THE BOOK OF

JUDGES

LESSONS FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

"Everyone did what was right
in his own eyes"

Steve Glaser

INTRODUCTION

The previous book of 'Joshua' described the conquest of most of the Promised Land by the Israelites following their forty year exodus from Egypt. It ended with Joshua's warning to the leaders of Israel shortly before his death.

Joshua 23:1-13-*"A long time afterward, when the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, and Joshua was old and well advanced in years, Joshua summoned all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and officers, and said to them,*

'I am now old and well advanced in years. And you have seen all that the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the Lord your God who has fought for you. Behold, I have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain, along with all the nations that I have already cut off, from the Jordan to the Great Sea in the west.

The Lord your God will push them back before you and drive them out of your sight. And you shall possess their land, just as the Lord your God promised you.

Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left, that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them, but you shall cling to the Lord your God just as you have done to this day. For the Lord has driven out before you great and strong nations.

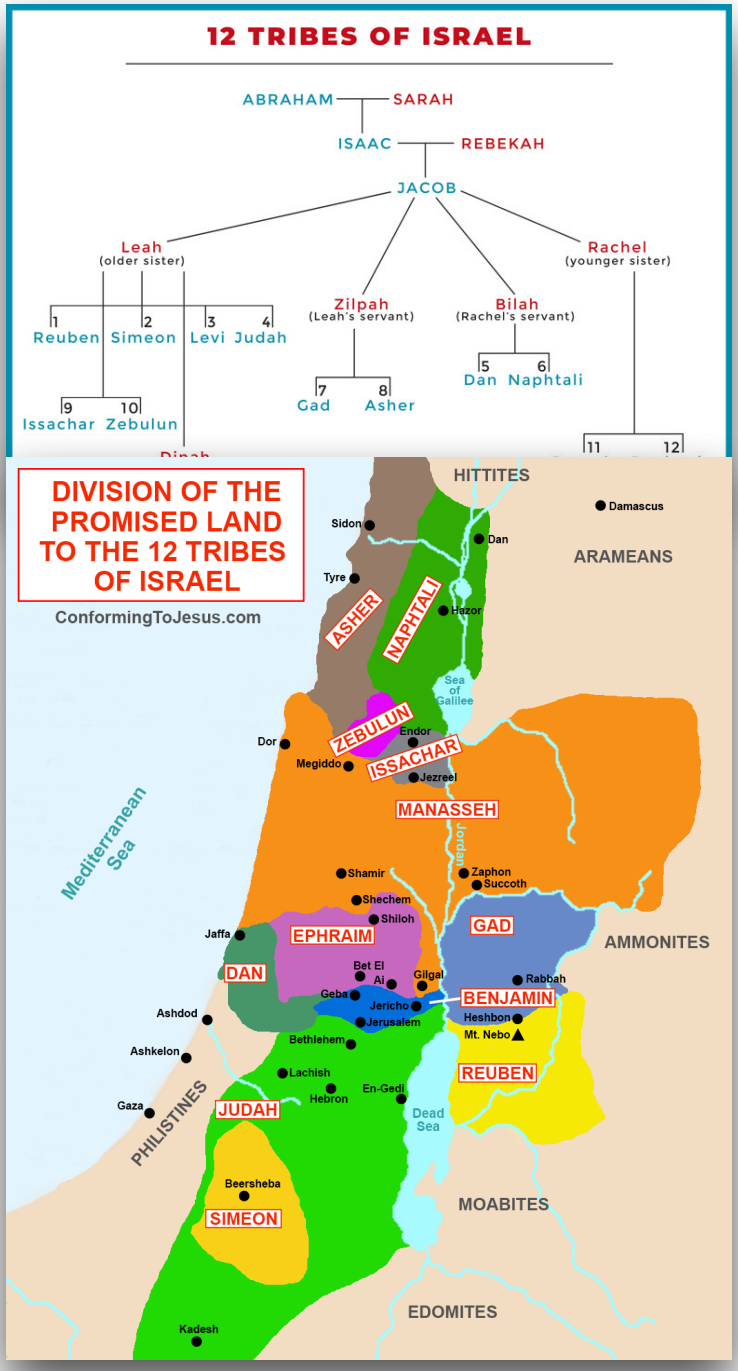
And as for you, no man has been able to stand before you to this day. One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the Lord your God who fights for you, just as he promised you.

Be very careful, therefore, to love the Lord your God. For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good mixed ground that the Lord your God has given you."

The twelve tribes dispersed to their allotted territories with the mandate to continue the fight until all of the Promised Land was conquered and their enemies destroyed. Unfortunately, after Joshua's death, a new generation of Israelites arose who did not heed Joshua's warnings. With only a loose coalition of tribal chieftains leading them, they forsook the Book of Law and fell into the snares of the surrounding nations.

Instead of faithfulness to the one true God, they engaged in apostasy. Instead of annihilation, the Israelites offered assimilation. Instead of pursuing holiness, they intertwined their culture with the surrounding pagan nations and served their false gods and goddesses. What resulted was over three centuries of turbulence and oppression described in the 'Book of Judges.'

The title "Book of Judges' is somewhat of a misnomer as the '*judges*' described were not adjudicators of justice, but rather a series of anti-hero tribal 'deliverers' who saved the Israelites from the oppression of foreign invaders. It covers over three hundred years from Joshua's conquest of most of the Promised Land (and distribution of the land to the twelve tribes of Israel) until the beginning of the monarchy. Though the author is not known with certainty, the Talmud suggests the book was written by the prophet Samuel after the coronation of King Saul. Other scholars believe it was written sometime after the demise of the Northern and Southern kingdoms in the eight and sixth centuries respectively.



The book describes cycles of Israelite sin, oppression, repentance, and deliverance by these God-ordained 'judges.' Each '*judge*' brought only temporary respite as the Israelites struggled to maintain their covenant relationship with God.

God had promised the land to these Israelites' forefathers. Despite their apostasy, He would not abandon them— but He would withdraw His leadership from time to time and allow them to suffer the consequences of their aberrant actions.

The twelve (mostly flawed) tribal '*judges*' described in the book were from various geographical regions scattered throughout the twelve tribes and many of their timelines overlapped. Some oppression affected only portions of the Israelite population at any given time as they battled the peoples of Mesopotamia, Moab, Canaan, Midian, Ammon, Philistia, and other unnamed nations.

The 'Book of Judges' is certainly relevant today. Like these ancient Israelites, our nation has abandoned God's rule and assimilated into the pagan cultures surrounding us. Unfortunately, in search of secular relevance, even many churches have fallen into the trap of 'woke' consumer Christianity and morally compromised the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

They fail to recognize that a church only stays relevant by speaking and living God's truth while offering grace, forgiveness, love, and hope. It stays relevant, not by conforming, but by reforming. It stays relevant by being in the world, but not of the world— engaging the culture while not being shaped by it. A church stays relevant not by ignoring sin, but instead offering a way out through the unselfish sacrifice of Jesus.

God gave us this book for a reason. Let's see what important lessons we can glean about restoring our nation, our churches, and ourselves. Thanks for once again joining me in discovering God's Truth.

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work"
(2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Steve Glaser

CHAPTER ONE

Judges 1:1-*"After the death of Joshua, the people of Israel inquired of the Lord, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?"*

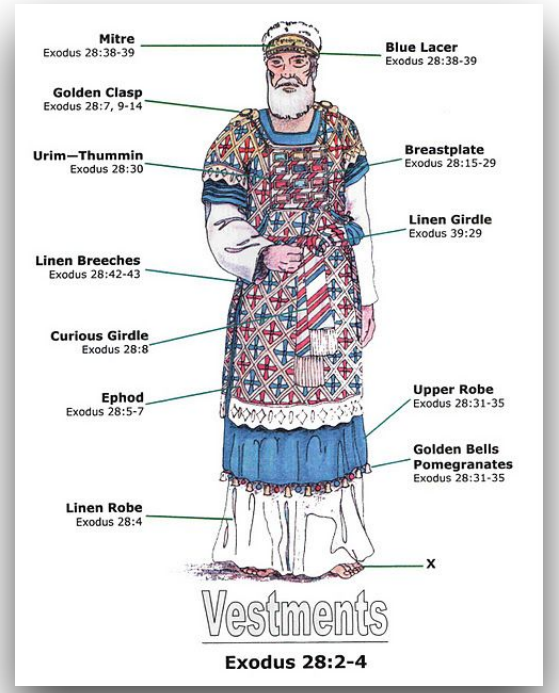
Moses led the people out of Egypt through the wilderness and Transjordan for forty years; but God did not allow him to accompany them into the Promised Land— that responsibility fell upon Joshua. Accepting his new role in his early eighties, Joshua led the Israelites for over thirty years as they broke the backbone of the Canaanite resistance and inhabited their apportioned tribal lands. But unlike Moses, Joshua did not appoint a unifying successor— each tribe was to continue the fight against the remaining enemies in their own lands.

Leaderless with Joshua's impending death (but still semi-unified), "*the people of Israel inquired of the Lord, 'Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?'"* Exactly how *Yahweh* answered their question is subject to scholarly debate, but presumably it was by the high priest's manipulation of the *Urim* and *Thummim* attached to the priestly garment.

Lev 8:7-9- *"And he put the coat on him and tied the sash around his waist and clothed him with the robe and put the ephod on him and tied the skillfully woven band of the ephod around him, binding it to him with the band.*

And he placed the breastpiece on him, and ***in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummim.***

And he set the turban on his head, and on the turban, in front, he set the golden plate, the holy crown, as the LORD commanded Moses."



The Hebrew words *Urim* and *Thummim* mean literally "*lights*" and "*perfections*." Though no one knows the precise nature of the *Urim* and *Thummim* or exactly how they were used, they were often employed by the high priest to determine God's will (Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 33:8; Joshua 7:14-18; 1 Samuel 14:37-45; 2 Samuel 21:1).

Though sometimes referring to a particular group of people along the coastal and river valley lowlands of the Promised Land, the term "*Canaanite*" is used here to designate the collective enemies encountered throughout the land by the Israelites. Though now acting independently, the tribes of Israel still sought the mind of God as their real commander-in-chief. Their reliance on Him would unfortunately be short lived.

"The opening scene of the book offers so much promise.

The theocratic system is in place. Israel is sensitive to the will of God, and God responds to the overtures of His people.

In its present canonical position, after the Book of Joshua, the reader expects a continuation of the triumphant narrative encountered in the previous book.

But how different will be the reality from the ideal, the history from the dream!

By raising the reader's expectations this way the narrator invites the intensity of his own and God's disappointment with His people in the period of settlement."

(Daniel I Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture—Judges, Ruth"*)

WHO IS YOUR COMMANDER-IN CHIEF?

HOW DO YOU SEEK GOD'S WILL?

HOW DOES HE ANSWER YOU?

Judges 1:2-*"The Lord said, "Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand."*

The tribe of Judah had been given the largest tract of land in Canaan. Judah (and the smaller tribe of Simeon within Judah's land grant) occupied most of the lower aspect of the Promised Land from *Jerusalem* southward. When the collective peoples of Israel asked who should go first to continue Joshua's conquests, God gave a simple, direct answer—"*Judah shall go up*" as He had already "*given the land into his* (Judah's) *hand.*" The outcome of these battles was pre-ordained. All that was required was obedience to His Word.

"Obedience is connected to trust and respect. It actually comes from a Latin word meaning 'to hear.' When we obey God, it's a sign that we really trust Him and are listening to what He's saying, and truly believe He knows best. If we don't obey God, we are essentially saying, 'I know better than you do…

Only God knows perfectly what is best for us and our happiness; when we try to do things our own way, we invariably make mistakes and fall short of the goal. Obeying God is the only way to know we are doing the right thing, that will work out the best for everyone, including ourselves, in the end" ("*What is Obedience to God?"* C.S. Lewis Institute, July 1, 2020).

WHAT IS OBEDIENCE?

DO YOU OBEY GOD OR DO YOU THINK YOU KNOW BETTER THAN HIM?

HOW DO YOU TRUST AND RESPECT GOD?

Judges 1:3-*"And Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me into the territory allotted to me, that we may fight against the Canaanites. And I likewise will go with you into the territory allotted to you." So Simeon went with him."*

The tribe of Judah accepted *Yahweh's* directive and formed an alliance with the much smaller tribe of Simeon to "*fight against the Canaanites*" within their given territories. Familiarly, Judah and Simeon were full brothers of Jacob and his first wife Leah (Gen 29:33,35) . Simeon's ancestral allotted territory was encircled by the tribe of Judah.

Before entering the Promised Land, the tribe of Simeon was the smallest with only twenty-two-thousand men of military age (Nu 26:14)— less than half the average number of each of the other tribes. (Of note, within two centuries the tribe of Simeon ceased to exist as a separate tribe).

"An 'alliance' is a formal agreement between two or more states for mutual support in case of war. Contemporary alliances provide for combined action on the part of two or more independent states and are generally defensive in nature, obligating allies to join forces if one or more of them is attacked by another state or coalition…

Although alliances may be informal, they are typically formalized by a treaty of alliance, the most critical clauses of which are those that define the *casus foederis*, or the circumstances under which the treaty obligates an ally to aid a fellow member" (*Britannica Dictionary*).

"Alliances have been an enduring feature of war and conflict for thousands of years… Multilateral military arrangements allow states to aggregate their capabilities and collaborate on common security challenges…

Alliances and partnerships between sovereign states are often exasperatingly difficult to manage; domestic politics, burden sharing, and diverging strategic considerations create friction points that threaten to collapse them altogether…

Our Founders admonished us to beware of 'entangling alliances' that could embroil the United States in conflicts and conflagrations that were not necessarily in our interest" (Kathleen J. McInnis, PhD, "The Competitive Advantages and Risks of Alliances").

