

"*And they raped her and abused her all night until morning, then let her go at the approach of dawn.*"

E. (:26) Beaten Corpse

"*As the day began to dawn, the woman came and fell down at the doorway of the man's house where her master was, until full daylight.*"

Why no names in this account??

- Universal nature of the conduct – this depraved conduct could be experienced by anyone; prevalent throughout the nation
  Block: Anonymity is a deliberate literary device adopted to reflect the universality of Israel's Canaanization.
- Dehumanization of the individual in a completely worldly society

IV. (:27-30) SHOCKING LESSON/LETTER OF DISMEMBERMENT -- COMMUNICATION INTENSIFIES IN ITS GRAPHIC EXPRESSION IN ORDER TO CAPTURE THE ATTENTION OF A CALLOUSED CULTURE

A. (:27) Depravity Cannot Be Overlooked

"*When her master arose in the morning and opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, then behold, his concubine was lying at the doorway of the house, with her hands on the threshold.*"

Often we prefer to look the other way and just go about our business; we would prefer to be oblivious to the dark side of our own culture; but we are called to hate evil and to take a stand against unrighteousness

B. (:28) Disdain and Disinterest Reveal a Lack of Sensitivity and Tenderness

"*And he said to her, 'Get up and let us go,' but there was no answer. Then he placed her on the donkey; and the man arose and went to his home.*"

What a contrast to the Levite's approach to try to reconcile with his concubine with words of tenderness

C. (:29) Dismemberment is Offensive but Gets People's Attention

"*When he entered his house, he took a knife and laid hold of his concubine and cut her in twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout the territory of Israel.*"

Cf. **1 Sam. 11:7** Saul cut the yoke of oxen in sections and sent throughout the land to muster troops for the battle

D. (:30) Demand for Action Arises From the Moral Outrage Over This Incident

"*And it came about that all who saw it said, 'Nothing like this has ever happened or been seen from the day when the sons of Israel came up from the land of Egypt to this day. Consider it, take counsel and speak up!'*"

How can you say that private morality has no public consequences

Block: what looks at first like nothing more than a personal crisis in a private household escalates into a citywide problem, then becomes a crisis for an entire tribe and ultimately jeopardizes the integrity of the entire nation of Israel itself.

F. B. Meyer: However, this method of raising righteous indignation in Israel was successful. All who received this kind of information accompanied by part of a dead body, were greatly incensed against the perpetrators of the crime (Jdg 19:30). Does this mean it was right to do it this way. No, indeed! The case ought to have been addressed more locally, and settled in the courts without becoming a national scandal. But where were the local authorities to be appealed to? Thus is illustrated the great weakness of Israel at the time.

CONCLUSION:

Hopefully you were shocked today by the **depths of depravity** exhibited in a society that has lost its moral compass.

"'*Righteousness exalts a nation; but sin is a disgrace to any people*" (**Pr14:34**).

Hosea 9:9 – this event became infamous in the history of Israel as an example of her unrestrained depravity: "*They have gone deep in depravity as in the days of Gibeah*"

- **Compromise** always paves the way for moral decline
- **Common Courtesy** reflected in biblical mandates like Hospitality and how we treat others must be restored
- We cannot become **Calloused** to the wickedness around us
- The graphic nature of **Communications** has intensified greatly in our media driven culture

How does God want us to live in such a culture?

Phil. 2:15 "*as children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life*"

We cannot afford to choose to do whatever seems right in our own eyes; we must be focused in on the instructions from our control tower since God has the best perspective to guide our lives and protect us from moral catastrophe.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How has Christianity elevated the status and role of women in society?

2) How do you rate in terms of offering hospitality to strangers and acting as a steward of the gifts of God to your household (rather than as a possessor)?

3) What types of compromises set the stage for this Levite to function as he did in this account?

4) Why is it important that our response of moral outrage be governed by biblical principles rather than unleashed without restraint or guidelines?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Block: The boundaries of the final compositional unit (chaps. 19-21) are fixed by the formula "*In those days Israel had no king*" in 19:1 and 21:25. . . The echo of Genesis 19 in this text is intentional. By patterning this account after the earlier story, the narrator serves notice that, whereas these travelers had thought they had come home, finding safety with their own countrymen, they have actually arrived in Sodom. The nation has come full circle. The Canaanization of Israel is complete. When the Israelites look in the mirror, what they see is a nation that may be ethnically distinct from the natives but which is indistinguishable from them with regard to morality, ethics, and social values. They have sunk to the level of those nations whom they were commanded to destroy and on whom the judgment of God hung. And in the words of Moses in Deut 8:19-20, when Israelites act like Canaanites, they may expect the same fate.

David Silversides: **Folly in Israel**
Probably took place in the early part of the time of Judges; where there is ungodliness there will be great iniquity; that is inevitable; first table of the law = rejection of God coupled with second table of the law = moral transgression against fellow man;
1. Another unholy Levite (:1-4)
The spiritual leadership in Israel was corrupt; no surprise that the people on the whole are corrupt; a concubine = a second class wife; usually occurs when there is more than one wife; had less rights; lower status;
2 Some carefree days (:5-9)
They don't seem overly concerned for moral issues; they live for the moment; living for now;
3. A providential bad decision (:10-21)
It was the purpose of God to judge Israel; sequence of events started here in this passage that would lead to the death of thousands of Israelites; Levite ignores suggestion of his servant to stop at Jebus for the evening; no hospitality = sign of spiritual declension; Heb. 13:2; not regarded as a mere incidental thing; it is a requirement for the people of God; Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9; 1 Tim. 3:2 – a qualification for elder in the church; Tit. 1:8; use our homes and resources for the benefits

of others; do we regard ourselves as stewards and our home as God-given?
4. The abomination at Gibeah (:22-28)
Moral decay and ungodliness and lawlessness; no visible authority
"*sons of Belial*" – emptiness, vanity, worthless – Ps.l8:4; their wicked aim = wanted to homosexually abuse the Levite with or without his assent; host felt a sense of responsibility for the Levite who came under his roof; should have felt responsibility for his daughter and concubine as well; homosexual rape constitutes a greater sense of unnaturalness; still there should have been no compromise or accommodation; don't think in terms of allowing lesser sin in order to avoid the greater sin; both men should have protected both women at all costs – even at the cost of their own lives = the responsibility of men; abandonment of the concubine; shameful neglect of responsibility;
5. A terrible summons (:29-30)
We are not to destroy the body of the dead; cremation is contrary to the will of God; just because body decays naturally does not mean we should accelerate the process at our own hands; everybody dies but we don't hasten that process either; this was unnatural; even though the motive was to horrify the people to galvanize them to a response; Levite felt the need to do this; people were so insensitive to wickedness; still it was a wrong action on his part

Gil Rugh: **From Spiritual Apostasy to Moral Decay**
Time of religious syncretism – mix worship of God with pagan practices of nations around them; disregard of law of God regarding worship; 2:12; 2:17; 3:7; 6:25; 8:27; 8:33; hadn't driven out these pagans so the pressure was always there to compromise; the attraction; the desire to fit in; etc. 10:6; moral corruption always follows spiritual corruption; Rom. 1:18ff; given over to degrading passions – immorality of homosexuality = a misuse of what God has created; outside of the boundaries of what is natural; God removes His hand of restraint so that they pursue their lustful desires; moral decadence takes us back to the days of Sodom and Gomorrah; tribe of Benjamin almost wiped out – will be reduced to 600 men with no women
1) (:1-9) historical setting of an unfaithful concubine – she will be referred to as a wife; but low level; legal relationship that binds her to the Levite; above a slave woman; returned home perhaps fearful of consequences of playing the harlot; husband goes to speak to her tenderly; he wants to have her back; father is glad there could be a reconciliation here; things functioned in slow motion in their world compared to western world; you sit and visit and relax; takes time to prepare a special meal – slaughter the animal and prepare it; no hurry; nobody is going anywhere; not checking their watches; he is leaving and it is not later in the day; won't be able to make it home
2) (:10-21) not willing to stay in a non-Israelite city; matter of security; we stay with our own people; you have to find a place to stay once you get into the city; something is wrong when no one offers hospitality; Job 31:32 – defends his integrity by willingness to offer hospitality to strangers; prepared to sleep in the square; shame on host for guest to provide for their own needs;
3) (:22-30) Jews of the tribe of Benjamin (Saul came from this tribe) acting shamefully; corruption and decadence overtaken Israel; women were on a lower status in their society; you were obligated to protect your guest; cowardice and callousness; Israel marshals a large army in response; they are shocked into action

Jackman, D., & Ogilvie, L. J.: A society that reduces love to lust will not long have any residual respect for human life. Other people become mere objects. Human life is expendable and cheap, so a baby in the womb becomes "the fetus"; "it," not he or she. And a woman has a right to choose to do away with it if it is inconvenient. If old people increase in number and become a drain on the state, then let the state's medically approved agents "put them out of their misery."