WHY/ HOW DOES THE UNITED STATES ALIGN WITH OTHER NATIONS?

WHY/ HOW DO YOU ALIGN WITH OTHERS?

WHY MUST WE BE CAREFUL WITH OUR ALIGNMENTS?

Judges 1:4-5-*"Then Judah went up and the Lord gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand, and they defeated 10,000 of them at Bezek. They found Adoni-bezek at Bezek and fought against him and defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites."*

The Perizzites were a minor branch of pagan Canaan residing in the territory of Judah and fell under the "*herem law*"— they were to be "*devoted to destruction.*" The city of *Bezek* was located near *Jerusalem* on Judah's northern border. The tribe of Judah (with the tribe of Simeon) "*went up*" into the mountainous region of *Bezek* and defeated its local governor, "*Adoni-bezek*" (a title meaning "Lord of Bezek") along with 10,000 of his men. "*The Lord gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand."*

This is the first recorded battle in the Book of Judges. It occurred near the death of Joshua and seems to hint that the Israelites were indeed intent to complete the total defeat of its enemies in the Promises Land.

Winston Churchill once proclaimed, "Victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival." Unfortunately, even in victory, the next verse will describe how the tribes of Judah and Simeon had already partially succumbed to the cultural mores of the surrounding pagan territory that would eventually put their future in peril.

WHAT IS VICTORY?

WHAT IS THE COST VICTORY?

HOW HAS YOUR SURVIVAL BEEN PUT IN PERIL?

Judges 1:6-7-*"Adoni-bezek fled, but they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and his big toes. And Adoni-bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my table. As I have done, so God has repaid me." And they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there."*

Leaving his soldiers dying on the ground, Adoni-bezed fled, but the Israelites pursued and captured him. Under God's "*herem"* edict they were required to "*devote him to destruction*"— execute him. Instead, they reverted to the pagan practice of humiliating, incapacitating, and torturing him by cutting *"off his thumbs and his big toes*"— a practice Adonni-bezed had done himself to "*seventy kings.*"

Adonni-bezed then lamented that his fate was a repayment by "*elohim*" (a generic name for a "*god*"). Since he was a Canaanite, this "*elohim*" reference may have indeed been in recognition of the God of Israel or more probably just of one of his own pagan "gods." Regardless, he saw it as just recompense for his previous actions.

This initial battle in the Book of Judges gives the first glimpse of Israel's dichotomy of obedience seen throughout the book. They continued the battle for the Promised Land, but were already influenced by their surrounding culture as indicated in their torturing their captive instead of merely executing him (before carrying him on to *Jerusalem* where he eventually died).

Torture is defined as "the infliction of intense pain (as from burning, crushing, or wounding) to punish, coerce, or afford sadistic pleasure" (Merriam-Webster). The Assyrians invaders from the north who would

eventually capture the ten northern tribes of Israel after the monarchy, were noted for their cruel treatment of captives.

The Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 B.C.) once boasted about his treatment of captives:

> "In strife and conflict I besieged and conquered the city. I felled 3,000 of their fighting men with the sword. I carried off prisoners, possessions. oxen, and cattle from them.
>
> I burnt many captives from them. I captured many troops alive: from some I cut off come of their arms and hands; from others I cut off their noses, ears, and extremities. I gouged out the eyes of many troops. I made one pile of the living and one pile of heads. I hung their heads on trees around the city."

What Does The Bible Say About Torture?

(From: GotQuesdtions.org)

"*Torture* can be defined as "the infliction of intense pain to punish, to coerce, or to derive sadistic pleasure." Of course, sadism is never appropriate or just, but what about punishment or coercion? Is there ever a time when inflicting pain is justified in order to punish wrongdoing or to obtain a confession? What does the Bible say?

The Bible acknowledges the existence of torture. In a parable, Jesus spoke of a servant who was "turned . . . over to the jailers to be tortured" (Matthew 18:34). Such an allusion seems to indicate that the use of torture was common in the prisons of the day. The Bible also records the stories of many victims of torture: Jesus, Paul and Silas (Acts 16), the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 20:2; 38:6), and other unnamed saints (Hebrews 11:35). In every case, we see that the godly are the victims of torture, never the perpetrators of torture.

As individuals, we are not to seek revenge. Vengeance belongs only to the Lord (Psalm 94:1; Romans 12:19). Also, as individuals we have no authority to punish society's wrongdoers or to extract confessions from them. Therefore, as individuals, we can have no license to torture; inflicting intense pain on others is wrong. God alone is able to mete out punishment with perfect justice, and it is His prerogative to make His punishment painful. Demons are aware of a future time of "torture" for themselves (Matthew 8:29). Hell is a place of "torment" and intense agony (Matthew 13:42; Luke 16:23-24). During the Tribulation, torment will be part of the plagues upon evildoers (Revelation 9:5). In any of His judgments, God is holy and perfectly fair (Psalm 119:137).

Now we'll consider the use of torture in relation to governmental policy. We know that God has appointed civil governments and charged them with maintaining justice in this world (Romans 13:1-5). "For [the ruler] is God's servant to do you good . . . an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" (verse 4). Elsewhere, God calls judges and magistrates "gods"; that is, their authority to provide justice comes from God Himself (Psalm 82:1-4). If they fail in their duty, they will themselves be judged by the Lord, the Judge of all (verses 7-8).

So government bears the responsibility to protect the good and punish the evil. What methods may it employ in carrying out that responsibility? Beyond the endorsement of capital punishment (Romans 13:4; Genesis 9:6), the Bible does not say. The Bible neither condemns nor condones a government's use of torture.

Many questions can and should be asked: What specific techniques should be considered "torture"? Where do we draw the line? Is the infliction of any kind of pain inherently wrong? What if there are no permanent physical effects? Is sleep deprivation torture? What about a forced change in diet? Should yelling at a prisoner be considered psychological torture?

May a government, in order to protect its law-abiding citizens, engage in "highly coercive interrogation" (the use of strongly persuasive techniques to obtain tactical information)? What if these techniques do not inflict physical pain?

What if the goal of torture is to prevent further tragedy? What if a prisoner is withholding information that could save the life of an innocent person? What if a hundred lives could be saved? A thousand lives? Should that prisoner be threatened with physical pain until he reveals the information? What, then, if his information is wrong? And what about unlawful enemy combatants who are, legally, not prisoners of war and therefore do not fall under the rules of the Geneva Convention?

These are all questions not addressed in the Bible and that are beyond the scope of this article, but they highlight the need for us to pray "for kings and all those in authority" (1 Timothy 2:2). May our policy makers have the wisdom to distinguish good from evil and to provide true justice."

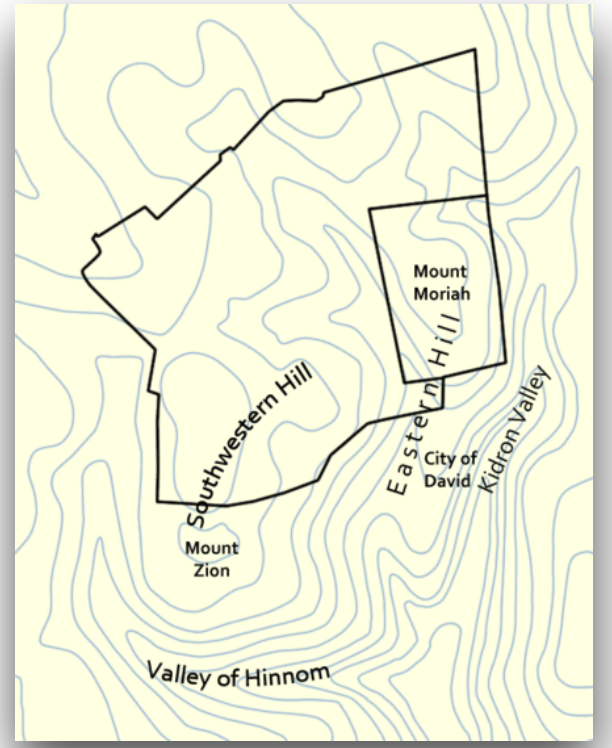
WHAT IS TORTURE?

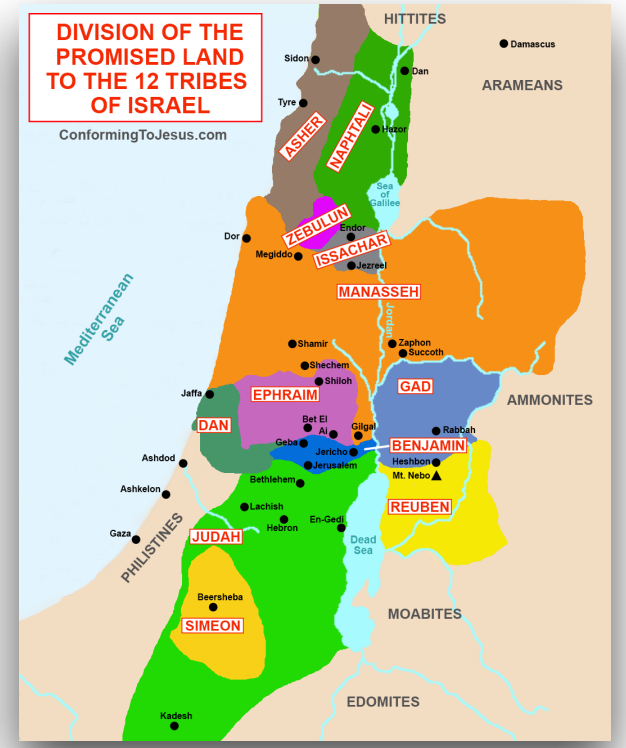
IS TORTURE ALWAYS WRONG?

WHY? WHY NOT?

Judges 1:8-*"And the men of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire."*

The old city of "*Jerusalem*" had been in existence since 3000 B.C— its common Biblical name was "*Jebus.*" It was a border town located between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. *Jerusalem* of that day was not the city of we think of today, but rather a fortress city between the Kidron and Hinnom valleys outside the walls of current day *Jerusalem*.





In keeping with God's "*herem"* edict, the tribe of Judah captured and destroyed the men of the lower land of the city. But it was only much later in history that David captured the higher portion, eliminated the Jebusites (who the tribe of Benjamin had allowed to assimilate (vs 1:21)), and made this area his capitol. It was called the "*City of David*" that is today located on a ridge outside the current day walls of the city of *Jerusalem*, west of the Kidron Valley and to the immediate south of the *Temple Mount* (ancient Mt. Moriah).

During David's time, Mount Moriah (future *Temple Mount)* was north of the *City of David* and owned by a man named Araunah who used it as his threshing floor. Only later during his reign did David purchase the field and dedicate it as the spot where the temple would be eventually built by his son, Solomon, in the 10th century B.C. (2 Samuel 24) . It stood until 587 B.C., when it was destroyed during the Babylonian siege of *Jerusalem* and was rebuilt a century later. This "*Second Temple*" stood until it also was destroyed during the Roman siege of *Jerusalem* in 70 A.D.

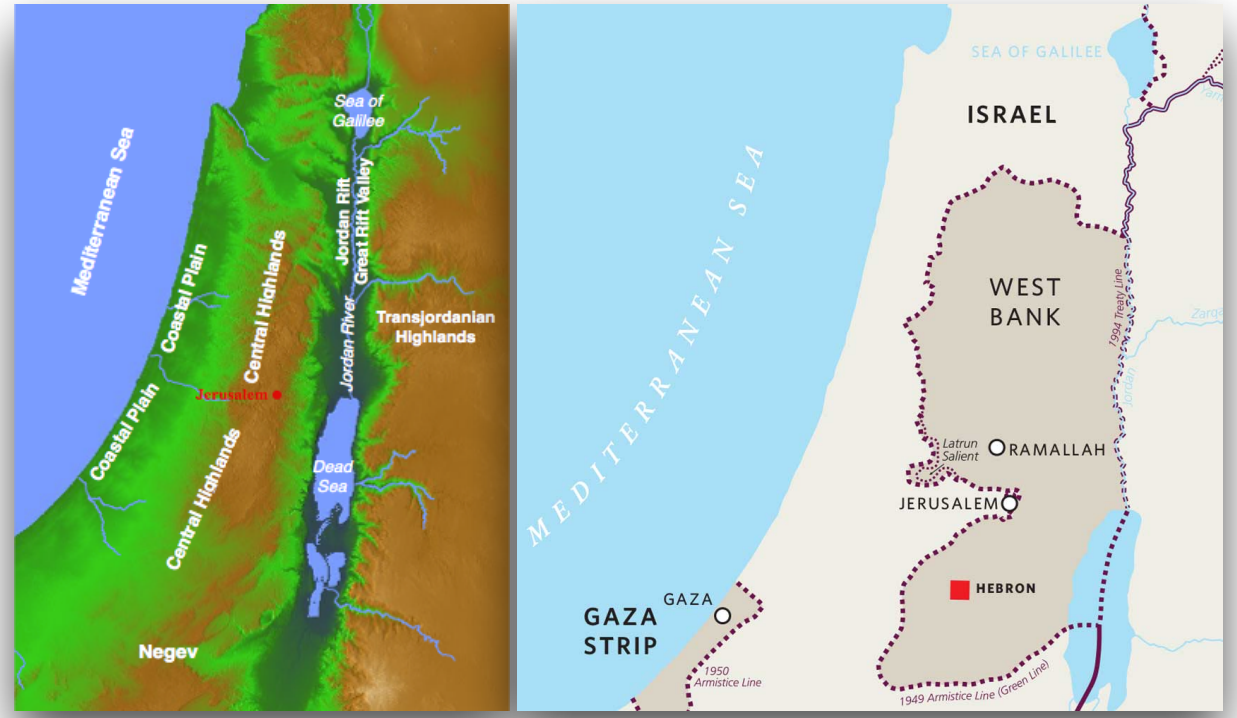
Since David's era, *Jerusalem* has been conquered and recaptured more than 40 times. It has been claimed not only by many countries and empires, but also by three of the world's major religions.