Abortions and euthanasia “on demand” are symptoms of the same disease that surfaces in rape, crimes of violence, and the mental cruelty, petty tyrannies, and personal violence that characterize so many homes. We must not be surprised to find child abuse, incest, robbery with violence, and murders increasing. “If God is dead,” said Nietzsche, “then everything is permitted.” It’s all perfectly logical.
(Vol. 7: The Preacher's Commentary Series, Judges, Ruth. Formerly The Communicator's Commentary. Page 277. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc)

Inrig: Our society is filled with gross immorality, defended by suave, articulate, attractive spokespersons. You can scarcely find a perversion that someone is not willing to defend as essential to human freedom. I am reminded of the man who summarized his life in these words: “I have spent the best years of my life giving people the lighter pleasures and all I get is abuse and the existence of a hunted man.” Who was that poor, persecuted, misunderstood humanitarian? Al Capone, the gangster.

Dr. Jerry Harmon: **The Collapse of a Nation**
Introduction: Illustration of what happens when a people reject God’s authority. Man doesn't become more noble, man becomes more dangerous. We see this here in chapter 19 of the book of Judges. Moral chaos is the result of rejecting God's authority.

So this is not just a story, however, of ancient history. Really, this is a mirror of what happens when any people or any nation reject the authority and the word of God. This will be the inevitable result. We see it in our world today. We see it in the confusion today over right and wrong. It just seems like people take what is wrong and make it right, and what's right and make it wrong. We see it in the breakdown of the home. We see it in the devaluing of human life. We see it in the violence that is across our country and the exploitation of the weak.

Big Idea: **The marks of a nation in decline or a nation that is about to collapse**

I. The Compromise of the Home.
This story is especially gruesome. It's especially horrible. One commentator called this story, quote, the sewer of Scripture, the most disgusting and degrading story in the Bible, unredeemed by an admirable character or a noble act. To read these chapters, he said, is to be repelled by them. And you cannot help but feeling rather dirty. It's almost as bad as reading the newspaper today.

Why does the writer focus again on another Levite? Well, because the Levites were the leaders. And if the spiritual leaders in the country were that bad, then you can expect the people as well to be morally depraved also. Hosea 4.9 says, like people, like priests. And we find here a priest who doesn't value the institution of marriage. Therefore, you expect the people to be worse than that.

A concubine is a secondary wife who comes to him without a wedding dowry. That is, he marries at no cost this woman. She doesn't have the rights or privileges of a normal wife. Her children may or may not have the inheritance according to the father. In other words, there's no obligation to her as a normal wife. And this arrangement was normally made when a man already had a first wife. If he had a first wife and wanted to have another wife, he would bring in a concubine. And this would be for his entertainment and for his convenience.

There's a compromise in marriage and also in the father-in-law. He seems to be more concerned about hospitality than his own daughter's holiness and the relationship that she's in, this improper relationship.

II. The Corruption of God's People

Now again, in ancient Near Eastern customs, it was important that you showed hospitality to a traveler that came to you or came to your city. That was especially true if they were Israelites, if they were of your people. So this Levite, with his group, come to the city square. And by the way, if you needed hospitality for the night, that's where you would go. You would go to the center of the city, you would go to the city square, and then normally someone would see you there, they would recognize that you were a stranger, and they would offer to take you in. You would want to go inside the city gates, because at night the gates would close, and you were safe inside that city. So here's this man and this Levite with his concubine and his servants. They come to the city square and they're waiting there for someone to bring them in and to take care of them. And what does the Bible said? There's no one. No one does it. I mean, they just ignore them.

In other words, he's saying (vs. 19), you know, all we need is a place to bed down. We're not saying that we need food. We have our own food. We have everything that we need. So we don't need anyone to give us a meal. We don't need any extras. All we need is just a simple place to bed down. That's it.

And here it was with this place here, the streets were not safe. The tragedy is, is that this is supposed to be an Israelite town. where supposedly the people were the people of God, where supposedly they were supposed to follow the law of God and love one another. And here this man recognizes you will not be safe if you stay here in the city square at night, even though the gate is locked. That's the tragedy here. We see the corruption of the people of God here in this town.

III. The Cruelty of a Godless Society

The city of Gibeah in Israel is the new Sodom. That's how far Israel fell in their depravity and their spiritual darkness when they set aside God, when they began to worship other gods, when they set aside the law of God, when God was no longer their authority, and when everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes. How low did they go? Well, they were the new Sodom. That's how bad it was.

This is amazing how bold the perversion is in this Israelite city. That's amazing. They actually knock on the door and demand that that man be brought out. so that they can commit sexual rape against this man that came into that house? That is incredible. That is incredible in its wickedness.

What happens is the Levite comes out in the morning, look at verse 28, *and he said unto her, up and let us be going*. That's really kind and compassionate. Now again, was she dead at that point? We're not sure. She may have been.

Either way, what this man did, what the Levite did was just horrible. If she wasn't dead, he killed her. If she was dead, he treated her like some kind of animal carcass, divides her up to 12 pieces, sends it all throughout the land of Israel. And that is to shock everyone in Israel about what had happened to this woman here in this town of Gibeah. And this whole scene, again, it raises all

kinds of questions in people's minds. Again, the whole point of this is to shock the reader.

TEXT: Judges 20:1-48

TITLE: THE PAINFUL PROCESS OF PURGING EVIL

BIG IDEA:
THE PERVASIVENESS OF PERVERSITY REAPS TRAGIC JUDGMENT ON GOD'S PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION:

You remember where we left the sad story back in Judges 19 – the Levite's concubine had been raped and left for dead by the wicked men in the town of Gibeah in the tribe of Benjamin. The Levite responded by hauling her back home and then hacking her up into 12 pieces to send throughout the 12 tribes as a call to arms to galvanize troops to take action. What seemed like an isolated event that only impacted one woman of low standing and her nondescript Levite husband who lived out in the sticks in Ephraim is going to escalate into a national crisis. In fact, this story is placed as an appendix to the book of Judges because it highlights the **Pervasiveness of Perversity** that has consumed the nation. Israel has sunk into the depths of both religious and moral depravity.

Sin impacts more people than we will ever realize. It is described in the NT as the leaven which leavens the whole lump. It is like a cancer that may be unseen but grows and spreads in malicious fashion. People try to minimize the effects of sin and call for us to leave others alone to pursue alternative life choices – even when those choices have clearly been revealed by God as destructive to our overall society.

It is going to be a **Painful Process** to try to exercise judgment against this outrageous and reprehensible behavior. Especially because God's people take a sanctimonious attitude like they have no skin in the game; like they are pure and holy when in fact they themselves have been assimilated into a worldly culture of humanistic compromise with the Canaanites around them.

A civil war is about to erupt that will leave over 65,000 choice fighting men slaughtered on the field of battle in just a very brief time period. Think about those numbers and all of the heartache associated with those families. The entire tribe of Benjamin will almost be eradicated. How sad that the people of God degenerated to such a point that they reaped such tragic discipline from their covenant God.

Remember the counsel of the Apostle Paul regarding the process of trying to address sin in the family of God: [Not exactly parallel since civil govt involved in nation of Israel]
Gal. 6:1 – "*Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted*."
As we work through this rather lengthy passage, we will see the antithesis of this spirit of gentleness reflected in the presumption and self confidence of the other eleven tribes.

THE PERVASIVENESS OF PERVERSITY REAPS TRAGIC JUDGMENT ON GOD'S PEOPLE

THREE STAGES IN THE PAINFUL PROCESS OF PURGING EVIL

I. (:1-17) THE ENGAGEMENT TO PURGE EVIL – CHOOSING PROPER SIDES

A. (:1-11) The Unity of God's People in Moral Outrage Over Wickedness

1. (:1-2) Demand for Action Unifies God's People -- What does it take to **unify God's people** and cause them to take a stand against Moral Depravity?

> "*Then all the sons of Israel from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, came out, and the congregation assembled as one man to the LORD at Mizpah. And the chiefs of all the people, even of all the tribes of Israel, took their stand in the assembly of the people of God, 400,000 foot soldiers who drew the sword.*"

Look at all of the references to unity in this paragraph – very impressive --
Something that other judges were not able to achieve throughout the book as we have studied it (Deborah 5:15b-17; 8:1-3 the complaints of the men of Ephraim; 15:11)
Certainly something of a mixed bag – not saying that everyone had pure motives of wanting to yield to God and be used by Him as righteous instruments of discipline; they had their own thoughts of revenge and desire to slaughter those involved
Why couldn't Israel have been this united in the beginning to drive out the enemies of the land as God had instructed?? Now they are united against their own countrymen

"*from Dan to Beersheba*" – northernmost portion of the land to southernmost
"land of Gilead" = Transjordan tribes

Mizpah was only four miles north of Gibeah (eight miles north of Jerusalem)

2. (:3-6) Danger of Selective Reporting -- Be careful to get all of the facts about the situation –

> *"(Now the sons of Benjamin heard that the sons of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.) And the sons of Israel said, 'Tell us, how did this wickedness take place?' So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, 'I came with my concubine to spend the night at Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin. But the men of Gibeah rose up against me and surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me; instead, they ravished my concubine so that she died. And I took hold of my concubine and cut her in pieces and sent her throughout the land of Israel's inheritance; for they have committed a lewd and disgraceful act in Israel.'"*

Levite paints his actions in the best possible light; leaves out some very embarrassing details

PreceptAustin: "Lewd" is *zimma*, used often of sexual perversions worthy of death (cf. Lv18:17; 19:29).
"Disgraceful" is *nebala*, a strong term for active moral rebellion against the divine standards, as in rape (2 Sa 13:14), homosexual acts (Jud 19:23,24) and general promiscuity (Deut. 22:21).

3. (:7-11) Details of Practical Steps That Need to be Taken

> "'*Behold, all you sons of Israel, give your advice and counsel here.' Then all the people arose as one man, saying, 'Not one of us will go to his tent, nor will any of us return to his house. But now this is the thing which we will do to Gibeah; we will go up against it by lot. And we will take 10 men out of 100 throughout the*

tribes of Israel, and 100 out of 1,000, and 1,000 out of 10,000 to supply food for the people, that when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, they may punish them for all the disgraceful acts that they have committed in Israel.' Thus all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united as one man."

- Call for Counsel – let's devise a wise plan of action
- Sense of Urgency – address the situation at once; nothing gets better by just wasting time and procrastinating – address the evil
- Provide for the practical necessities of the anticipated upcoming battle; count the cost and be prepared to stay the course; don't act too quickly and then bow out when the pressure intensifies
- Maintain our united stance

Keil & Delitzsch: vs 9 -- Consequently the meaning is simply this: "Let us proceed with the lot against Gibeah," i.e., let us deal with it as with the towns of the Canaanites, conquer it, lay it in ashes, and distribute its territory by lot.

B. (:12-17) The Stubbornness of Misplaced Loyalties on the Part of the Tribe of Benjamin

"*Then the tribes of Israel sent men through the entire tribe of Benjamin, saying, 'What is this wickedness that has taken place among you? Now then, deliver up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and remove this wickedness from Israel' But the sons of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the sons of Israel. And the sons of Benjamin gathered from the cities to Gibeah, to go out to battle against the sons of Israel. And from the cities on that day the sons of Benjamin were numbered, 26,000 men who draw the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah who were numbered, 700 choice men. Out of all these people 700 choice men were left-handed; each one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss. Then the men of Israel besides Benjamin were numbered, 400,000 men who draw the sword; all these were men of war.*"

If we don't humble ourselves and judge ourselves, God will take more extreme measures to discipline us – the tribe of Benjamin was given the opportunity to participate with the nation in "*removing this wickedness from Israel*"

What wickedness are we tolerating in our lives and in our church when God says to remove, to purge the evil??

Look at how this can work itself out in terms of <u>church politics</u> –

- rather than supporting the decision of the elders in a matter of church discipline, a family could choose to shield their relative from such action
- when it comes to church leadership, people can easily push aside and disregard God's revealed standards and qualifications and throw their loyalty behind certain individuals for the wrong reasons

These things happen all of the time in our churches

PreceptAustin: Like many today (even in the church), the Benjaminites were unable to accept reproof. And so they would have to learn the disastrous hard way. (Pr 29:1, 6:15). Their refusal to cooperate was definitely an act of rebellion against the Lord. By coming to the aid of Gibeah rather than joining in the punishment of that city the tribe identified with the wicked men and

merited their punishment. When sin isn't exposed, confessed, and punished, it pollutes society and defiles the land. The wicked men of Gibeah were like a cancerous tumor in the body that had to be cut out. (1Co5:6, 15:33). . .
The men of Benjamin had a good reputation as excellent soldiers, true to the prediction of Jacob in [Ge49:27]. Their prowess with the bow and the sling was well known, and even in the time of Saul some Benjamites could use the sling with either hand (1Ch8:40; 12:2)

Not very good odds for the tribe of Benjamin – about 27,000 vs 400,000
Inrig: Benjamin was hilly country, easier to defend than to attack.

Dale Ralph Davis: Their crack Seven Hundred Unit (v. 16) will have to be reckoned with. This number formed an elite corps of left-handed super-slingers, renowned for their deadly accuracy. They may have been the reason Benjamin had initial success against the other tribes. Most soldiers were probably right-handed and carried their shields on their left arms. That would provide normal defense against right-handed slingers, but lefty slingers would be hurling at a different angle toward the unguarded side, and, if these left-handers could hit a hair (v. 16), they could surely smash a right ear.

Gibeah only contributed 700 men – so they were rather a small town relative to the tribe as a whole – yet the Benjamites rallied around these worthless men because of pride and tribal loyalty; the offense was clear; certainly judgment was justified; what was their justification for resisting?

Application: In Engaging in the process of purging evil, make sure that we are committed to God's Word and God's Agenda rather than motivated by misplaced loyalties and our own personal agenda. Don't let pride and a sectarian spirit make us so stubborn that we end up resisting God's revealed standards of justice and righteousness.

II. (:18-28) THE ENIGMA WHEN THINGS DON'T GO AS EXPECTED – CHASTENING PRESUMPTUOUS SELF CONFIDENCE

A. (:18-22) First Inquiry and Battle – Presumptuous in Self Confidence

> "*Now the sons of Israel arose, went up to Bethel, and inquired of God, and said, 'Who shall go up first for us to battle against the sons of Benjamin?' Then the LORD said, 'Judah shall go up first.' So the sons of Israel arose in the morning and camped against Gibeah. And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin, and the men of Israel arrayed for battle against them at Gibeah. Then the sons of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and felled to the ground on that day 22,000 men of Israel. But the people, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves and arrayed for battle again in the place where they had arrayed themselves the first day.*"

Thought process: going up first would be the position of honor since they were so confident in their superior numbers; but here God was disciplining Judah as well; they should have taken the leadership in purging the wicked Canaanites from the land

Wolf: Gibeah's proximity to the territory of Judah insured familiarity with the terrain. . . The mention of Bethel poses a problem, since the tabernacle was located at Shiloh (cf. 18:31). . . The ark of the covenant may have been moved from Shiloh to Bethel (cf. vv. 26-27) to be nearer to the scene of battle. The ark frequently accompanied Israel into battle (cf. Num 10:35).

Block: "Judah shall go up first." This response is appropriate because the victims were from Bethlehem in Judah.

A. C. Gaebelein: But to be fit to be used of God to deal with evil involves much more than readiness to be His instrument. They are too ready, as we see in the result. Their wrath is too prompt, too implacable, too unsparing. Theirs is the reckless haste of vengeance, and not the solemn discrimination of divine judgment. They remember not their own sins, bring no sin offering to God, no tears of penitence. They build on their numbers; no doubt on the justice of their cause, also, but in self-righteousness and without self-suspicion. Thus they go up to smite, and they are smitten heavily, disastrously. Benjamin, the wrong-doer, is wholly victorious

Dale Ralph Davis: Israel receives the favor of divine guidance (vv. 18, 23) and yet sees no evidence of divine help. Does this not constitute one of the enigmas of Christian experience – being certain of the divine will (because a matter is clearly taught in Scripture) and yet finding that path marked more by trouble than by success? Does that mean we are out of the divine will or simply that Yahweh is dealing with us in one of his hidden ways?

B. (:23-25) Second Inquiry and Battle – Confused by Unexpected Results

"*And the sons of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until evening, and inquired of the LORD, saying, 'Shall we again draw near for battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin?' And the LORD said, 'Go up against him.' Then the sons of Israel came against the sons of Benjamin the second day. And Benjamin went out against them from Gibeah the second day and felled to the ground again 18,000 men of the sons of Israel; all these drew the sword.*"

Wolf: The combination of burnt offerings and fellowship offerings was usually an expression of devotion and commitment. Solomon offered both kinds of sacrifices at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8:64), and Joshua had built an altar on Mount Ebal as the nation renewed its allegiance to the Lord (Josh 8:31).

C. (:26-28) Third Inquiry and Battle – Humbled to the Point of Repentance and Dependence Upon the Lord

"*Then all the sons of Israel and all the people went up and came to Bethel and wept; thus they remained there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening. And they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD And the sons 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, Aaron's son, stood before it to minister in those days), saying, 'Shall I yet again go out to battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?' And the LORD said, 'Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand.'*"

Application: Life presents many Enigmas. Don't allow the short term positive and negative aspects of your circumstances to dictate your thinking about the validity of your actions. You must humbly submit to the Word and endeavor to please the Lord and leave the results to Him.