WHAT NATIONS HAVE LAID CLAIM TO JERUSALEM?

WHAT RELIGIONS HAVE LAID CLAIM TO JERUSALEM?

WHY IS JERUSALEM SO IMPORTANT?

Judges 1: 9-10-*"And afterward the men of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who lived in the hill country, in the Negeb, and in the lowland. And Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron (now the name of Hebron was formerly Kiriath-arba), and they defeated Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai."*



After the defeat of lower *Jerusalem*, the tribes of Judah and Simeon turned their attention southward. Whereas the "*hill country"* (central highlands) indicated lands just south of *Jerusalem*, the " *Negeb*" was the desert area in the southernmost territory of Judah. The "*lowland*" (also known as the western foothills), was the transition area between the "*hill country*" (central highlands) and the coastal planes.

The ancient city of *Hebron* was located approximately 20 miles south of *Jerusalem* in what is today known as the "*West Bank*." It was here that God first showed Abram the land that would someday belong to him and his offspring (Gen13:14–17). And it was here that Abraham purchased an ancestral burial cave. This cave, in the field of Machpelah (also called Kiriath-Arba), is considered by Jews today to be the second holiest site in all Israel as it is the burial place of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah.

It was also here that, after the death of King Saul, God would tell David to go to rule over Judah for seven years because at that time the Jebusites controlled *Jerusalem* (2 Sam 2:1–4, 5:3).

"*Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai"* were the sons of *Anak* (a Nephilim), who inhabited *Hebron* when the spies sent by Moses first reconnoitered Canaan:

> "*So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, near Lebo Namath. They went up into the Negeb and came to Hebron.* ***Ahiman, Sheshai,*** *and* ***Talmai,*** *the descendants of* ***Anak****, were there.* (*Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt*)" (Nu 13:21-22).

> *"And there we saw the* ***Nephilim*** *(****the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim****), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them"* (Num 13:33).

These three rulers were the ungodly generational offspring of fallen angels and human cohabitation:

> "*When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them,* ***the sons of God*** *saw that the daughters of man were attractive.* ***And they took as their wives any they chose.***
>
> *Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years."*
>
> *The* ***Nephilim*** *were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when* ***the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them.***
>
> *These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown."* (Gen 6:1-4)

Though many of the Anakin (Nephilim) were defeated by Joshua, some remained along the southeastern Philistine coastal areas in *Gaza, Gath,* and *Ashdod.*

> "*And Joshua came at that time and cut off the Anakim from the hill country, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel. Joshua devoted them to destruction with their cities. There was none of the Anakim left in the land of the people of Israel. Only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod did some remain"* (Joshua 11:21-22)

God's primary objective of Israel's military campaign throughout the Promised Land was to clear the land of the seed of these Nephilim so the Israelites could dwell there. Unfortunately, because of Israelite assimilation of their surrounding cultures, Nephilim remnants remained until the time of David.

WHERE IS THE "WEST BANK" TODAY?

WHERE IS THE "GAZA STRIP" TODAY?

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF "WEST BANK" AND "GAZA STRIP" TODAY?

Judges 1:11-13-*"From there they went against the inhabitants of Debir. The name of Debir was formerly Kiriath-sepher.*

And Caleb said, "He who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will give him Achsah my daughter for a wife." And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, captured it. And he gave him Achsah his daughter for a wife."

Though the location of "*Debir*" is today uncertain, scholars believe it to have been located just southwest of *Hebron*. Caleb, one of the original twelve spies sent by Moses forty years prior, was apportioned this land by Joshua (Joshua 14:6-15), but it still needed to be defeated. As an incentive, Caleb promised, "*"He who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will give him Achsah my daughter for a wife."*

The challenge was accepted by "*Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother."* Caleb then made good on his promise and "*he gave him Achsah his daughter for a wife."* (see also Joshua 15:13-19)

Far from being offended, Achsah would have probably been proud to have been offered in marriage to this brave hero. (Othneil will again be seen later in the Book of Judges (3:7-11) as an energetic governor). Arranged marriages were very common throughout the world until the 18th century. Even today, in orthodox Jewish, Islamic, and Hindu families, arranged marriages are sometimes's observed.

An "arranged" marriage is one that is brought about by consent of the parents of the bride and groom—often without regard to the wishes of the couple to be married. Biblical texts infer that marriages between cousins were often preferred (as was this marriage between Othniel and Achsah).

Even most traditional marriages of the 21st century pay tribute to the ancient responsibility of a father to his daughter in marriage. The practice of "giving a daughter" to someone in marriage is traditionally called "*giving away the bride,*" where the father of the bride symbolically hands her over to the groom at the wedding ceremony, signifying the transfer of her care from her family to her new husband.

HOW DID YOU CHOOSE A MARRIAGE PARTNER?

WHOSE ADVICE DID YOU CONSIDER?

DID YOU CONSULT GOD?

Judges 1:14-15-*"When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for a field. And she dismounted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Give me a blessing. Since you have set me in the land of the Negeb, give me also springs of water." And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs."*

It was common for a father to offer a "*dowry*"— a gift of money, goods, or property given by the bride's family as part of the marriage ceremony. Caleb had given the young couple a portion of his land in the Negeb desert. Because of its arid location, Achsah wisely asked her father for a further *"blessing*" of *springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs."*

"Although she remains gracious and respectful, she will not be simply a passive object of men's deals. Instead she seizes the opportunity to achieve something neither her father nor her husband contemplated. But she does so without overstepping the bounds of female propriety." (Daniel I Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*). Voluntary submission to the wishes of her father (and husband) did not require her to leave her brains at the altar.

WHAT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A FATHER TO HIS DAUGHTER?

WHAT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A DAUGHTER TO HER FATHER?

HOW HAVE YOU HELPED YOUR DAUGHTER AND SON- IN- LAW IN MARRIAGE?

Judges 1:16-*"And the descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah from the city of palms into the wilderness of Judah, which lies in the Negev Arad, and they went and settled with the people."*

In their continued war against the pagan inhabitants of their tribal land, Judah progressed southward through the Negeb toward "*Arad*" But this time they were accompanied by *"the descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law."* Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, had been a Midian priest of the Kenite clan (Ex 3:1).

Though the "*City of Palms*" often refers to the city of *Jericho*, the area referenced here (from which they traveled) probably referred to another nearby oasis region near the "*wilderness of Judea.*" (*Jericho* was far northeast of their last conquest in *Hebron*).

"*Arad*" was strategically positioned, guarding the eastern Negeb from nomadic peoples. It commanded a position on the frontier road to Edom and Elath and was an important stopping post on key trading routes.

Winston Churchill once said, "There is only one thing worse than fighting with allies, and that is fighting without them." The statement, "*they went and settled with the people"* can be interpreted one of two ways. Either the descendants of Moses' father-in-law joined with the tribe of Judah in settling the land after annihilating the people of *Arad* or these allies compromised Judah's mandate to eliminate *Arad* and influenced Judah to assimilate with the pagans of this strategic city in the Negev.

The latter position is certainly in line with the theme of the Book of Judges. Judah's alliance with Moses's father-in-law's clan could have been a two edged sword leading to their eventual assimilation and apostasy.

WHAT IS ASSIMILATION?

WHAT IS APOSTASY?

HAS CAN ASSIMILATION LEAD TO APOSTASY?

Judges 1:17-"*And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they defeated the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath and devoted it to destruction. So the name of the city was called Hormah.*

The exact location of city of "*Zephath"* is today unknown, but obviously within the boundaries of the tribe of Simeon. It was renamed "*Hormah*"— meaning "*destruction*." As the Simeonites "*devoted it to destruction*," the new name was fitting. The tribe of Judah kept their word to assist the Simeonites in claiming their inheritance.

The phrase "*To keep your word*" means to do what you say you'll do. We may sometimes fail in this endeavor, but God never does— He's consistently true to His word. "God's absolute trustworthiness has been consistently demonstrated over a long time. The Scripture record shows unequivocally that God keeps His promises. They are His assurance, His commitment to us, His guarantee to do what He says He will do. From Genesis to Revelation we find that God is true to His promises" (Pastor Jim Feeney, PhD; *"God's Promises Are True & Sure and God Is True to His Promises: A Sermon to Build Your Faith"*).

"Every word of God proves true; He is a shield to those who take refuge in him" (Prov 30:5).

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (Heb 10:23).

WHAT IS A PROMISE?

DO YOU ALWAYS "KEEP YOUR WORD?" WHY? WHY NOT?

DOES GOD ALWAYS "KEEP HIS WORD?" WHY? HOW?

WHAT HAS GOD PROMISED YOU?

Judges 1:18-*"Judah also captured Gaza with its territory, and Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory."*

Much of the land allotted to the tribe of Judah along the Mediterranean Sea was occupied by the *Philistines* who were once described by the *Egyptians* as the "*Sea Peoples*." After conflict with the

Egyptians, the *Philistines* eventually settled on the coastal plain from what is now modern day *Tel Aviv* southward to *Gaza.*

This territory contained five major cities— ***Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath**, and **Ekron***. It was known as "***Philistia"*** ("*Land of the Philistines*") and later called "***Palestine"*** by the Greeks.

Philistia was situated on the *Via Maris Trade Route* (the "*Way of the Sea*")— one of three major trade routes connecting the Nile Delta with Canaan, Syria, and Asia. Because of this strategic location, the Philistines dominated world trade and greatly influenced other nations.

The tribe of Judah "*captured*" *Gaza, Ashkelon,* and *Ekron;* but it is unclear if they "*devoted them to destruction*" as required by God's "*herem*" edict because Judah kept control of Gaza for only a short time before it fell back into the hands of the *Philistines* (Judges 1:18).

Today, though still considered part of Israel, the city of *Gaza* is contained within the boundaries of the Palestinian controlled *"Gaza Strip"*— just forty-five miles south of Israel's modern-day city of *Tel Aviv*.

"The "*Gaza Strip*" is a small territory (occupying just 140 square miles) located on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It is the smaller of the two Palestinian territories contained within the border of Israel— the other being the "*West Bank.*" Inhabited mostly by Palestinian refugees and their descendants, the *Gaza Strip* is one of the most densely populated territories in the world" (*"Wikipedia"*).

"*Hamas* has been the de-facto governing body in the *Gaza Strip* since 2007 when it ousted the "*Palestinian Authority*" from power. "*Hamas*" emerged in 1987 during the first Palestinian uprising as an outgrowth of the "*Muslim Brotherhood's*" Palestinian branch…

On October 7, 2023, *Hamas* launched a coordinated land, sea, and air assault that took Israel by surprise. At least 1,200 Israelis were killed in the attacks—the deadliest day for Israel since its independence—

and about 240 were taken hostage. Israel's response led to hundreds of deaths in the *Gaza Strip* on that same day. On the following day, Israel declared war for the first time since the "*Yom Kippur War*" in 1973." ("*Britannica*").

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PARTIAL AND TOTAL OBEDIENCE TO GOD?

HOW HAS ISRAEL'S PAST PARTIAL OBEDIENCE TO GOD AFFECTED ITS PRESENT STATE?

HOW HAS YOUR PAST PARTIAL OBEDIENCE TO GOD AFFECTED YOUR PRESENT STATE?

Judges 1:19-*"And the Lord was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but he could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they had chariots of iron."*

Perhaps as an explanation of why the tribe of Judah was not able to completely annihilate the Canaanite/ Philistines of the coastal "*plain,*" the writer of the book of Judges states the inhabitants of this region had acquired "*chariots of iron*" — technology superior to what the Israelites possessed.

Unlike in the mountainous regions of the *"hill country*" (central highlands) where chariots were useless, they gave a distinctive advantage on the flat plains.

This period of history was a transition time between the "*Bronze*" and "*Iron Ages*." Though bronze was stronger than iron, iron was more malleable and could be shaped into the rims of wheels making them harder to destroy. Because of the difficulty in refining its ore (it had to be super-heated to 1530 degrees celsius— 2785 degrees Fahrenheit), iron was quite precious.

"Technological advancements have been a key factor in war for as long as humans have been fighting each other. The most obvious example of this is the atomic bomb and the nuclear weapons that so called 'super-power" countries have which is claimed to act as a deterrent to war.

Previously the rifle was seen as the most advanced technology in warfare. History is full of examples of how technology advances have influenced the outcomes, and in some cases prevented conflicts.

The reality is that technology is used on both sides, and those with the most capable often have an advantage which will in some way help determine the outcome" (Prof Andy Pardoe, *"The Role of Technology in War"* LinkedIn, Mar 6,2022).

WHAT WARFARE TECHNOLOGY HAVE YOU OBSERVED IN YOUR LIFETIME?

HOW HAS TECHNOLOGY AIDED IN WINNING WARS?

HOW HAS TECHNOLOGY AIDED IN PREVENTING WAR?

Judges 1:20-*"And Hebron was given to Caleb, as Moses had said. And he drove out from it the three sons of Anak."*

This is a summary statement representing the overall success of the tribe of Judah in the southern hill country. Caleb was the leader of the men of Judah in their quest to occupy this allotted territory. Moses had promised Caleb land in this region for his continued faithfulness since spying out the the area many decades prior (Num 14:24; Deut 1:36; Josh 14:9,; 15:13). Unlike in the coastal cities of *Gaza, Gath, Ashdod,* Caleb was able to drive out "*the three sons of Anak"* (remnants of the Nephilim) from this region.