III. (:29-48) THE EXECUTION OF THE MILITARY STRATEGY -- CARRYING OUT THE PROVIDENTIAL SLAUGHTER

A. (:29-35) Overview Account of God Given Victory

"*So Israel set men in ambush around Gibeah. And the sons of Israel went up against the sons of Benjamin on the third day and arrayed themselves against Gibeah, as at other times. And the sons of Benjamin went out against the people and were drawn away from the city, and they began to strike and kill some of the people, as at other times, on the highways, one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah, and in the field, about thirty men of Israel. And the sons of Benjamin said, 'They are struck down before us, as at the first.' But the sons of Israel said, 'Let us flee that we may draw them away from the city to the highways.' Then all the men of Israel arose from their place and arrayed themselves at Baal-tamar; and the men of Israel in ambush broke out of their place, even out of Maareh-geba. When ten thousand choice men from all Israel came against Gibeah, the battle became fierce; but Benjamin did not know that disaster was close to them. And the LORD struck Benjamin before Israel, so that the sons of Israel destroyed 25,100 men of Benjamin that day, all who draw the sword.*"

The fact that God reveals His providential plan to provide deliverance and victory did not excuse the people from exercising their responsibility to plan for the details of the battle and execute in dependence upon God; God's sovereignty always encourages our perseverance – it can never be attacked as an encouragement for slothfulness

- cf. – Why Pray if God is going to provide for our needs …
- cf. – Why Evangelize if the elect are going to be saved
- cf. – Should we continue to sin that grace may abound??

Don't ever think this way!

Joshua 8:1-29 – see similar strategy used by Joshua against Ai

B. (:36-48) More Detailed Account of Military Strategy and Mopping Up Operation

"*So the sons of Benjamin saw that they were defeated. When the men of Israel gave ground to Benjamin because they relied on the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah, the men in ambush hurried and rushed against Gibeah; the men in ambush also deployed and struck all the city with the edge of the sword. Now the appointed sign between the men of Israel and the men in ambush was that they should make a great cloud of smoke rise from the city. Then the men of Israel turned in the battle, and Benjamin began to strike and kill about thirty men of Israel, for they said, 'Surely they are defeated before us, as in the first battle.' But when the cloud began to rise from the city in a column of smoke, Benjamin looked behind them; and behold, the whole city was going up in smoke to heaven. Then the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were terrified; for they saw that disaster was close to them. Therefore, they turned their backs before the men of Israel toward the direction of the wilderness, but the battle overtook them while those who came out of the cities destroyed them in the midst of them. They surrounded Benjamin, pursued them without rest and trod them down opposite Gibeah toward the east. Thus 18,000 men of Benjamin fell; all these were valiant warriors. The rest turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, but they caught 5,000 of them on the highways and overtook them at Gidom and killed 2,000 of them. So all of Benjamin who fell that day were 25,000 men who draw the sword; all these were valiant warriors. But 600 men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and they remained at the rock of Rimmon four months. The men of Israel then turned back against the sons of Benjamin and struck them with the edge of the sword, both the entire city with the cattle and all that they found; they also set on fire all the cities which they found.*"

Wolf: In characteristic Hebrew fashion the writer repeats himself as he adds details about the ambush and its effect. . . The entire town literally became a burnt offering.

Wiersbe: At the first census after the Exodus from Egypt, there were 35,400 men of war in Benjamin (Num. 1:37), and this increased to 45,600 by the time of the second census (Num. 26:41). During this three-day war, the Benjamites were left with only 600 men stranded on the rock of Rimmon, a fortresslike rock formation near Gibeah. What a price the tribe of Benjamin paid for refusing to obey the Law of the Lord!

Brensinger: These towns, after all, supplied the troops who have since been killed in the fighting. By slaughtering every living thing and subsequently burning the cities, the Israelites seemingly place the entire tribe of Benjamin under what is typically referred to as "the ban."

The ban, *herem*, was part of Israel's understanding of holy war: various enemies had to be "devoted to the Lord for destruction" (as in Josh. 6:17). This act of destruction helped to keep Israel from later contact and contamination. Normally, such drastic measures were either taken against Israel's external opponents or reserved for internal cases involving pervasive idolatry.

In the present instance, however, the procedure stems from Gibeah's abuse of the concubine. Is this a case of grossly inflated retaliation? Do the Israelites actually implement this form of punishment in compliance with a divine oracle? The deep regret, change of policy, and preventive measures that soon follow suggest otherwise. Israel will actually attempt to undo or at least minimize the lingering effects of the deed.

Application: Make sure that we constantly check our motives so that we don't overstep what the Lord has called us to do. We want to have the heart and mind of the Lord in all of the Execution of our spiritual ministry.

CONCLUSION:

The responsibility for purging evil from the church falls to us today: **1 Cor. 5:6-8**
"*Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*."

THE PERVASIVENESS OF PERVERSITY REAPS TRAGIC JUDGMENT ON GOD'S PEOPLE

Remember that we first must look to ourselves and our own motives and judge ourselves lest we be judged by God.

Gal. 6:1 – "*Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted*."

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Where do we see God's people united today in moral outrage over evil?

2) Have we seen situations in the church where people chose to side against God's standards of justice and righteousness because of misplaced loyalties?

3) How can we guard against pride and self confidence in seeking the Lord's will for how to proceed in situations of addressing sin?

4) How gracious is God to the tribe of Benjamin to spare a remnant when the intent of the Israelites was to wipe them out entirely?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Silversides: **Judgment at the House of God**

1. Judgment at the house of God (:**1-3**)

Mixed membership – not all who were Israelites outwardly were genuinely saved; much sin remained among God's assembly; not totally a righteous expression of moral outrage; not acting as instruments of God's judgment but pursuing revenge and slaughter

2. Selective Reporting (:**4-7**) – Levite asked to give a report; Prov. 18:13 – need to get the facts before you make a judgment; Levite avoids those elements that don't reflect well on him; **19:22**; he thrust the concubine out instead of protecting here; glossing over embarrassing faults

3. Pride and Misplaced Loyalty (:**8-17**) – The tribe of Benjamin defended the indefensible; They didn't deny what had taken place; tribal pride was the cause; partiality in the church of God; NT church discipline designed for purity of church and restoration of the sinner – but family members usually will resist; cf. voting for church officers based on family ties or long term friendships instead of biblical qualifications;

4. The Lord's Judgment by His Word and Providence (:**18-25**) – first, an inadequate inquiry; they assumed the rightness of the expedition and success of their superior numbers; the Lord only answered what they asked for; second time He tells them to go up but still does not promise them success; wants them to put away their self confidence and depend on Him; apparent details of providence never contradict precepts of God's Word – Benjamin's initial victories may have encouraged them – but did not mean that God approved of their unwillingness to deal with the men of Gibeah; cannot judge the rightness of actions on the basis of short term providence; in the long range, God will demonstrate what is right and wrong; must rely on Word of God

5. The Lord gives a kind of Victory (:**26-48**) –

- The **Humbling**; to a chastened, humble people He gave a more complete answer; full integrity of heart is key to real guidance from the Lord; **Ps. 112:4; Ps. 18: 25**;
- The **Means** (:**29-34**) – Revelation of victory to come did not excuse them from responsibility; they still had to execute the military strategy; an incentive to perseverance; Benjamin's assumption (:**32**); misplaced self confidence of the Benjamites is now judged; no

matter how many times we have had victory we still need to depend on the Lord; Lord of Providence had determined that evil would come on them

- The **Outcome** (:35) – 26,700 is the grand total; they lost a total of 1000 men in the two successful battles; excessive vengeance (:**48**); they came close to obliterating the tribe of Benjamin altogether; forgot that the tribe belonged to the Lord; in all of this the Lord was judging Israel

Lessons:

- Pride and self confidence in a good cause is still sin; even when we have a good cause we need to watch our motives and depend on the Lord
- Justice and fairness must override ties of loyalty
- We need to pray for our church and country; the Lord in His providence can bring unforeseen judgment because of our sin

Dan Gibson: **Tragedy of Perversion, Part II**
Only time there was unity in the nation of Israel in book of Judges (except for tribe of Benjamin); they stood together because of evil committed against one woman; something so horrible about this that 400,000 men showed up; shock and awe; cf. Saul cutting up a bull and sending it in 12 pieces to galvanize support and involvement; this perversion did not just happen over night; these perverse men had been allowed to practice evil for quite some time; this story mirrors Sodom and Gomorrah; same result of destruction of town by fire; only 700 soldiers were from this small town out of 26,700. This town had a duty and obligation to maintain God's righteous standards, but this was a lawless place; the Bible tells us what actually happened – even when it exposes the dirty laundry of God's people – not fanciful tales; David came out of tribe of Judah; Lord is lion of Judah = victorious, mighty king who leads us in victory and triumph; cf. aborted babies – what if we sent those carcasses around to incite horror! Primary function of government is to protect life – but they are not treated as persons; cf. how black people were not treated as humans as well – no rights; Pro Life movement takes photos of aborted babies and that convicts people; if you stumble upon a dead body in the street you are shocked … but everything is hidden by the abortion providers; cf. magistrates today defending all forms of evil – like homosexuality and abortion; when spiritual men cannot meet together and come to wise conclusion you end up in civil conflict with escalated casualties; How much are we coddling evil in our day? Need to take a stand against evil; God cares about justice; we need church reformation

Dale Ralph Davis: In spite of her problems, in spite of her setbacks, Israel has access to divine guidance through the high priest. Theologically speaking, Israel has the means of grace. Yahweh directs them through his appointed servant, the high priest. Benjamin – and we must view Benjamin in light of this contrast – has none of this. No ark, no priest, no direction from Yahweh, no word from heaven, no light in turmoil. In this Benjamin already stands under judgment, for what judgment can be worse than having no counsel from God, no access to his presence, no way through divine silence? Is this not divine judgment – that he leaves us alone? A later Benjaminite will understand this perfectly – and miserably (**1 Sam. 28:15**). Long before Benjamin's troops were being hacked down in their panic to reach Rock Rimmon, Yahweh had already judged them; he left them to themselves, to the grand isolation of their own wits.

Dr. Jerry Harmon: The Cost of Confronting Sin
Introduction: Some of you might remember in 1986 that NASA faced a difficult decision about whether or not they should launch the Space Challenger. They knew that the O-rings on the

space shuttle had problems. But because of the public pressure and because of the demands of the schedule, They launched anyway. And you all know the story that 73 seconds into the launch, the Challenger exploded.

And that was all because of a small problem that was ignored. And the ignoring of that problem brought about just a tremendous catastrophe. When I think about that, that's an apt illustration of sin. When it's ignored, when it's tolerated, when it's covered up, then it grows until judgment is unavoidable. And so this chapter really, the whole overall theme of it is that sin must be confronted even when it's costly.

The cost of ignoring sin is fatal. It's difficult to confront sin, but the consequences for not confronting is even worse. You remember the apostle Paul when he wrote to the Corinthian church, He warned them because they were ignoring a sinning brother. And Paul said to them in 1 Corinthians 5:6, your glory is not good.

Big Idea: **Some lessons here from this story that we can draw about confronting sin**

I. Sin must be confirmed before it can be judged – 20:1-11.
When it says from Dan to Beersheba, that's a phrase that means all over, from the uttermost north of Israel, Dan, to the uttermost south of Israel, which is Beersheba. They all gathered together, and it says they went unto the Lord in Mizpah. This was an area that was right on the border between Ephraim and Benjamin. It was kind of a neutral location, somewhat.

A. There must be a unified front
The reason for that is because there's always a danger that when sin is confronted, it causes division among the people of God. That's always a potential. People begin to take sides.

B. Confronting sin requires uncovering the facts.
Prov. 18:13; Deut. 13:12-14; 17:2-4
You need two or three witnesses – **Prov. 18:17; 25:8**

II. Sin must be confronted even when it is close to home – vs. 12
Are we willing to place relationships above truth? Above truth. That's really the question.
Gen. 49:27

Just because you're doing the right thing doesn't guarantee you're gonna have success. You might be doing the right thing, and it may not go well. Sometimes doing what is right brings pain before it'll bring peace. Sometimes obedience doesn't produce immediate success, but also a temporary defeat doesn't mean that God was not on your side or that he abandoned you in any way. Sometimes we have to persevere in our obedience when we're trying to do something that is right. It may not always go our way. Things might not always happen the way we want them to happen.

Confronting sin, again, is not easy. There's a cost to it. It might cost relationships. It might cost you comfort. There may be a serious price to pay, but we can't have peace without truth. And truth is worth it. It's worth it to strive for truth.

III. Sin must be cleansed in dependence on God – vs. 26
A. They needed Humility

Now after two humiliating defeats, the people of Israel, they wept before the Lord. Look down at **verse number 26**. Notice what it says. Then all the children of Israel and all the people went up and came into 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. Israel needed humility.

The people needed to be humbled.
They needed to be corrected.
They needed to be taught that numbers don't determine victory.

The received a promise of victory.

B. Israel's new strategy

There's a cost that comes when we confront it in our own life. It's the cost of confession, the cost of repentance, a difficult conversation, making restitution where it's necessary. All of that is involved in dealing with sin in our own life, but we have to be thorough.

TEXT: Judges 21:1-25

TITLE: ENTITLEMENT MENTALITY: MESSY SITUATIONS . . . MESSY SOLUTIONS

BIG IDEA:
THE FRUITS OF A CANAANIZED CULTURE ARE MESSY SITUATIONS AND MESSY SOLUTIONS -- YET GOD BY HIS GRACE PRESERVES HIS PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION:

Look again at how the **theme verses** for the book of Judges form the **bookends** for these appendix chapters of 17-21 as we finish up our study of the book (17:1; 21:25):

"*In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*"

As we have looked into the sad story of Israel's religious and moral depravity in these final chapters, we come away with no positive examples or praiseworthy role models. Instead we see people going through the motions of outward religious observances while their heart trusts in their faulty human wisdom. They get themselves into complicated moral messes and then devise imaginative escape plans without ever coming to grips with the real problem of their own pride and idolatry and independent spirit.

Joshua: **Victory Through Faith**
Judges: **Failure Through Compromise** – yet surprisingly, the Lord still preserves His people
The book is as much about the Faithfulness of God as it is about the Worldliness of God's People

What God's people cannot seem to get a grip on during this time period of the Judges is owning up to their own culpability. They fail to take their own sin seriously enough. The Levite who surrendered his concubine to the lusts of the mob in Gibeah is a prime example. And God's people are also in denial regarding the impact of their sin on their community as a whole. So they are surprised when brought face to face with the harsh reality of national crisis.

Inrig Illustration: There is an old story of a ship that was traveling across the Mediterranean, and one of the passengers cut a hole through the side of the ship. The sailors came to him and demanded to know what he was doing. "What difference does it make to you?" he asked. "The hole's under my own bunk."

For the Israelites, their ship has taken on so much water that it is difficult to find a way to repair it. Imagine coming to a counselor with a life that is all twisted up with complicated sin problems from a myriad of poor choices and ingrained sinful habits. There is no quick fix or simple word of advice that will suffice. The only hope is to reach that state of brokenness and bankruptcy where you cast yourself totally on the mercy and grace of the Lord Jesus. Israel does not take that path. Instead we find:

TWO HUMANISTIC SOLUTIONS TO A CHAOTIC NATIONAL PITY PARTY CREATED BY PERSISTENT SIN AND RASH REACTIONS

The narrator presents events without any moral critique. He does not wrap everything up for us in a tidy ethical and theological package. We are intended to feel the **ambivalence** between God's people acting foolishly on their own and yet still struggling to seek His will.

(:1-4) CHAOTIC NATIONAL PITY PARTY – HOW DID WE END UP IN SUCH A MESS?

A. (:1) Rash Oath

"*Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpah, saying, 'None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin in marriage.*'"

There are <u>two oaths</u> that become prominent in the understanding of their thinking here. Both were made in the heat of battle when they gathered at Mizpah in response to the object lesson of the cut up concubine. These were not carefully thought out game plans that were derived from prayerfully seeking the Lord's will. These were passionate outcries from hearts that were shocked with outrageous conduct – much like a parent might respond in rage with some type of outlandish punishment.

<u>Oath #1</u> which we have here in vs. 1 – We will not give our daughters to the men of Benjamin in marriage

<u>Oath #2</u> – (vs. 5) placing any city under the ban of destruction if they did not rally with their fellow countrymen to take up this offense

We know how seriously these oaths were treated from the earlier story of Jephthah and his daughter coming out of his door to greet him upon his return from battle. Going back on your commitment does not seem to be an option – even if the oath has been rash and somewhat foolish. So now we have a major problem …

B. (:2) Regret Without Repentance

"*So the people came to Bethel and sat there before God until evening, and lifted up their voices and wept bitterly.*"

Four months have passed since the almost total obliteration of the tribe of Benjamin;
Now we see an attitude change on the part of the Israelites – they start to have some concern for God's overall program of maintaining a nation of 12 tribes. That is part of their core DNA as a people.
Weeping like a funeral dirge for the death of a tribe
Not allowing a lot of time to seek the Lord – just gave it until that evening
Seems like they are lifting up their voices more in complaint than in contrition

James 4:6-10
"*But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, 'God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.*"

C. (:3) Raising Foolish Questions

"*And they said, 'Why, O LORD, God of Israel, has this come about in Israel, so that one tribe should be missing today in Israel?*'"

Sounds like they are blaming God for their predicament – They are asking the popular "**Why**"

question – Don't we do this all the time? **Why is this happening to me?** As if I am so righteous and blameless that I should expect perfect circumstances when the reality is that I am still a fallen sinner living in a cursed environment that depends solely on God's mercy and grace for any benefits.
Maybe the Israelites should not have been so quick to follow up on the success that God had given them against the Benjamite warriors by then aggressively pursuing the utter destruction of all of their cities – including the women who could have been potential marriage candidates for the remnant of 600 soldiers seeking refuge at the rock of Rimmon. (20:48)

Block: in the mid of the narrator this grotesque application of Yahweh's prohibition on intermarriage with Canaanites (Deut 7:1-5) to their own kinfolks serves as a final acknowledgment of the Canaanization of Israel. ..