Jacob was faithful— unfortunately, we sometimes we are not. But 2 Timothy 2:13 says, even *"if we are faithless, He* (God) *remains faithful—for He cannot deny himself'"*

"No matter what we do or don't do, His attitude toward us is always the same. And that's the kind of stability that people need to see from Christians today. They need to see people who reflect God's character in good times and bad. They need to see faithfulness…

Sometimes we start out doing the right thing for a while and then, when we don't get a right result or a positive response from people, we change our mind and do something else. But God wants us to remain faithful to His Word even during times of discouragement. And for our faithfulness, He promises us a reward" (Joyce Meyer Ministries, *"The Rewards of Faithfulnes—The Transformative Power of Faithfulness in Every Area of Life"*).

Our reward may not be temporal, but it will certainly be well worth the effort we put forth today. *"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up"* (Gal 6:9).

WHAT IS FAITHFULNESS?

WHAT IS FAITHFULNESS TO GOD?

ARE YOU FAITHFUL? WHY? HOW?

Judges 1: 21-*"But the people of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem, so the Jebusites have lived with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day."*

After recounting the overall success of the tribe of Judah (interspersed with some failures), the author of the book of Judges begins to describe the many failures of the remaining tribes. *Jerusalem* was positioned at the border of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin— but under the direct land-grant of the tribe of Benjamin. *Jerusalem* (*Jebus*) was occupied by the pagan Jebusites. The Jebusites were under God edict of *"herem"* calling for their total destruction.

"The Jebusites, stated to have dwelt in the mountains (Num. 13; Josh. 11:33), were a warlike people. At the time of Joshua's invasion the capital of the Jebusites was *Jerusalem*, called also "*Jebus*" (Judges 19: 10, 11; 2 Sam. v. 6), whose king Adoni-zedek organized a confederacy against Joshua…

Adoni-zedek was defeated at Beth-horon, and he himself was slaughtered at Makkedah (Josh. 10.:1-27); but the Jebusites could not be driven from their mountainous position" (Emil G. Hirsch, M. Seligsohn, Solomon Schechter, Louis Ginzberg, *"The Jebusites;" Jewish Encyclopedia*).

The tribe of Judah eventually captured the lower part of *Jerusalem* and "*struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire* (Judges 1:8). But the smaller tribe of Benjamin did not follow-up by attacking the upper part of the city (Mount Zion) because they lacked the resolve to do so. Instead of annihilating this pagan group as directed by God, the tribe of Benjamin assimilated with the Jebusites for centuries until the time of David. (This verse is a foreshadowing of the tribe of Benjamin's future role in the disastrous final chapters of the Book Of Judges).

Jeremy R. Geerdes,

"*The Jebusites*"

"Thoughts, comments, and random oddities from me for my friends, members of my church family, and anyone else who happens by"

"The people of Judah knew what God had commanded about the inhabitants of the land. And yet, for whatever reason, they decided to allow the Jebusites to remain. And the crazy thing is, they didn't even compel the Jebusites to become their servants or slaves. No, the people of Judah allowed the Jebusites to live there with them.

It's shocking. Appalling. Maybe outrageous. And as I think about it even now, I find myself angered by the entire notion. What were they thinking? And then, all of a sudden, I realize that we do exactly the same thing.

We all have a tendency to press forward with God's plan until we decide we've done enough or, maybe even more often, we run across a friend/temptation/sin that we just have too much fun with. And then we stop.

Of course, when someone confronts us about it and asks why we're allowing that inconsistency in our testimony to remain, we have a great excuse ready to roll: "We couldn't dislodge that from our lives." It sounds well and good, even gives the impression that we tried, and at least on the surface, at least aims to lay the blame for the problem back at God's feet, as though He somehow failed. And yet, when all is said and done, the fact remains that it is we who have allowed that sin to live there with us to this very day.

So, what sin are you allowing to remain a part of your life? And whose fault is it really? Maybe it's time to repent and expel that problem once and for all."

IS YOUR TESTIMONY INCONSISTENT WITH YOUR LIFE?

WHO'S FAULT IS IT?

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DISLODGE FROM YOUR LIFE?

Judges 1:22-*"The house of Joseph also went up against Bethel, and the Lord was with them."*

This "*house of Joseph*" was either "a generic reference to the northern tribes as a whole, in contrast to Judah, or a more limited reference to Ephraim and Manasseh, the tribes descended from Joseph's two sons and whose pivotal achievement was the capture of *Bethel*" (Daniel I Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*). The exact location of ancient *Bethel* is disputed, but believed to be about twelve miles north of *Jerusalem.* It was strategically located on the north-south trade route and was a junction between the Mediterranean seacoast on the west and Jericho on the east.

This verse states that (unlike the tribe of Benjamin in their encounter with the Jebusites of *Jerusalem*), "*The Lord was with*" these tribes who went against *Bethel.* The name *Bethel* means *"house of God"* —the name given by Jacob after God's revelation to him there:

"*Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep.*

And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!

And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring.

Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first." (Gen 28:10-19).

WHAT WAS GOD'S PROMISE TO JACOB?

HOW DID GOD FULFILL THAT PROMISE?

WHAT IS GOD'S PROMISE TO YOU?

HOW HAS GOD FULFILLED THAT PROMISE?

Judges 1:23-26-*"And the house of Joseph scouted 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 way into the city, and we will deal kindly with you." And he showed them the way into the city.*

And they struck the city with the edge of the sword, but they let the man and all his family go. And the man went to the land of the Hittites and built a city and called its name Luz. That is its name to this day."

To capture *Bethel*, "*the house of Joseph*" followed the strategy used at *Jericho* and sent in spies. There they discovered a man willing to show them a way into the city. Like Rahab in *Jericho*, this man and his family were given protection for his information and allowed to leave after they "*struck the city with the edge of the sword."*

"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 simply transferred to a new site. The (*"herem"*) mandate had been betrayed. The new city functions as a sanctioned symbol of the "Canaanite in their midst" (Daniel I Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

HOW WAS ALLOWING THIS HITTITE TO LEAVE A BETRAYAL OF GOD'S HEREM MANDATE?

WHAT WAS THE CONSEQUENCE OF ALLOWING HIM TO LEAVE?

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR CONSEQUENCE OF NOT COMPLETELY OBEYING GOD'S MANDATES?

Judges 1:27-28-*"Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants 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, for the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land. When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not drive them out completely."*

These verses (and the following in this chapter) describe the failure of the Israelite tribes to destroy the pagan inhabitants of their lands. The tribe of Manasseh failed to conquer *Beth-shean, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, and Megiddo*— five important cities within their allotment between the Mediterranean Sea and Jordan River..

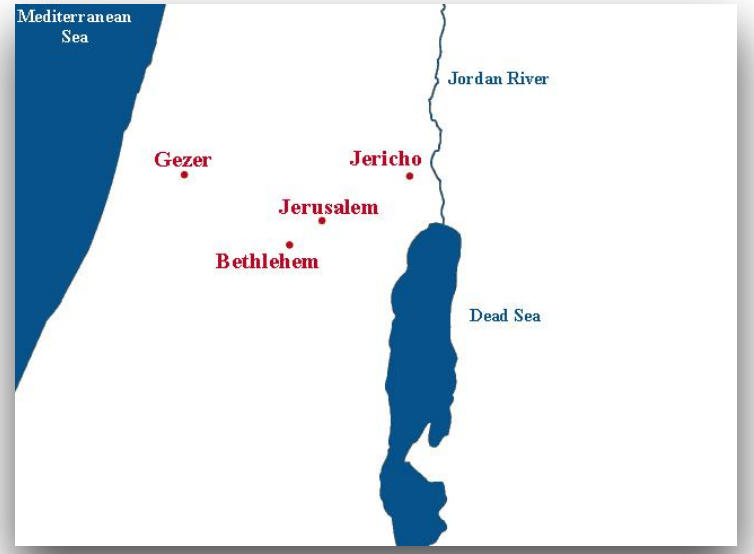
Beth-shean was located at the junction of the Jordan and Jezebel valleys. *Taanach* was five miles southeast of the city of *Megiddo* that controlled the pass to the Jezreel Valley. (The Bible names this valley as the location where the "final battle" or *Armageddon* will take place.). *Dor* was an important coastal town just south of the Carmel ridge. *Ibleam* (location uncertain today but thought to also be known as Khirbet Bel'amed) guarded the eastern-most pass from the Ephraimite highlands into the fertile Valley of Jezreel.

Unlike with the occupation of Bethel, the Lord was <u>not</u> with the tribe of Manasseh and the "*Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land."* Even when they became stronger, the Israelites did not destroy their enemies as directed, but simply "*put the Canaanites to forced labor."* "The determination of the Canaanites to remain in key cities guarding the Jezreel Valley was stronger than the faith of the tribe of Manasseh to displace them" (Walvoord and Zuck, Editors, *"The Bible Knowledge Commentary— Old Testament"*). Because of this disobedience, their eventual assimilation and apostasy was a foregone conclusion.

IS THE LORD WITH YOU NOW? WHY? WHY NOT?

Judges 1:29-*"And Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, so the Canaanites lived in Gezer among them."*

The tribe of Ephraim failed to "*drive out the Canaanites"* from the town of "*Gezer*" and allowed them to assimilate.



Located midway between modern day *Tel Aviv* and *Jerusalem, Gezer* importance was due in part to the strategic position it held at the crossroads of the ancient coastal trade route linking Egypt with Syria, Anatolia (Asia Minor) and Mesopotamia (West Asia situated within the Tigris–Euphrates river system in the northern part of the Fertile Crescent). It was just east of the *Via Maris* that ran from Egypt north along the sea and then east past *Megiddo* and on to *Damascus*. The city also guarded the approach to the foothills and the road through *Jerusalem* to *Jericho*, an important trade route.

Later in Biblical history, many of David's battles with the Philistines were fought around *Gezer* (1 Chronicles 14:16 and 20:4, and 2 Samuel 5:25). Gezer was eventually destroyed by an Egyptian pharaoh (1 Kings 9:16) and the city was then given to pharaoh's daughter as a dowry when she married Solomon. *Gezer* again became an Israelite city and Solomon used forced labor to rebuild it (1 Kings 9:15–17). Today is it merely an excavation Tel.

WHY/ HOW DO CITIES RISE AND FALL?

WHY/ HOW DO COUNTRIES RISE AND FALL?

WHY/ HOW HAS OUR COUNTRY RISEN AND BEGUN TO FALL?

Judges 1:30-31-*"Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol, so the Canaanites lived among them, but became subject to forced labor.*

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."

The tribe of "*Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants"* of its land. Instead of following God's *herem* edict they "*lived among*" the inhabitants of *Kitron* and *Nahhalol*— only making them *"subject to forced labor.*"

The location of the two towns mentioned are unknown today. No current Tel exists to excavate— perhaps an appropriate reward for Zebulun's disobedience.

The tribe of Asher, located along the Mediterranean Sea, was also negligent in its duty to destroy the pagan enemies within its allotted land. Seven cities are listed— *Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik,* and *Rehob.* They didn't even coerce the inhabitants of these cities into forced labor— instead, *"the Asherites lived among the Canaanites."*

Sidon was a major Phoenician city that competed with Tyre to the south for economic superiority for centuries. They were never brought under Israelite control. The pagan Canaanites were the default population with whom the Asherites assimilated.

"The cities of Tyre and Sidon led a strong Canaanite culture with its vigorous Baal worship. The culture and religion had a strong influence on Israel, especially during the reigns of Solomon and Ahab" (Barker and Kohlenberger, Editors, *"Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary— Old Testament"*).

WHAT/ WHO WAS BAAL?

WHAT/ WHO ARE ALL THOSE 'gods' IN THE BIBLE?

HOW DO YOU KNOW THE ONE TRUE GOD IS TRUE?

Judges 1:33-*"Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anath, so they lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became subject to forced labor for them."*

The tribe of Naphtali failed to "*drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anat"* within their allotted land. "*Beth-shemesh"* meant "House of the Sun God" and "*Beth-anath*" meant "House of Anath"— a prominent female goddess of war who was the consort and sister of Baal.

Obviously the Canaanite pagan influence in these cities was substantial and the Nephtalites would eventually succumb to its influence despite subjecting its inhabitants to forced labor.

You can suppress people, but it is often quite difficult to suppress their culture or religion. Cultural and religious suppression refers to the systematic effort to undermine or eliminate the cultural practices, beliefs, and identities of a group, particularly in the context of colonization and imperialism. It can be carried out through laws, policies, societal pressure, or direct violence.