This question sounds more like a cry of protest than an honest query. Indeed the tone is accusatory. The Israelites are blaming God, as if Yahweh has failed to fulfill his role as divine patron protecting his people. Their query seems to represent an attempt to evade the requirements of covenant justice and to find a scapegoat. Whatever the Israelites' motive, the silence of God is deafening! In contrast to chap. 20, where the issue was still retribution for gross violation of covenantal standards, this time Yahweh will not be drawn in. He will not accept responsibility for what has happened in Israel.

Brensinger: To appreciate more fully the severity of such a situation, one need only remember that an entire social safeguard existed in ancient Israel to prevent a single family from dying out! According to the levirate law, if a man died childless, his brother was required to marry the widow and produce an heir for him (Deut. 25:5-10). Otherwise, the deceased man's name would be forever forgotten, and him with it. How much worse, then, is the prospect of watching an entire tribe disappear.

D. (:4) Religious Rites Without Inward Transformation

"*And it came about the next day that the people arose early and built an altar there, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.*"

Just going through external religious motions accomplishes nothing
Notice the silence of God – they have not humbled themselves to the point where God will respond. But they have no patience to wait upon the Lord. They turn to religious activity as something that might ease the burden on their conscience and they decide to move forward in their own human wisdom.

They are still holding on to trying to be in control of the situation rather than putting their dependence upon the Lord. So they wrap things up in some type of religious veneer and aggressively move forward – imagining that the God who remains silent is somehow still with them in their decision making.

I. (:5-15) HUMANISTIC SOLUTION #1 – LET'S FIND SOMEONE TO BLAME – BULLY AND OVERPOWER THEM – EXPEDIENT RATIONALIZATION

A. (:5-9) Perplexing Problem and Expedient Solution

"*Then the sons of Israel said, 'Who is there among all the tribes of Israel who did not come up in the assembly to the LORD?' For they had taken a great oath concerning him*

who did not come up to the LORD at Mizpah, saying, 'He shall surely be put to death.' And the sons of Israel were sorry for their brother Benjamin and said, 'One tribe is cut off from Israel today. What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since we have sworn by the LORD not to give them any of our daughters in marriage?' And they said, 'What one is there of the tribes of Israel who did not come up to the LORD at Mizpah?' And behold, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh-gilead to the assembly. For when the people were numbered, behold, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead was there."

Does not seem to be any concern to investigate the reason why the town of Jabesh-gilead had not responded. Maybe there was some legitimate excuse?? Why had this not been addressed earlier??
Devising a solution that does not have any cost for themselves.
Aren't they just going to create the same type of problem for Jabesh-gilead in terms of them having the sustainability to maintain their inheritance?

Block: What happens around this verse (:6) represents the people's own attempt to solve the crisis, made all the more necessary by Yahweh's silence on its causes and its solution.

B. (:10-12) Snatch and Grab Quick Strike Mission

"*And the congregation sent 12,000 of the valiant warriors there, and commanded them, saying, 'Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the little ones. And this is the thing that you shall do: you shall utterly destroy every man and every woman who has lain with a man.' And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead 400 young virgins who had not known a man by lying with him; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.*

Introducing more mayhem and violence into the equation – some commentators suggest that maybe the men of the city gave up the virgins willingly rather than suffer destruction … certainly this city still has a role in Israel's history going forward

C. (:13-15) Incomplete Resolution

"*Then the whole congregation sent word and spoke to the sons of Benjamin who were at the rock of Rimmon, and proclaimed peace to them. And Benjamin returned at that time, and they gave them the women whom they had kept alive from the women of Jabesh-gilead; yet they were not enough for them. And the people were sorry for Benjamin because the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.*"

PreceptAustin: Breach or Gap (*perets*) was usually associated with an outburst of the Lord's anger ("*And David became angry because of the LORD'S outburst* [root word *parats*] *against Uzzah, and that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day*." 2Sa 6:8). "Breach" also refers to a break in a wall, and figuratively in this context and would refer to God's judgment upon the Benjaminites accomplished through battle (Judg. 20:35). Benjamin's near extinction left a gaping hole in the Israelite tribal structure, much like a breach in a wall.

II. (:16-24) HUMANISTIC SOLUTION #2 – LET'S FIND SOMEONE TO EXPLOIT – TRICK AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEM – LOOPHOLE MENTALITY

A. (:16-22) Perplexing Problem Persists and Expedient Solution #2

"*Then the elders of the congregation said, 'What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?' And they said, 'There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, that a tribe may not be blotted out from Israel. But we cannot give them wives of our daughters.' For the sons of Israel had sworn, saying, 'Cursed is he who gives a wife to Benjamin.' So they said, 'Behold, there is a feast of the LORD from year to year in Shiloh, which is on the north side of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south side of Lebonah.' And they commanded the sons of Benjamin, saying, 'Go and lie in wait in the vineyards, and watch; and behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to take part in the dances, then you shall come out of the vineyards and each of you shall catch his wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin. And it shall come about, when their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, that we shall say to them, Give them to us voluntarily, because we did not take for each man of Benjamin a wife in battle, nor did you give them to them, else you would now be guilty.*"

Look at their **Entitlement Mentality** – it is all about each family in Israel being able to enjoy their rightful inheritance. They have forgotten that the land is a gracious gift from God and tied to covenant faithfulness. Now they want to assert their rights.

Block: Although the three festivals prescribed in Exodus 23 and Deuteronomy 165 oblige all males to appear, this celebration is known as a festival of dancing women. The elders again try to sanctify their strategy by calling this event a "festival of the Lord." But the narrator's refusal to specify which festival is in mind suggests that in his view this is another symptom of the Canaanization of Israel.

Matter of semantics

B. (:23a) Snatch and Grab Quick Strike Mission

"*And the sons of Benjamin did so, and took wives according to their number from those who danced, whom they carried away.*"

I guess each of the 200 got to lie in the weeds and select his bride --

Dennis T. Olson: (The New Interpreter's Bible) Preoccupation with legalistic and technical obedience to certain rules or laws without an accompanying sense of the principles of faithfulness and love that undergird such laws and temper their rigid application is a recipe for disaster.

C. (:23b-24) Final Resolution

"*And they went and returned to their inheritance, and rebuilt the cities and lived in them. And the sons of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family, and each one of them went out from there to his inheritance.*"

Tribe of Benjamin has been preserved – everybody can go home in peace and concentrate on their inheritance
Where is giving the glory to God in all of this?? Strictly a humanistic enterprise

(:25) CONCLUSION:

"*In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*"

THE FRUITS OF A CANAANIZED CULTURE ARE MESSY SITUATIONS AND MESSY SOLUTIONS -- YET GOD BY HIS GRACE PRESERVES HIS PEOPLE

Humanistic Solutions are never real answers to our problems. As believers today in the Church Age, we can look forward with confidence to the Righteous King who is coming and who will reign in peace and righteousness. He will take all of the messy situations of today and make the paths straight. But even now the Head of the Church, the precious Lamb of God, our Lord Jesus Christ wants to reign in our lives and in our church to guide us into that pathway of holiness and righteousness. May we bow the knee every day to our King and do what is right in His eyes.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Where have you seen people try to right one wrong with another wrong or use that type of expedient argument?

2) How can we develop the patience to wait upon the Lord for His leading rather than act in presumption and haste?

3) When have we relied on religious activities to try to compensate for genuine spiritual guidance and power?

4) Are we living to please the Lord according to His revelation and authority or doing what is right in our own eyes?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Inrig: 20:27-28 – the tabernacle was in Shiloh, and the Ark of the Covenant belonged in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle in Shiloh. The ark was intensely holy, and no one was to view it, except the high priest once a year. But the holiness of God had been so cheapened that the high priest had allowed it to be taken out of the tabernacle and transported to Bethel, in direct disobedience to God. . . That is the root of all sin – a weak conception of the holiness of God. . .

Notice the downward flow – We lose our sense of the holiness and greatness of God, and soon we find ourselves engaged in sexual sin, the sin Paul says is against our own body Then we lose our self-worth, and we are plunged into the lowest level when we view people as things and treat them as commodities. Sin devastates our spirit in our relationship to God, distorts our soul – our sense of self, and reduces us to little more than animals, living as mere bodies, with our humanity almost erased. That is the process of Judges 19-21, and it is the process of the twentieth century.

Dale Ralph Davis: I think, therefore, that the writer wants us to see Judges 21 as the ambiguous situation it is. There is a certain rightness and a certain wrongness about what Israel does. They justifiably requite Jabesh-gilead with unjustifiable severity (vv. 5, 10). They stand consistently upon their wife-oath (vv. 7, 16-18) but trample happily upon the rights of the Shiloh girls and their families (vv. 19-22). It is a mix of consistency and confusion. It is all correct and yet very mistaken.