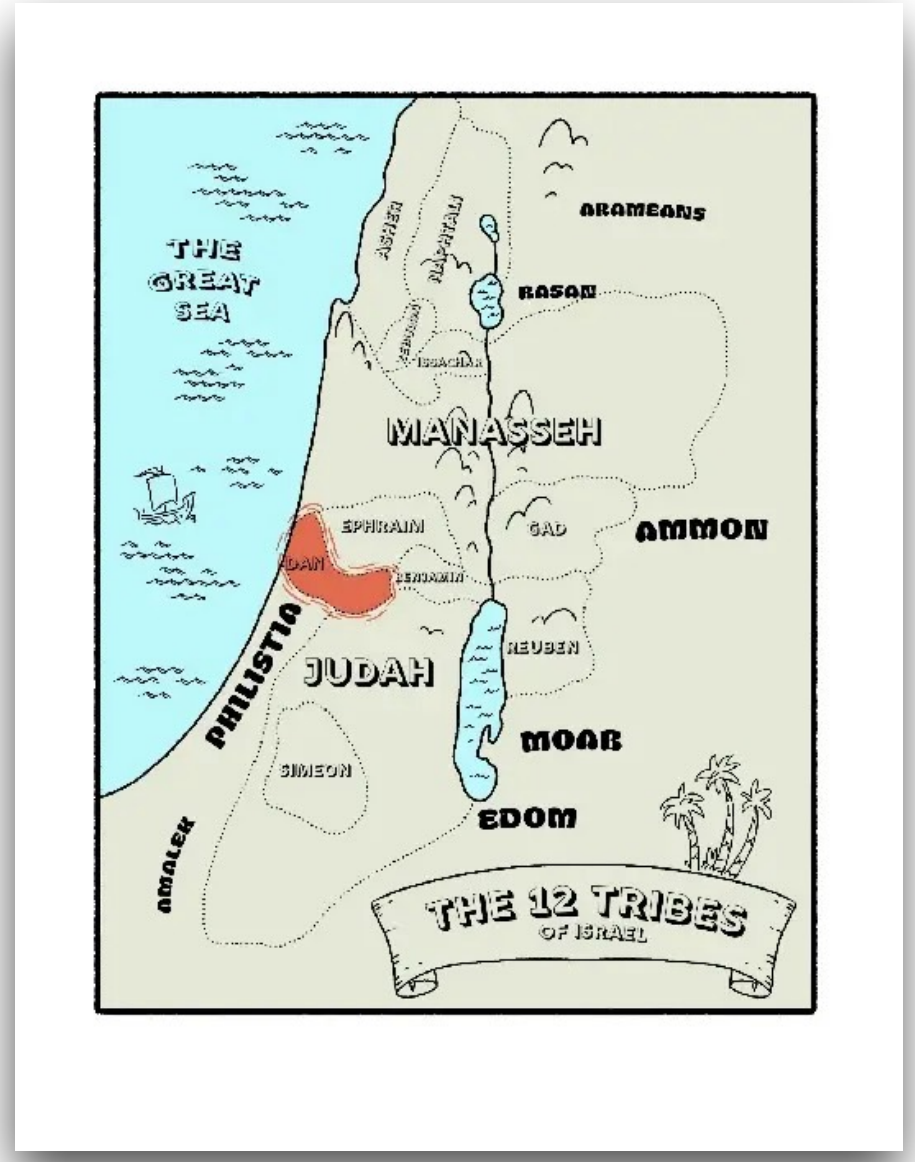
Christianity has been under suppression for thousands of years. Statistically, one in seven Christians are persecuted worldwide. Yet under pressure, the global church continues to show astonishing strength and growth. False 'gods' and false religions may try, but they will never conquer the one true God— the gospel of Jesus Christ will reign forever.

WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED TODAY?

HOW ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED TODAY?

HAVE YOU BEEN PERSECUTED FOR YOUR FAITH? WHY? HOW?

Judges 1:34-36-*"The Amorites pressed the people of Dan back into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the plain. The Amorites persisted in dwelling in Mount Heres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim, but the hand of the house of Joseph rested heavily on them, and they became subject to forced labor. And the border of the Amorites ran from the ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela and upward."*



Positioned geographically between the tribes of Judah and Ephraim, the tribe of Dan originally occupied a small strip of land along the Aijalon Valley from the Mediterranean Sea to the Judean hills west of Jerusalem. "*Mount Heres"* was twelve miles west-northwest of Jerusalem— it guarded an important trade route. "*Aijalon*" and "*Shaalbim*" were just a few miles away.

The Amorites would not relinquish control of the land and confined the Danites to the hill country— not allowing them to come down into the fertile plain.

Here the term "Amorite" could refer either to this distinct pagan group or used like the term "Canaanite" to generically reference the former inhabitants of the Promised Land as a whole. Regardless, the tribe of Dan did not follow God's *herem* edict and didn't take full possession of the land.

The "*house of Joseph"* (the tribe of Ephraim) eventually claimed much of the territory of the weakened tribe of Dan and subjected many of the Amorites to forced labor. But God didn't ask them to take captives or slaves. He told the Israelites to drive the Amorites out of the land of Israel completely. This was never accomplished and the Amorites became wealthy because Israel was not in charge of trade in their own lands. The Amorite influences would became a severe blow to the nation of Israel and the tribe of Dan would eventually have to move northward of the Sea of Galilee.

The remaining border of the Amorites "*ran from the ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela and upward." Akrabbim* (meaning "*scorpions*") was the name given to the ridge containing the pass between the south Dead Sea and *Zin*. *Sela* and *Zin* were in the extreme south of Judah. Scorpions are said to abound in this whole district, and hence the name (Num. 34:4).

The fate of the tribe of Dan marked the end of the first chapter of the Book of Judges. What started on a positive note with the tribes of Judah and Simeon (though not without its troubles) degraded throughout the book. Tribe after tribe failed to keep God's *herem* edict and the tribe of Dan would even eventually be forced to move northward. This chapter was just a preliminary glimpse of Israel's disobedience to come.

WHAT WAS THE LESSON FROM THIS FIRST CHAPTER OF THE BOOK OF JUDGES?

HOW DOES IT APPLY TO YOUR LIFE TODAY?

HAS YOUR DISOBEDIENCE GOTTEN IN THE WAY OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

CHAPTER TWO

Judges 2:1-*"Now the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, "I will never break my covenant with you,"*

Sometimes the term "*angel of the Lord*" is an actual angel ("*mal'ak*" or "*messenger*") from God; but here it is God Himself speaking. It was God who brought the Israelites out of Egypt and it was God who had sworn to their forefathers that He would give them this land. It is often concluded by scholars that this "*angel of the Lord*" ("*mal'ak YHWH"*) is the *Old Testament* pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. Throughout the *Old Testament* we sometimes see two *Yahwehs* — one invisible in the spiritual realm ("the heavens") and another brought forth to interact with humanity on earth— Jesus.

"*Gilgal,*" located on the eastern border of *Jericho*, was where the Israelites first camped after crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Their they were circumcised, erected a memorial of twelve stones, and celebrated the Passover. It became the base camp from which Joshua went out on his campaigns.

Many years and and battles later, Joshua re-gathered the tribes of Israel at nearby "*Bochim*" prior to sending them permanently to their individual allotted lands to finish the conquest. "*Bochum*" is literally translated as "*weepers"* (or place of *"weepers"*) and was named by the Israelites after their "weeping" before the Lord for their disobedience to God's covenant (vs 4-5).

There are two types of covenants (*"b'rit"*— pacts between individuals)— one of "*parity*" (equality) and one of inequality called a "*suzerainty*" treaty. The latter treaty is imposed by a superior king upon an inferior and it is this (suzerainty) covenant that God would never break with the people of Israel. He pledged to be the *Suzerain* (king) over Israel while Israel in turn was to be His vassal and be faithful to the covenant bond. Here (and elsewhere) it is always referred to as as Yahweh's covenant— never Israel's. God would keep His word to give them their land even if Israel would not hold up their end of the bargain.

WHAT IS AN EXAMPLE OF A MODERN DAY "SUZERAINTY" CONTRACT?

HAVE YOU ENTERED INTO UNEQUAL CONTRACTS?

WHAT IS GOD'S CURRENT CONTRACT WITH YOU?

Judges 2:2-*"and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars. But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done?"*

God reminded the people of Israel that He had given them two very specific instructions— (1) "*make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land"* (Ex 23:20-33; 34:11-15) and (2) "*break down their altars"* (Deut 7:1-5; 12:1-3). Seems simple enough, but (as seen in the previous chapter) the tribes had disobeyed both injunctions upon entering their allotted lands. God then asked rhetorically, "*What is this you have done?*"

A rhetorical questions is asked for effect, rather than from a desire to know the answer. God didn't need an answer His question— He'd already predicted their actions to Moses many years before.

Deut 31:16-*"And the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers. Then this people will rise and whore after the foreign gods among them in the land that they are entering, and they will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them."*

God wanted the people of Israel to search their souls as to why they had failed Him so miserably. What in their hearts and minds would make them think there would be no consequences for their actions? What led them to their sin? The answer is quite simple— the same mindset that leads us to our own.

James 1:13-15-*"Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."*

James succinctly explained the steps of sin:

(1) "*God cannot be tempted with evil, and He himself tempts no one"*

James first emphatically states that God tempts no-one. The Greek word used here for "*tempted*" is "*peirasmos*" meaning a <u>direct evil impulse</u>. From the beginning of time, it has been human instinct to blame others for our own sins.

Gen 3:12-13-"*The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*

God doesn't wish evil on people; nor does He cause evil. However, God does sometimes "*test*" us in order to strengthen our faith. For a test to be an effective tool for growth, it must be capable of being failed. God proves His love by protecting us "<u>in</u>" temptation instead of "<u>from</u>" temptation.

1 Cor 10:13-*"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*

(2) "Desires"

We have two enemies—the world and the "ruler" of this world—the devil. Satan, the origin of sin and temptation, often uses our "*desires"* to serve his purpose. Though we are certainly tainted with our own "evil" desires, sometimes Satan uses our "natural" desires (such as hunger, thirst, and sex) as a starting point of temptation.

(3) "*Lured and enticed*"

Once our desire is identified, Satan…

(a) Offers suggestions from our own environment and experiences that seem at first glance harmless, but eventually lead to evil

(b) Deceives us with false advertising by presenting such things as fame, sex, wealth, and power as being ultimately satisfying

(c) Singles out our fear and makes us feel as though we are struggling alone

(4) "*Desire when it has conceived"*

Desire grows within us until consummated and gains the consent of the will

(5) *"Gives birth to to sin*"

"At first temptation is a mere thought confronting the mind; then imagination paints it in stronger colors; only after that do we take pleasure in it, and the will makes a false move and we give our assent" (Thomas Kempis, Dutch Theologian, c. 1380 – 1471).

(6) "*Sin when it is fully grown"*

Sin matures until it becomes a fixed habit

(7) "Brings forth death"

Sin ultimately leads to spiritual death— separation from God

Rom 6: 23- "*For the wages of sin is death, but the free will of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"*

WHO DO YOU BLAME FOR YOUR OWN INADEQUACIES?

WHAT LURES AND ENTICES YOU AWAY FROM GOD?

HOW DO YOU PREVENT SIN FROM BEING CONCEIVED?

Judges 2:3-*"So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you."*

The only thing keeping the Israelites on the path to victory was God's leadership. He was the driver of the tractor who cleared the lands before them. He destroyed the thorns and thistles of their enemies' '*gods*.' Without the one true God, the Canaanite 'gods' would "*snare*" the Israelites into apostasy. *Yahweh* would let the Canaanites and their false 'gods' have their way with the people of Israel for a time. It wasn't as though the Israelites hadn't been warned!

Joshua 23:11-13-*"Be very careful, therefore, to love the Lord your God. For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the Lord your God has given you."*

*"*When a warning is found anywhere in life, the obvious and wise thing to do is to take heed and to pay close attention to it. But sadly when it comes to biblical warnings, many Christians either ignore them, or actually seek to explain them away… We think we can do better than God, so we start removing all these warnings, thinking they don't apply to us or are no longer relevant. But that is a recipe for disaster…

As G.K. Chesterton said long ago, "Don't ever take a fence down until you know the reason it was put up." (Culture Watch, "*Whatever Happen To Warnings*?").

DO YOU HEED GOD'S WARNINGS? WHY? WHY NOT?

DO YOU BELIEVE GOD'S WARNINGS DON'T APPLY TO YOU OR ARE NO LONGER RELEVANT?

DO YOU EVER TAKE THE FENCE DOWN WITHOUT KNOWING WHY IT WAS PUT THERE IN THE FIRST PLACE?

Judges 2:4-5-*"As soon as the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim. And they sacrificed there to the Lord."*

When the Israelites heard the words of the angel of the Lord, they immediately "*lifted up their voices and wept."* "The people of Israel responded appropriately at the moment with great lamentation. But is the lamentation caused by sorrow for sin or to the announcement of punishment and of God's backing away from fulfilling promises for a disobedient people? Did they expect to hold God to His promises when they had not kept theirs?" (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary— Judges"*).

"The weeping of the Israelites left little more than the place name (*Bokem*— "*weeping*") for it apparently did not express true repentance since the people did not turn permanently from their disobedience. The sacrifices offered to the Lord at *Bokim* seem to have been only an external ritual rather than an expression of true faith" (Walvoord and Zuck, Editors, *"The Bible Knowledge Commentary— Old Testament"*).

"When we're talking about repentance and sorrow, the Apostle Paul describes and distinguishes between mere '*sorrow'* and genuine '*repentance…'*

2 Cor 7:9-11-*"As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death."*

And so in writing to the Corinthian church, he said that he was glad that he had brought them to sorrow—(but) not as an end. In other words, he says that he wasn't rejoicing that he made them sorrowful by itself, but that they were made sorrowful to the point of repentance. And the idea here is this, is that you can have sorrow, but it's a sorrow that is shallow, it is a sorrow that regrets any kind of change. It is a sorrow that still clings to sin while still feeling in some sense grief for the sin" (Michael Beasley, "*Is Sorrow for Sin and Repentance the Same Thing*?").

ARE YOU SORROWFUL WHEN YOU SIN?

ARE YOU REPENTANT WHEN YOU SIN?

HOW HAS GODLY GRIEF LED TO REPENTANCE IN YOUR LIFE?

Judges 2:6-7-*"When Joshua dismissed the people, the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land. And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the Lord had done for Israel."*

After Joshua had "*dismissed the people, the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land*" and "*served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua.*" They had witnessed firsthand *"all the great work that the Lord had done for Israel.*"

The idiom, "*seeing is believing*" means when something is witnessed, the truth of its occurrence or existence can no longer be doubted. But Biblically, "seeing" is often <u>not</u> "believing," whereas "believing" <u>is</u> always "seeing." Jesus performed many miracles, but not everyone who witnessed them became believers. But all who did believe in Him had their eyes opened to the great gift He was offering.

Today, even those who have never seen Jesus (or, for that matter, heard His name spoken) have been given the opportunity to "see" Him through the work of God the Father. They are without excuse.

Rom 1:20-*"For His invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been <u>clearly perceived</u>, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. <u>So they are without excuse</u>."*

John 12:44-45-*"And Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him <u>who sent me</u>. <u>And whoever sees me sees him who sent me</u>."*

John 10:30-*"<u>I and the Father are one</u>."*

HOW IS SEEING BELIEVING?

HOW IS BELIEVING SEEING?

DID YOU SEE AND BELIEVE OR BELIEVE AND SEE?

Judges 2:8-9-*"And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110 years. And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash."*

This is an almost word for word repetition of the account of Joshua's death found in the Book of Joshua:

Josh 24:28-30-*" After these things Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being 110 years old. And they buried him in his own inheritance at Timnath-serah, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash."*

After approximately thirty years of leading the people in battles throughout the Promised Land, Joshua died at the age of 110 years. He was buried at *Timnath-serah*, which is in the hill country of his home tribe of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash (exact location unknown today, but thought to be at Khirbet Tibnah in the West Bank about 18 miles north of Jerusalem). In contrast to Moses, Joshua died without appointing a successor— thus setting set the stage for the period of Judges.

Adam lived to be 930 years old— Noah 950 years. Abraham lived 175 years and Jacob 147. Moses lived to the ripe old age of 120 years, while Joshua spent 110 years on this earth.

The average life expectancy in the United States is currently 77.5 years. On the positive side, men who reach age 65 can expect to live another 17 years (whereas 65 year old women live on average another 19.7 years). What we do with our remaining years depends entirely on us! Choose wisely!

HOW OLD ARE YOU?

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH YOUR LIFE SO FAR?

WHAT DO YOU PLAN TO DO WITH THE REST OF YOUR LIFE?

Judges 2:10-11-*"And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel."*

After the generation who knew Joshua died, a new generation came along who "*did not know the Lord or the work that He had done for Israel."* Their parents failed in their duty to pass on their knowledge of the Lord to their children. They failed to have discussions about God in their homes and on their walks. They failed to acknowledge God when they awaken their children in the mornings or put them to bed in the evenings. They failed to display their love of God, not just on the doorposts of their homes, but throughout their cities. It was a generational failure (like our own) that would have dire consequences.

Deut 6:4-9-*"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. <u>You shall teach them diligently to your children</u>, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."*

These verses of Deuteronomy are a known as the "***Shema***" (*Hebrew* meaning "*to listen*") and are today recited twice a day by orthodox Jews. It reminds parents to:

(1) **Listen** to God

(2) **Love** God

(3) **Remember** God

(4) **Teach** about God

(5) **Talk** about God

(6) **Write** about God

Our faith is best passed on to our children by leading an authentic, faithful life to God— leading by example. These six steps outlined in the "*Shema*" sound like good advice. What do you think?

HOW ARE YOU PASSING GOD ALONG TO YOUR CHILDREN?

HOW CAN YOU USE THE "SHEMA" TO PASS GOD ON TO YOUR CHILDREN?

HAVE YOU BEEN A GOOD OR BAD EXAMPLE TO YOUR CHILDREN? HOW? WHY?

Judges 2:11-13-*"And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the Lord to anger. They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth."*

These verses and those that follow in this chapter summarize the downward spiraling cycles of idolatry, punishment, deliverance, semi-repentance, and disobedience to be seen throughout the book of Judges. The phrase "*the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord"* is repeated throughout the book of Judges to express the Israelites' apostasy. They didn't just abandon *Yahweh*, they fully committed themselves to the Canaanites' false 'gods'— the *"Baals"* and the *Ashtaroth.*"

"*Baal* occurs as a divine title ("*divine lord, master*") more than seventy times in the Old Testament. It usually refers to the storm/weather 'god',' who in the Canaanite mythological literature goes by the name "*Hadad*" and several other titles… In Canaanite mythology "*Baal"* was one of seventy offspring of "*El*" and "*Asherah*" ('goddess' of love and war)...

When the pleural form "*ba'alim*" (*"Baals"*) occurs, the reference is not to a multiplicity of 'gods,' but to the numerous manifestations of the one weather 'god,' on whose blessing the fertility of the land was thought to depend" (Daniel I Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

Baal

Asherah

What is "*evil in the site of the Lord"* today? John Piper gives his simple definition:

"The core essence of evil is preferring anything more than God…

Evil is always defined in the Bible with reference to willing in regard to God. God is the supreme value in the universe, and therefore, evil is defined with reference to this ultimate reality, ultimate value, ultimate treasure. Failing to value the ultimately valuable appropriately is evil. That is what evil is" (John Piper, *Ask Pastor John, "What Is Evil"*?).

Evil makes God *angry.* "In the Bible God gets angry at human violence. He gets angry at powerful leaders who oppress other humans. And the thing that makes God more angry than anything else in the Bible is Israel's constant covenant betrayal…

All of these examples have something in common: they are all expressions of God's anger at humanity's idolatry. Humans don't take seriously the fact that we are made in the image of God. Rather, we elevate power, wealth, sex, and lots of other things to the status of a god. And then, in the name of our deified ideals and idols, we create communities and institutions that neglect, marginalize, and even destroy other people made in God's image…

And all this fallout and pain caused by human idolatry makes God angry, and rightfully so. There are some things that are worth getting angry about." (The Bible Project Team, *"Is the God of the Bible an Angry God?"*).

WHAT MAKES YOU ANGRY?

WHAT MAKES GOD ANGRY"

HOW HAVE YOU ANGERED GOD LATELY? HOW? WHY?

Judges 2:14-15-*"So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them for harm, as the Lord had warned, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress."*

"*The anger of the Lord was kindled.*" He was (and is) a jealous ("passionate") God—He could not allow the Israelites' adulterous affairs with other 'gods' go unpunished. "*He gave them over to plunderers"* and *"sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies." Yahweh* had both "*warned*" and "*sworn*" to them this would occur; but the people had ignored Him.

God didn't cause their pain directly, He simply withdrew His support and gave them over to their enemies — a righteous punishment. He no longer marched before them against their enemies for a time and allowed them to experience the "*terrible distress*" caused by their own actions.

God is not evil. He's the anthesis of evil. God is the definition of goodness. But sometimes God uses the bad things of this world to bring about His good. He uses it to guide His naughty children back to Him. When things are going really, really well, we tend to forget about God and slip off the tracks. God never abandons His people; but He does discipline us from time to time.

ARE YOU IN DISTRESS? HOW? WHY?

HAVE YOU CONTRIBUTED TO YOUR OWN DISTRESS THROUGH DISOBEDIENCE? HOW? WHY?

WHAT IS GOD TRYING TO TEACH YOU?

Judges 2:16-*"Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them."*

In this very next verse after God allowed the disobedient Israelites to experience "*terrible distress,*" the writer of the book of Judges states, "*then the Lord raised up judges"* to save them. These "*judges*" were not adjudicators of justice, but rather a series of anti-hero tribal "*deliverers"* who saved the Israelites from the oppression of foreign invaders "*who plundered them.*"

"An '*anti-hero*' is a main character in a narrative who may lack some conventional heroic qualities and attributes, such as idealism and morality. Although anti-heroes may sometimes perform actions that most consider morally correct, their reasons for doing so may not align with the audience's morality'" (*"Wikipedia"*). An anti-hero is a protagonist who lacks the the strong morals, courage, or selflessness that we associate with heroes. These "judges" were not spiritual leaders, but rather "deliverers" from physical oppression.

"The book of Judges is not about judges, at least not in the way we commonly understand the English term… The *Hebrew* word "*spt*" has a broader semantic range than does the English term "*judge.*" The Hebrew can also mean "*leader*" or "*deliverer*"… The type of leadership that the judges provided was

unique in the ancient Near East. They were charismatic figures, divinely raised up in times of crisis from outside traditional power circles to meet a specific threat, namely enemy oppression… It was a non-dynastic leadership" (C. A. Brown, *"Judges,"— "Joshua, Judges, Ruth"*).

WHAT IS AN "ANTI-HERO?"

HOW DO ANTI-HEROS SOMETIMES DO GOOD THINGS FOR THE WRONG REASONS?

HOW DO YOU SOMETIMES DO GOOD THINGS FOR THE WRONG REASONS?

Judges 2:17-*"Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the Lord, and they did not do so."*

Instead of fully repenting when God gave the people one "*judge"* after another to deliver them from their enemies, the Israelites repeatedly "*whored after other gods and bowed down to them."* They refused to follow the lead of their fathers. Instead of obeying the commandments of the Lord, they chose to prostitute themselves in the red-light districts of false 'gods.' They broke their "marriage" covenant with the one true God and "*bowed down"* in the beds of false 'gods.'

"The imagery and symbolism of marriage is applied to Christ and the body of believers known as the church. The church is comprised of those who have trusted in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and have received eternal life. Christ, the Bridegroom, has sacrificially and lovingly chosen the church to be His bride (Eph 5:25–27)…

Just as there was a betrothal period in biblical times during which the bride and groom were separated until the wedding, so is the bride of Christ separate from her Bridegroom during the church age. Her responsibility during the betrothal period is to be faithful to Him (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:24). At the rapture, the church will be united with the Bridegroom and the official "wedding ceremony" will take place and, with it, the eternal union of Christ and His bride will be actualized (Rev 19:7–9; 21:1-2)...

Believers in Jesus Christ are the bride of Christ, and we wait with great anticipation for the day when we will be united with our Bridegroom. Until then, we remain faithful to Him and say with all the redeemed of the Lord, "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20) (*Gotquestions.org— "What Does It Mean That The Church is The Bride Of Christ?"*).

WHAT IS A MARRIAGE VOW?

WHAT IS THE "MARRIAGE" VOW OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH?

HOW DO YOU AVOID WHORING IN THE "RED LIGHT DISTRICTS" OF FALSE 'gods?'

Judges 2-18-19-*"Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them. But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways."*

God had promised the Israelites He would never totally abandon them and "*was moved to pity by their groaning."* However, since their "*groaning*" was merely due to their "*affliction"* and "*oppression"* (and not out of a sense of true repentance), God's mercy lasted only as long as the judge who "*the Lord raised up for them*" was in power. "*Whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them."*

"The rulers raised by God represented stop-gap measures in an apparently irresistible, irreversible, and inevitable process of Canaanization. Instead of effecting fundamental repairs on this deteriorating dike, they plugged the holes with their fingers. As soon as the finger was removed, the water gushed through with increasing force" (Daniel I Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

DO YOU GROAN FOR YOUR SINS OR ONLY FOR THE CONSEQUENCE OF YOUR SINS?

HAVE YOU EVER TRIED TO PLUG HOLES OF GUSHING SIN WITH ONLY YOUR FINGERS?

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN YOU REMOVED YOUR FINGER?

Judges 2:20a- ***"So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel"***

God's anger resulted from His grief over the Israelites' moral lapses. But there is a vast difference between the anger of God and the anger of man. God's righteous anger is not an emotional response of indignation or irritation. God's wrath is just. God's wrath is His loving response to sin and disobedience that He can withdraw after repentance of the sinner. While human anger is often fueled by personal motivation and revenge, God's anger is always justified and aimed at restoring justice— His wrath arises from His holiness, righteousness, and love for His creation.

	God's Righteous Anger	**Man's Unrighteous Anger**
The Cause:	Against what angers God	Against what frustrates us
The Speed:	Slow	Quick
The Goal:	Restoration	Destruction
The Expression:	Confront, admonish, warn…	Condemn, accuse, threaten…
The End:	Satisfied in or by Jesus	Consumes us

Table from Eric Geiger— *"God's Righteous Anger vs. Man's Unrighteous Anger"*

"The words 'anger' and 'wrath' make us think about our own experience of these things. Human anger can often be unpredictable, petty, and disproportionate. These things are not true of the anger of God. God's wrath is the just and measured response of His holiness towards evil"(Colin Smith, *Open the Bible, "Five Ways God's Anger Is Not Like Ours"*).

The wrath of God is fearsome and terrifying— but it need not worry Christians who have been redeemed by belief in His Son.

Romans 5:9-*"Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God."*

DO YOU GET ANGRY? WHY?

DOES GOD GET ANGRY? WHY?

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YOUR ANGER AND GOD'S ANGER?

Judges 2:20b-22-"*and He said, "Because this people have transgressed my covenant that I commanded their fathers and have not obeyed My voice, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, in order to test Israel by them, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the Lord as their fathers did, or not."*

God led Joshua to conquer thirty-one kings throughout the Promised Land (Joshua 12:7-21). But because this generation (and many afterward) disobeyed His voice and transgressed His covenant, He would "*no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died."* God hid His face to "*test*" them. Would "*they take care to walk in the way of the Lord as their fathers did, or not?"* Unfortunately, the book of Judges chronicles one failure after another.

"Testing in the Bible is a process or circumstance in which individuals are subject to challenges, difficulties, or temptations that assess and refine their faith, character, and obedience to God. It is a means by which God can strengthen and purify the hearts of His people…

God's intention behind these tests is not to cause harm but to help purify and strengthen our character, offering solace during challenging times. It's important to remember that these tests are not arbitrary hurdles meant to disrupt our journey. Instead, they are meticulously crafted aspects of God's grand design, aiming to guide us closer to embodying Christ's virtues…

The trials that once seemed like stumbling blocks can become stepping stones in our spiritual journey. " (Lance Ingram-*"The Refinement Process: How God Tests And Grows Us"*).

WHAT IS A TEST?

WHY/ HOW DOES GOD TEST US?

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM GOD'S TESTS?

Judges 2:23-*"So the Lord left those nations, not driving them out quickly, and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua."*

God told the people what He would do if they disobeyed His covenant and He followed through with His promise. As outlined in the remainder of the book, God allowed the remaining pagan nations to be thorns in the Israelites backsides for the better part of three centuries. "*The Lord left those nations, not driving them out quickly."*

God always keeps His promises— even if we don't. He wouldn't be God if He didn't.