The ambivalence pervading chapter 21 simply fits the pattern of incongruities throughout the story from the beginning of chapter 19. We watch a Levite sacrifice his concubine to the mob yet use truth selectively to hide his cowardice. We hear a host offer the protection of his house and also his own daughter and his guest's concubine to the lusts of the crowd. We see a tribe defiantly refuse to cooperate with covenant justice and willfully align itself with the darkest guilt of its kin. We observe Israel seeking divine guidance and yet meeting destruction – until victory at the last. We marvel at an Israel as urgent to preserve Benjamin as they were rabid to destroy him, resorting to injustice to maintain their own consistency.

But surely "righteous" Israel stands in as much need of Yahweh's grace as does sinful Benjamin. S. G. DeGraaf has put it well:

> By these [Israel's] actions the tribe of Benjamin was preserved. But the Israelites had tackled the problem in a cocky, conceited, highhanded way. How estranged from the Lord's service Israel had become! How little did it live by His light! It is a miracle that anything came of that people, that justice was practiced, that the fellowship of the tribes was preserved. There is no other explanation for this miracle than that God, in His grace in the Christ, wished to dwell in the midst of that people in spite of its sin.

Brensinger: The intermarrying between the two tribes at least partially explains later events. The Benjaminite Saul, for example, protects the people of Jabesh-gilead in the face of Ammonite aggression (1 Sam. 11). Similarly, the citizens of Jabesh-gilead remove the bodies of Saul and his sons from their humiliating perches in Beth Shan (1 Sam. 31:11-13).

G. Campbell Morgan: This is a very sad chapter, and gives us the last of the illustrations of the conditions obtaining when there was no king in Israel. As we have seen, more than once the writer drew attention to the fact, and so traced the lawlessness to the lack of authority. The truth is that Israel had lost its living relation to its one and only King. Uninstructed zeal, even in the cause of righteousness, often goes beyond its proper limits, and does harm rather than good. The terrible slaughter of the men of Benjamin continued until not more than six hundred of the tribe were left. Then another of those sudden revulsions which characterize the action of inflamed peoples occurred. Israel is seen suddenly filled with pity for the tribe so nearly exterminated. They realized that the unity and completeness of the family of Jacob was threatened by their action. The sad part of the story is that, to remedy the threatened evil, they resorted to means which were utterly unrighteous. Wives were provided for the men of Benjamin by further unholy slaughter at Jabesh-Gilead, and by the vilest iniquity at Shiloh. It is impossible to read these last five chapters without realizing how perilous is the condition of any people who act without some clearly defined principle. Passion moves to high purpose only as it is governed by principle. If it lacks that, at one moment it will march in heroic determination to establish high ideals, and purity of life; and almost immediately, by some change of mood, will act in brutality and all manner of evil. Humanity without its one King, is cursed by lawlessness.

Preacher's Commentary: The casuistry of the argument in verse 22 is truly appalling. When the

people of Shiloh complained of the abduction of their daughters, they were to be informed that this kept their oath intact. Nothing could have been further from the truth. In fact, it was a backdoor way of giving their daughters to the Benjamites, by setting up the whole charade and assuring the men of Benjamin that no action would be taken against them. This was to answer injustice with injustice. The point being made, that must be applied to our contemporary situation, is that once God, whose righteous character is the only source and guarantee of truth and justice, is neglected, then such fine-sounding moral concepts are inevitably reduced to hollow verbiage. In the words of Jean-Paul Sartre, "Finite man is meaningless without an infinite reference point." The existentialist philosophy and the history of nations in the twenty-first century surely confirms this age-old message of the Book of Judges. Even the most advanced technological societies are covered with only the thinnest veneer of civilization when once the Christian foundations are eroded away. As the Duke of Wellington once remarked, the problem is that if you educate devils all you get is clever devils. (Jackman, D., & Ogilvie, L. J. Vol. 7: The Preacher's Commentary Series, Judges, Ruth. Page 294. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson)

Wilcock: The revealed will of God in the words he has given is there all the time, and may be read plainly by the clear-sighted and obedient. . . Instead of the skin-deep religion of chapters 17 and 18, the true worship and use of the Lord's name, aware of the perils of both sacramentalism and subjectivism (the need to have the right things and the right feelings). Instead of the moral chaos of chapters 19-21, every circumstance of daily life acknowledging the Lord's authority and reign.

And why is this possible? Because even when, as in all five chapters, the Lord sits disapprovingly on the sidelines, speaking only when he is spoken to and for the rest leaving Israel to muddle through in her own way, since that is what she has decided she wants to do, -- even then, he is there. He has not abandoned his people. Indeed, unasked and unobtrusive, he is ensuring that they will never finally destroy themselves by their own willful folly. What we have here is in the end a story of grace.

Warren Wiersbe: sees the book of Judges from an interesting prophetic perspective...Judges is the book of "no king," 1 Samuel is the book of "man's king" (Saul), and 2 Samuel is the book of "God's king" (David). The world today is living in the Book of Judges because there is no king in Israel. When presented with their rightful King, the Jews said, "We have no king but Caesar." (Jn 19:15) Next on the agenda is the appearance of "man's king" (Antichrist) who will usher in world control and chaos. Then "God's King" will appear, defeat His enemies, and establish His righteous kingdom. Note that the Book of Ruth takes place during the period of the Judges (Ruth 1:1-note) and that it is a love story and a harvest story. God's people are living in the Book of Ruth, sharing in the harvest and waiting for the wedding

David Silversides: **When Men are Left to Themselves**

1. (:1-4) The Problem – had decided to treat the Benjamites more or less as the Canaanites; but they did not follow through to the very end; 600 men holed up; change of attitude – tears in vs. 2; engaged in worship; but was there repentance?? What about the slaughter of the women and children? There is a fickleness and rashness about the whole affair; a makeshift approach to the problems; They sought a quick fix of their own rather than depending on the Lord for the answer; Selective oath keeping and selective killing;

2. (:5-15) The First Expedient

3. (:16-24) The Second Expedient

4. Analyze this use of Oaths – We are not quite sure what is right and what is wrong in these

developments; don't suit the fulfillment of the oath to your convenience

Trevor Kirkland: **Thinking Pragmatically and not Spiritually**
This last section (17-21) describes events at the beginning of the time of the Judges; fits into that repetitive cycle of sin, bondage and deliverance; should be an encouraging book that shows us the kindness and deliverance of God;
Chap. 21 shows us what happens when biblical law is set aside and people act pragmatically
1. (:1-4) Oaths – their validity and application –
Battle is over and four months have passed; Israel begins to wake up to the enormity of what has happened;
2. (:5-23) Pragmatic Solutions
They trample on the rights of others to maintain a certain oath;
Pragmatic solutions are only partially successful; it didn't fully work; so they develop a second pragmatic solution; they anticipate an objection and counsel how to deal with it; answer is the Benjamites stole the wives – even though the elders facilitated the matter; argued that they did not give them wives; clever human scheme; the problem is solved;
3. (:24-25) A Solemn Conclusion
They have learned a syncretistic philosophy – appear to seek the Lord but devise their own solutions; this was the new generation that arose that knew not God; the absence of restraint; attitude of self will; clinging to autonomy; it is my life and I will live it as I please;
Applications:

- **Beware of rash promises**; Providence has a way of bringing our words back to us in a manner and time we least expect it; you must repent and not keep what is unlawful; in the heat of the moment people make rash promises
- **Beware of worldly, fleshly reasoning** (:10-12) – the people of God have an obligation to meet God's standards, not the world's (Matt. 5:33); more is expected of believers; so easy to fall into the thinking of our culture = if it works it must be right
- **Using religious activity for worldly ends** – God had appointed various feasts for Israel; the purity and solemnity of worship is gone; the spiritual oversight of the Levites is gone; such a feast has been reduced to worldly pleasure; God had highly regulated the feasts; but now they are used for man's purposes; don't diminish the worship of God
- **It is commendable to seek to undo what was done wrong** – we do not condone how they did it but we do commend the aspiration as they have regard for their brethren; avoid pride and self love
- **The quickness of spiritual declension** – Jump back and forth between seeking after God and acting pragmatically

Dr. Jerry Harmon**: Why We Need a King**
Introduction: We learn a lot about the fallenness of man as you go through the book of Judges and we also learn a lot about the faithfulness of God. Those are the two things that stand out. Man continues to fail and God continues to be faithful despite the failure of man. Look at **verse 25**. *In those days, there was no king in Israel, and every man did that which was right in his own eyes*. And so this is really the summation of the whole book. Judges ends by declaring this reality. When you get to the end of Judges, it leaves you with a longing for a righteous king, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Big Idea: **Reasons Why We Need a King**

I. Because we cannot trust our own hearts – vs. 25

Chapter 21 is another crisis that takes place in Israel. One of their own tribes is about to be extinguished, and they don't know what to do about it.

They tried to solve this problem with their own reasoning – **Jer. 10:28**
When people become their own authority, truth becomes opinion. Morality becomes preference. Freedom becomes self-indulgence. Identity becomes self-creation. Justice becomes power.

II. Because sin's damage exceeds our ability to repair – vs. 1
The reason this happened is because of the sinfulness of Israel. What they're experiencing here is the consequences of sin. The sorrow comes after a long history of compromise, of corruption, of immorality, of moral decay, of idolatry, of refusing to live under the rule of God. And this is what happens. And now you're weeping before God and blaming God. This is the devastation of sin.

Sin always has devastating consequences. And there are some consequences from sin which man in his ability has no power to overcome. He can't repair the damage. The only one that can repair the damage from sin is Almighty God. Man can't do that, only God can do that. God in his grace has the power to do that.

III. Because man-made promises and plans cannot save us – vv. 6-7
The tribe's on the verge of extinction. They made an oath to God they would not give their daughters to the tribe of Benjamin. And so, are they going to do now? They made this vow, but they want to help this tribe to repopulate. What are they going to do? Well, what they need to have done is to realize that this was a foolish vow and repent of the vow. That's the thing that they should have done. But they're looking for a way to to preserve the vow that they made and still solve the problem.

They don't consult the law of God. They don't seek God in prayer. They realize it's a really bad vow rather than confessing it as a sin. They are going to figure out a way to fulfill that vow and still preserve the tribe of Benjamin and they're going to do it in their own way. So they plunge headlong into this rash vow that they made in order to keep it. And by the way, this is the danger of self-rule. We can become committed to the wrong thing and call it integrity. It's not really integrity.

Humility admits when you're wrong. A leader knows when he's made a bad decision. Someone said a leader is someone who makes good second decisions. You have enough humility to realize that was a mistake and you make a good second decision.

IV. Because human wisdom can sacrifice the innocent.
The solution to this dilemma is shocking. We will kill all the people at Jabesh Gilead in that village. And then we'll take the virgins that are left over and we'll use them to be the wives for these people of Benjamin. They recover 400 wives … still need another 200.

What a price was paid for these wives. People had to die. Innocent people were slaughtered. This is just, again, an incredible thing when you think about it. They're willing to just kill these innocent people. This, again, shows you the ridiculous judgment that they're using here in the moral chaos that is going on when they're doing what is right in their own eyes. You see, when human wisdom is detached from God's word, it often solves one problem by creating victims somewhere else. And that's really the essence of abortion, isn't it? Society presents abortion as a

solution to an unwanted pregnancy, but the problem is solved by making an unborn child bear the entire cost.

V. Because compassion needs truth and holiness.

Oh, listen, there's this yearly feast at Shiloh. Shiloh was the central place of worship. Shiloh was where they all come together, and it's a yearly feast, and normally young women come, and it's a festive time. It's a time of worship, and when they're coming down the road, and they're worshiping, and they're joyful, and all of this, then you hide.

Make sure you hide. And when you see him come down the road, just jump out and just grab you one. I mean, that's how it went. That's what they tell them to do. Can you imagine someone coming to church and getting kidnapped in order to be a bride? Coming to worship and that taking place? This is just, again, it's laughable. And again, the women, they have no say so in this matter. They're treated like objects. They're treated like possessions.

This is the ultimate illustration to a pragmatism. The end justifies the means. Oh, well, we're able to save this whole one tribe. And so because we're able to do that, then it justifies the way we're doing it. That's pragmatism. Beware of reasoning that says the outcome is good, so the method doesn't matter.

VI. Because only Christ can restore what sin has ruined – vs. 25

Judges ends with no satisfying human answer. Israel's people return to their inheritance. Benjamin is preserved. The immediate emergency is over, but the nation is still spiritually and morally corrupt, and they're as bad off as they can be.

<u>Practical Applications:</u>

1) Submit to the king's word. Let scripture, rather than preference, determine in your life what is right and what is wrong. Don't resort to your own reasoning.
2) Confess self-rule. Identify places where you have, in effect, said, I will decide what's right for me.
3) Stop multiplying sin. Don't attempt to hide, justify, or repair wrong through another wrong. and then seek godly wisdom. Seek godly wisdom. Bring major decisions into the light of scripture and prayer and get mature godly counsel. Protect the vulnerable. Always refuse solutions that shift the burden of sin onto those who are the least powerful or to the weak or the innocent.
4) Then come to Christ. His kingship is not oppressive. He is the one who gave himself for us. You can trust a king like that. Come to Christ.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS:

Baxter, J. Sidlow. *Explore the Book*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1960.

Block, Daniel I. *The New American Commentary*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1999.

Brensinger, Terry L. *Believers Church Bible Commentary*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1999.

Bruce, F. F. *The New Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956.

Davis, Dale Ralph. *Judges – Such a Great Salvation*. Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2000.

Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Wilmington, DE: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1972.

Inrig, Gary. *Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1979.

Jordan, James B. *Judges – God's War Against Humanism*. Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1985.
Website version: http://www.biblicalhorizons.com/pdf/jjju.pdf

Keil, C. F. and Delitzsch, F. *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: MI, 1950.

Lindsey, F. Duane. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications Ministries, 1983.

MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur Study Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006.

Pfeiffer, Charles F. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1962.

Ryrie, Charles Caldwell. *Ryrie Study Bible*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1986.

Stedman, Ray C. *Adventuring Through the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 1997.

Watson, Robert A. *The Expositors' Bible*. New York, NY: Hodder & Stoughton.

Wiersbe, Warren W. *The Bible Exposition Commentary – Joshua – Esther*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2003.

Wilcock, Michael. *The Message of Judges – The Bible Speaks Today*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992.

Wolf, Herbert.. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Volume 3 – Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 &2 Samuel.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988.

Wood, Leon. *A Survey of Israel's History*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1970.

SERMON ARCHIVES:

Begg, Alistair. http://www.truthforlife.org/resources/scripture/judges/

Bill, Brian. www.sermoncentral.com

Bomkamp, Jim. http://preceptaustin.org/judges_commentaries.htm

Bowen, Thomas. www.sermoncentral.com

Carr, Alan. http://preceptaustin.org/judges_commentaries.htm

Carson, Ken. http://www.gcfweb.org/institute/prophet/judges.pdf

Cathers, Rich. http://preceptaustin.org/judges_commentaries.htm

Clarke, Adam. http://preceptaustin.org/judges_commentaries.htm

Constable, Thomas. http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/judges.pdf

Criswell, W. A. http://preceptaustin.org/judges_commentaries.htm

Daniel, Ron. http://preceptaustin.org/judges_commentaries.htm

Deffinbaugh, Robert. www.bible.org

Drake, Shawn. www.sermoncentral.com

Fuller, Tom. www.sermoncentral.com

Gaibelein, A. C. http://preceptaustin.org/judges_commentaries.htm

Gibson, Dan. www.sermonaudio.com

Gill, John. http://preceptaustin.org/judges_commentaries.htm

Goins, Doug. www.pbc.org/messages

Grant, Scott. www.pbc.org/messages

Guzik, David. http://preceptaustin.org/judges_commentaries.htm

Hanneman, John. www.pbcc.org/sermons/hanneman.php

Harmon, Jerry.
https://www.sermonaudio.com/broadcasters/jharmon/sermons?searchKeyword=judges&sort=bible

Henley, Grady. www.sermoncentral.com

Holwick, David. http://preceptaustin.org/judges_commentaries.htm

JesusPlusNothing.com http://www.jesusplusnothing.com/studies/

Johnson, S. Lewis. [Gideon series]
http://www.sljinstitute.net/sermons/old_testament/history/gideon/gideon_master.html

Jones, Don. www.sermoncentral.com

Kirkland, Trevor. www.sermonaudio.com

Krell, Keith. http://preceptaustin.org/judges_commentaries.htm

Lefebvre, Michael. www.sermonaudio.com

Macaskill, George. www.sermonaudio.com

Maclaren, Alexander. http://preceptaustin.org/judges_commentaries.htm

Malick, David. https://bible.org/passage/274/Judges

May, James. www.sermoncentral.com

McGee, J. Vernon. http://preceptaustin.org/judges_commentaries.htm

Meyer, F. B. http://preceptaustin.org/judges_commentaries.htm

Miller, J. R. http://pamphlets.jr-miller.com/his-steps/index.html

Moore, George F. http://preceptaustin.org/judges_commentaries.htm

Morgan. G. Campbell. http://preceptaustin.org/judges_commentaries.htm

Newton, Phil. http://preceptaustin.org/judges_commentaries.htm

Onyemalechi, Sylvester. www.jfoutreach.org

Padfield, David. http://www.padfield.com/acrobat/ot/judges.pdf

Pett, Dr. Peter. www.angelfire.com/ok/bibleteaching/judges.html

Piper, John. http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/by-scripture/judges

Pritchard, Ray. www.keepbelieving.com

Rzengota, Bruce. www.sermoncentral.com

Rugh, Gil. www.sermonaudio.com

Silversides, David. www.sermonaudio.com

Stedman, Ray. Peninsula Bible Church, Mountain View, CA.
Website: http://www.pbc.org

Sullivant, Michael. www.sermonaudio.com

Tomlinson, Glenn. www.sermonaudio.com

Tow, Richard. www.sermoncentral.com

Zeisler, Steve. Peninsula Bible Church, Mountain View, CA.
Website: http://preceptaustin.org/judges_commentaries.htm