2 Tim 2:13-*"If we are faithless, He remains faithful—for <u>He cannot deny himself.</u>"*

God's faithfulness is a solemn obligation of His nature and character. He's bound by what He is— perfection. He cannot act contrary to His word. He always keeps His promises.

WHY CAN'T GOD DENY HIMSELF?

WHY DOES GOD KEEP HIS PROMISES?

WHY DO YOU KEEP YOUR PROMISES?

WHAT PROMISES HAS GOD MADE TO YOU?

CHAPTER THREE

Judges 3:1-2-*"Now these are the nations that the Lord left, to test Israel by them, that is, all in Israel who had not experienced all the wars in Canaan. It was only in order that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, to teach war to those who had not known it before."*

The previous chapter ended with, *"So the Lord left those nations, not driving them out quickly, and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua"* (Judges 2:23). This chapter lists those nations who would *"test"* the Israelites' faithfulness to the one true God. The generations after the time of Joshua had become soft—they did not "*know war*" as their ancestors had "*experienced all the wars in Canaan.*" War would be a painful but necessary lesson.

John Stuart Mill (19th century British philosopher, economist, and member of Parliament) once said,

> "War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things: the decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks nothing worth a war, is worse. . . .
>
> A man who has nothing which he is willing to fight for, nothing which he cares more about than he does about his personal safety, is a miserable creature who has no chance of being free, unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself."

"War is a terrible thing. Some wars are more 'just' than others, but war is always the result of sin (Rom 3:10-18). At the same time, Ecclesiastes 3:8 declares, "There is…a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace…"

In a world filled with sin, hatred, and evil (Rom 3:10-18), war is inevitable. Christians should not desire war, but neither are Christians to oppose the government God has placed in authority over them (Rom 13:1-4; 1 Peter 2:17)…

The most important thing we can be doing in a time of war is to be praying for godly wisdom for our leaders, praying for the safety of our military, praying for quick resolution to conflicts, and praying for a minimum of casualties among civilians on both sides (Phil 4:6-7) (*Got Questions.org—"What Does The Bible Say About War?"*).

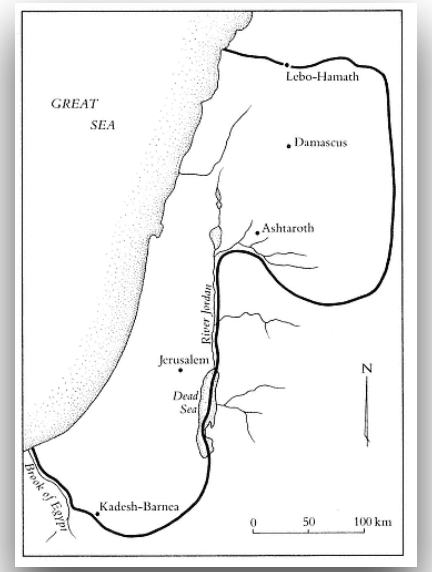
WHAT IS WAR?

WHY IS WAR SOMETIMES INEVITABLE IN THIS WORLD?

HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS APPROACH WAR?

Judges 3:3-*"These are the nations: the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived on Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath. They were for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the Lord, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.*

Though not an all inclusive list, these areas represented the geographical remnants that remained to be conquered by the Israelites. The four nations represent the entire land of Canaan— north, south, east and west "*They were for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the Lord."* It was a test they would fail— many of their enemies are still seen today!



HOW MANY TESTS HAVE YOU FAILED?

WHY DID YOU FAIL?

WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM YOUR FAILURE?

Judges 3:5-7-*"So the people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites" "And their daughters they took to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons, and they served their gods.*

And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth.

The Israelites didn't just fail their test, they failed miserably! They assimilated into the surrounding pagan cultures, intermarried, and *"served their gods."* The people of Israel ***"did what was evil in the sight of the Lord"***— a phrase repeated eight times in the book of Judges. The Israelites "*forgot the Lord their God*" and broke His cardinal rule, "*You shall have no other gods before Me"* (Exodus 20:3).

"In these verses, the narrator announced the theme of the book: the Canaanization of Israelite society. Territorial accommodation resulted in ethnic integration, which yielded spiritual integration. In the mind of the author, the newcomers, who entered the land as a distinct people, vassals of *Yahweh*, sold out…

The subsequent narratives must all be interpreted in this light. Israel failed; she rightfully stood under judgement of God…

When the narrator begins to recount the sociopolitical crises the nation experiences, the reader should not feel sorry for this people. They had it coming, and more" (Daniel I Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

God doesn't just see our actions, but also our motivations— His vision penetrates our souls. Doing "evil" before His eyes is an affront to His supremacy. He is ruler of heaven and earth. When we act out or even just contemplate our evil desires, His righteousness is challenged and must be rebuffed. Would you watch your child cross a line in the sand you forbade him to step over without consequences? I hope not.

Prov 15:3-*"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good."*

WHAT IS THE RESULT OF SPIRITUAL ASSIMILATION?

HAVE YOU TRIED TO HIDE YOUR EVIL FROM GOD

WHAT DOES GOD SEE?

Judges 3:8-9*"Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia. And the people of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years.*

But when the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel, who saved them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother."

This chronicles the first of many cycles of apostasy, enslavement, groaning, deliverance, and repeat idolatry—each cycle spiraling downward, one "*judge*" after another.

Biblical scholars have not reached a consensus as to the identity of "*Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia."* He apparently was from the area of the "*two rivers*" (*Tigris* and *Euphrates*). "*Rishathaim*" (Heb— "*Aram-naharaim"*) means "*Aram of the two rivers.*" "Aram was the the name of a group of kindred tribes scattered over portions of Syria, Mesopotamia, and Arabia" (Jastrow, Jr., Barton, Jastrow, and

Ginzberg—*Jewish Encyclopedia—"Aram"*). The ancient region of "*Mesopotamia"* included current day Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran.

Because of the Israelites' apostasy, "*the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia."* "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" (Daniel I Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

*"*He was the first oppressor of Israel in the period of the Judges. Israel was subject to Cushan-rishathaim, the king of Aram-Naharaim, for eight years, before being rescued by the first 'judge,' Othniel— son of Kenaz" (*Jewish Virtual Library*).

How many times have you been rescued by others when you've made mistakes? How often have your Christian brothers and sister kept you from engaging in errant actions that anger the Lord? If you're like me, too many times to count. Perhaps it's time to write a few "thank you" notes. You can start with one to Jesus— the ultimate deliverer of your transgressions.

WHAT IS A DELIVERER?

HOW MANY YEARS WERE YOU "ENSLAVED" BY THE WORLD BEFORE BEING DELIVERED?

WHO "DELIVERED" YOU TO JESUS?

Judges 3:10-11-*"The Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the Lord gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand. And his hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. So the land had rest forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died."*

"The identity of the deliverer (Othneil) is dependent on earlier information (1:11-15). Obviously the narrator's intention here is not to enable the reader to reconstruct in his/her mind the historical events. This brief account functions as a paradigmatic model against which the rest must be interpreted…

Similarly, Othniel is presented as a paradigmatic leader. Many have noted that the entire narrative writes nothing negative about this man. This is intentional. The prologue has prepared the reader to expect a progressive degeneration in the moral and spiritual fiber of the nation. As the embodiment of the people, the leaders whom *Yahweh* raises in the nation's defense exhibit the same pattern" (Daniel I Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

Othneil had proven himself in battle years before when he led the tribe of Judah against the inhabitants of *Debir* after Caleb offered his daughter in marriage for a successful outcome (Judges 1:11-13). Many years of idolatry and assimilation later, the Israelites now found themselves enslaved by the first of many foreign invaders due to their transgressions.

But, after eight long years of oppression, *"the Spirit of the Lord was upon*" Othneil and he went to war again— this time as the first "*judge*" (deliverer) of Israel. "*The Lord gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand"* and "*the land had rest forty years."* Note that it is the *"land,"* and not necessarily the people, that enjoyed the "*rest.*"

Unfortunately, as God raised up one "*judge*" after another, the peace would last only as long as the *"judge*" lived. The Israelites groaning was just that— groaning over their oppression and not due to true repentance. Their periods of respite were repeatedly interrupted by their own sins.

WHAT IS SIN?

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN ENSLAVED BY SIN? HOW? WHY?

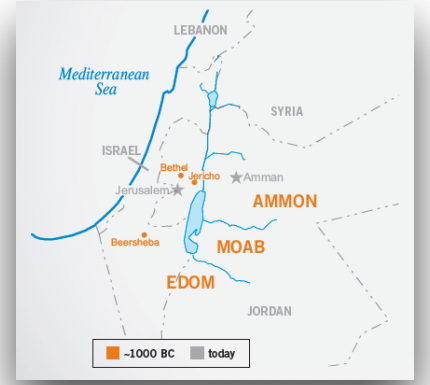
HOW DID THOSE PERIODS OF SIN INTERRUPT YOUR PEACE?

Judges 3:12-*"And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the Lord."*

Once again, *"**the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord**, and the Lord strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel."* The Moabites were a tribe of people who descended from **Moab**, one of the sons of Lot, the nephew of Abraham (Gen 19:37).

After Lot and his two daughters escaped the divine destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, they took refuge in nearby mountains.

Discouraged by the death of their future husbands in the destruction, Lot's oldest daughter convinced Lot's younger daughter to get their father drunk and join her in an incestuous relationship with him to preserve the family lineage.



The son of the oldest daughter was named **Moab—** the father of the **Moabites**. The son of the youngest daughter was named **Ammon**— father of the **Ammonites.**

The land of the Moab was located on the eastern side of the Dead Sea (current day Jordan). Their brother tribe Ammon was located just to their north and Edom (descendants of Jacob's brother Esau) was to their south.

The Moabites were a pagan nation— *Chemosh* was their national '*god*' (Jeremiah 48:13). But, in general, they were polytheistic (Judges 10:6).

During their forty year exodus from Egypt, the Israelites traveled north through the land of Moabites (as well as the Edomites and Ammonites). During their journey north along the Trans-Jordan, this land was to be left unmolested because *Yahweh* had long ago allotted this land to Abraham's nephew, Lot. *Yahweh* had allowed the Moabites to settle this land by enabling them to drive out the giant Emin —Anakin, Nephilim (Deut 2:9-11)

Throughout their history, the Moabites were hostile to Israel. Their proximity to Israel's future eastern border and their pagan religious practices were a continuous threat. Moabite women led the men of Israel into sin during the Exodus (Num 25:1-2) and later led Solomon into sin as king (1 Kg 11:1; 11:7). The offspring of such unions were barred from entering the assembly of *Yahweh* for ten generations (Num 22:24).

Now, "*because they* (Israel) *had* (again) *done what was evil in the sight of the Lord… the Lord strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel."* This set the stage for the next "judge" to arise within Israel's borders.

Note: These "*judges*" were from varied geographical regions scattered throughout the twelve tribes and many of their timelines overlapped. Some oppression affected only portions of the Israelite population at any given time

Biblical history is not entirely unfavorable toward the Moabites. The **Book of Ruth** took place during the dismal days of failure and rebellion of the Israelites— the period of the Judges. A famine forced Elimelech and his wife, **Naomi**, from their Israelite home to the country of **Moab**. Elimelech died and Naomi was left with her two sons, who soon married two **Moabite** girls, Orpah and **Ruth.**

Later, both of the sons died and Naomi was left alone with Orpah and Ruth in a strange land. Orpah returned to her parents, but Ruth stayed with Naomi as they journeyed to Bethlehem. This story of love and devotion told of Ruth's eventual marriage to a wealthy man named Boaz, by whom she bears a son, Obed, who became the grandfather of David and the ancestor of Jesus. **Obedience brought Ruth into the privileged lineage of Christ!**

Finally, Moab is noted for another memorable event. It's from the Mount of Neb (Mt Pisgah) in Moab that **Moses looked upon the Promised Land**…

Deut 34:1-4- *"Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea the Negeb, and the Plain, that is, the Valley of Jericho the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar And the Lord said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, 'I will give it to your offspring.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there."*

And it was in Moab where **Moses was buried**…

Deut 34:5-6- *"So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord, and He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor; but no one knows the place of his burial to this day."*

There are over 100 verses mentioning the Moabites throughout the *Old Testament* and *New Testament*

A Moab archeological discovery found in 1868 at Dhiban (in current day Jordan) is of significance to Bible history. Called the **Mesha Stela**, this inscription commemorates events in the reign of Mesha, king of Moab, including his overthrow of Israelite rule. Dating from approximately 900 BC, it mentions Mesha's war with Omri from 2 Kings 3. It is considered one of the oldest written inscriptions ever discovered and provides a powerful confirmation of the accuracy of the *Old Testament*.

WHO WERE THE MOABITES?

WHY WERE THE MOABITES HOSTILE TO THE ISRAELITES?

WHY ARE SOME PEOPLE HOSTILE TO YOU?

Judges 3:13-14-*"He gathered to himself the Ammonites and the Amalekites, and went and defeated Israel. And they took possession of the city of palms. And the people of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years."*

Eglon, the king of the **Moabites**, "*gathered to himself the **Ammonites** and the **Amalekites**, and went and defeated Israel."* This coalition of Moabites, Ammonites, and Amalekites attacked Israel and "*took possession of the city of palms"*— Jericho, the oldest known city in Israel and one of the oldest cities in the world. "*And the people of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years."*

The land of the **Ammonites** was located east of the Jordan River just north of their brother tribe, Moab. Today it encompasses the countries of Jordan and Syria. The chief city of the Ammonites was Rabbah—the modern city of Amman, Jordan.

Throughout Biblical history, the **Ammonites** are mentioned as people who followed false '*gods'* —they had many (including **Molech**— infamous for child sacrifice). Many Ammonite war practices were extremely violent. At one point, an Ammonite leader planned to gouge out the right eye of every Israelite as part of a treaty (1 Sam 11:2). Scripture states that the Ammonites would rip open pregnant women in lands they had conquered (Amos 1:13).

The **Amalekites** were descendants of Amalek, a grandson of Esau (Jacob's twin brother). They were a branch of the **Edomite** tribe descended from Esau's firstborn son, Eliphaz. Scripture records a long-lasting **feud** between the **Amalekites** and the **Israelites.**

Abraham
|
Isaac
|
Esau
|
Eliphaz
|
Amalek
|
AMALEKITES

The **Amalekites** were the first nation to attack Moses and the Israelites shortly after their Exodus from Egypt. This unprovoked attack was the first of several conflicts over hundreds of years between the Amalekites and Israelites…

Ex 17:8–13-*"**Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim*** [just north of Mt Sinai] *So Moses said to Joshua,"Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. **Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand."** So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. **Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed**. But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. **And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword."***

The brutality of the **Amalekites** was so great that God later warned the Israelites to never forget how the Amalekites, having no fear of God, attacked their rear guard targeting stragglers — those who were tired, weak, and vulnerable…

Deut 25:17-19-*"Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt, how he attacked you on the way when you were faint and weary, and cut off your tail, those who were lagging behind you, and he did not fear God.*

Therefore when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your enemies around you, in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget."

Does The Bible Instruct Us To Forgive And Forget?

(from: *gotquestion.org*)

"The phrase "**forgive and forget**" is **not** found in the Bible. However, there are numerous verses commanding us to "forgive one another" (e.g., Matt 6:14 and Eph 4:32). A Christian who is not willing to forgive others will find his fellowship with God hindered (Matt 6:15) and can reap bitterness and the loss of reward (Heb 12:14–15; 2 John 1:8).

Forgiveness is a decision of the will. Since God commands us to forgive, we must make a conscious choice to obey God and forgive. The offender may not desire forgiveness and may not ever change, but that doesn't negate God's desire that we possess a forgiving spirit (Matt 5:44). Ideally, the offender will seek reconciliation, but, if not, the one wronged can still make a decision to forgive.

Of course, it is impossible to truly forget sins that have been committed against us. We cannot selectively "delete" events from our memory.

The Bible states that God does not "remember" our wickedness (Heb 8:12). But God is still all-knowing. God remembers that we have "sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). But, having been forgiven, we are positionally (or judicially) justified. Heaven is ours, as if our sin had never occurred. If we belong to Him through faith in Christ, God does not condemn us for our sins (Rom 8:1). In that sense God "forgives and forgets."

If by "forgive and forget" one means, "I choose to forgive the offender for the sake of Christ and move on with my life," then this is a wise and godly course of action. As much as possible, we should forget what is behind and strive toward what is ahead (Phil 3:13). We should forgive each other "just as in Christ God forgave" (Eph 4:32). We must not allow a root of bitterness to spring up in our hearts (Heb 12:15).

However, if by "forgive and forget" one means, "I will act as if the sin had never occurred and live as if I don't remember it," then we can run into trouble. For example, a rape victim can choose to forgive the rapist, but that does *not* mean she should act as if that sin had never happened. To spend time alone with the rapist, especially if he is unrepentant, is <u>not</u> what Scripture teaches.

Forgiveness involves not holding a sin against a person any longer, but forgiveness is different from trust. It is wise to take precautions, and sometimes the dynamics of a relationship will have to change. "The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty" (Prov 22:3). Jesus told His followers to "be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matt 10:16). In the context of keeping company with unrepentant sinners, we must be "innocent" (willing to forgive) yet at the same time "shrewd" (being cautious).

The ideal is for the offender to truly repent of the sin and for the offended to forgive and forget. The Bible tells us true repentance will result in a change of actions (Luke 3:8–14; Acts 3:19) and that love keeps no record of wrongs (1 Cor 13:5) and covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).

However, changing hearts is God's business, and, until an offender has a true, supernatural heart change, it is only wise to limit the level of trust one places in that person. Being cautious doesn't mean we haven't forgiven. It simply means we are not God and we cannot see that person's heart."

DO YOU FORGIVE? WHY? WHY NOT?

DO YOU FORGET? WHY? WHY NOT?

WHAT DOES GOD WANT YOU TO DO?

Judges 3:15-16-*"Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, and the Lord raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud, the son of Gera, the Benjaminite, a left-handed man. The people of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab. And Ehud made for himself a sword with two edges, a cubit in length, and he bound it on his right thigh under his clothes."*

In their pain (not repentance) "*the people of Israel cried out to the Lord"* and the Lord "*raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud,"* a left-handed Benjaminite (ironic as "*Benjamin*" literally means "*son of the right hand*"). Jericho stood within Benjamin's tribal allotment (Josh 18:21). Under Moab rule for **<u>eighteen years</u>**, Israel was forced to pay yearly tribute to its king, Eglon.

Ehud was assigned the task of delivering the tribute, but he literally had something up his sleeve. He "*made for himself a sword with two edges, a cubit in length* (cubit = distance between elbow and middle finger—about 18 inches)*, and he bound it on his right thigh under his clothes.*"

"Ehud carefully hides the weapon on his right side, where he could easily reach it with his left hand, but where the guards would most likely not detect it" (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary- Judges"*). "It seems best to follow the lead of the *LXX's* (the *Septuagint's*) "*amphoterodexios"* and interpret Ehud's condition as ambidextrous— skilled in the use of both hands" (John Walton, general editor, *"Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary- Volume 2"*). He obviously anticipated an opportunity to deceive and assassinate his enemy.

Our Bible warns us against deceitful behavior. But sometimes two or more values or virtues come into conflict and a genuine moral dilemma ensues— "as when Rahab deceived the soldiers of Jericho in order to safeguard the lives of the Israelite spies who came to serve as advance scouts of the promised land (Joshua 2:1-24). She actually ended up in God's Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11 on account of her faith, exercised in protecting the lives of the spies (of which deception was an integral part)…

Certain professions make regular use of deception. Take for example, intelligence gathering. There is little doubt that the intelligence apparatus of most countries uses deceit in order to gain critical intelligence information about one's enemies. In addition, undercover police work requires that officers disguise their identity and create entirely new personas in order to infiltrate organizations effectively. Few questions are raised about the necessary use of deception in these occupations…

In other words, the fact that truth-telling is a biblical principle does not necessarily mean that it is an absolute to be *always* followed in every circumstance…

We should expect that at times we should have to weigh competing values and we should also expect that God would direct us in doing so. Thus, rather than saying that truth telling is inviolable, it is more accurate to suggest that it is a general rule that allows periodic exceptions when in conflict with other important moral values" ("*Theology of Work Project*—"*Exceptions to Truth-telling in the Bible*").

DO YOU ALWAYS TELL THE TRUTH?

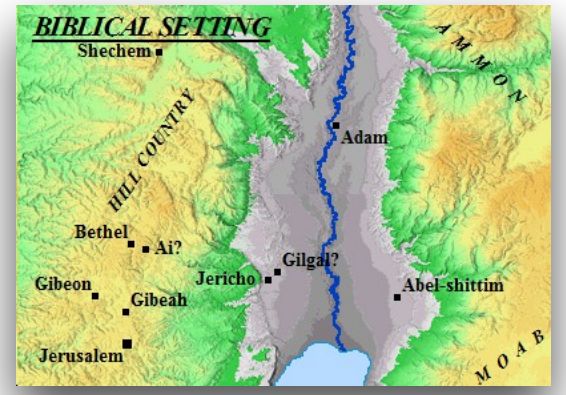
WHY DOES GODS COMMAND US TO TELL THE TRUTH?

WHEN / WHY IS DECEPTION ALLOWED AND NOT ALLOWED?

Judges 3:17-19-*"And he presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man. And when Ehud had finished presenting the tribute, he* (Ehud) *sent away the people who carried the tribute. But he himself* (Ehud) *turned back at the idols near Gilgal and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." And he* (Eglon) *commanded, "Silence." And all his attendants went out from his presence."*

The text does not describe the nature of the "*tribute,*" but in ancient times it often consisted of gold, silver, animals, and crops requiring many men to carry it to its destination. After delivering it, Ehud accompanied his men only a short distance before stopping at Gilgal and sending them away to safely return home.

*"*Gilgal was located on the eastern border of Jericho (while later Byzantine descriptions suggest it was a few miles east of the ancient city). This puts this important cultic site right along the road leading from



ancient Israel to the land of Moab in Transjordan" (Biblical Archeology Society—*"Where Is Biblical Gilgal?"*)

"Gilgal is significant in the Bible as serving as a place of memorial for the Israelites, to remind them of what God had done. After miraculously crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land, the Israelites set up twelve stones taken from the river, representing the twelve tribes, to serve as a reminder to the children of Israel (Josh 4:19–20)…

These stones at Gilgal would remind the Israelites and their descendants of the power of God and how He had dried up the Jordan River so they could walk through it, just as He had done to the Red Sea (Josh 4:21–24). The stones at Gilgal would serve a teaching purpose to the younger generation, so that they too could remember what the Lord had done for them (Josh 4:21–22) (GotQuestions.org—*"What Is The Importance Of Global In The Bible?"*)

Unfortunately, after sending his men away, Ehud now found Gilgal surrounded by only pagan idols and "*he turned back*" around to go stand before the king of Moab. As the people of Israel worked hard just to survive, Eglon had became a "*very fat man*" off their hard work.

Upon entering Elgon's chambers, Ehud said, *"I have a secret message for you, O king."* Curious, Elgon then commanded his entourage to remain silent and "*all his attendants went out from his presence*"—leaving the king alone with Ehud. Elgon would soon pay a hefty price for discovering that secret.

A secret is a fact or piece of information that is kept hidden from other people. We keep secrets for a variety of reasons— some good, some not. Secrets are kept to protect others, ourselves, or just out of some ego driven sense of control or exclusivity. Keeping secrets to protect others can be noble and is even a requirement of some professions (ie. pastors, counselors, physicians). But keeping secrets to protect ourselves is often a two edged sword— particularly if done for the wrong reasons.

"Shame, embarrassment, and self-protection are the top reasons people keep secrets, says Chris Davis, a psychology professor at Carleton University who studies the effects of secret-keeping on individuals and relationships. People are most likely to keep secrets about things like infidelity, addiction, behavior that may be stigmatized (like serving jail time or having an abortion), past trauma, and sexual orientation…

We weigh our secrets in terms of potential consequences for our lives and relationships. The higher the stakes, the more preoccupied we become. It's this preoccupation, rumination, and fear of discovery that take a toll on mental health" (Sandy Cohen, *"The Mental Health Cost of Keeping Secrets"*).

"We seek connection, but we fear rejection" (Chris Davis, Professor of Psychology, Carleton University).

"At any given time, according to research, the majority of us are keeping an average of 13 different secrets… When we choose to be entirely alone with something, we often don't develop healthy ways of thinking about that thing," (Michael Slepian, Associate Professor of Leadership and Ethics at Columbia Business School).

WHAT IS A SECRET?

HOW MANY SECRETS ARE YOU CARRYING?

ARE YOU KEEPING SECRETS TO PROTECT OTHERS, YOURSELF, OR OUT OF SOME EGO DRIVEN SENSE OF CONTROL OR EXCLUSIVITY?

Judges 3:20-23-*"And Ehud came to him as 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 reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly.*

And the hilt also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not pull the sword out of his belly; and the dung came out.

Then Ehud went out into the porch and closed the doors of the roof chamber behind him and locked them."

As the king sat "*alone in his cool roof chamber"* Ehud delivered his secret *"message from God.*" Unfortunately for the king, the message was not words, but the sharp blade held in Ehud's left hand.

As the sword dug deep into Elgon's ample belly, "*the dung came out."* Leaving the blade with "*the fat closed over*" it, Ehud "*went out into the porch and closed the doors of the roof chamber behind him and locked them."*

"Not everything contained in the Bible is God's moral will. For instance, the Bible contains stories about gang rape of both women (Judges 19) and men (Gen. 19). The Bible also contains Satan's lies (Gen. 3:4-5). The Bible is a very realistic book, describing graphic content…

However, description is not the same as prescription… While God did raise up Ehud, this doesn't mean he prescribed everything that he chose to do. Otherwise, we would have to believe that God makes people sinless at the moment he decides to use them…

In addition, this Moabite king was far from innocent. He was a cruel dictator that had forced his way into Israel to take them over. Many people today have no problem with assassinating dictators, who abuse their power" (*Evidence Unseen—"Was this knife to the stomach really a message from God?"*).

The Moral Dilemma of Tyrannicide

(Summarized from: Catholic Straight Answers.com—*"What Is The Church's Teaching On Tyrannicide?"*)

Tyrannicide (the act of killing a tyrant) is a moral dilemma. Technically, there are two classes of tyrants: a tyrant by "*usurpation*" ("*tyrannus in titulo"*), a ruler who has illegitimately seized power; and a tyrant by "*oppression*" ("*tyrannus in regimine"),* a ruler who wields power unjustly, oppressively, and arbitrarily.

A tyrant by "*usurpation*" has illegitimately seized power and, therefore, is a criminal. The legitimate authority may condemn him to death using the normal course of law. However, if the normal course of law is not available (due to the actions of the tyrant), then the legitimate authority can proceed "informally" to condemn the tyrant and even grant individuals a mandate to execute the tyrant.

A tyrant by "*oppression*" is one who has come to power legitimately, but rules unjustly, oppressively, and arbitrarily. Here the community must confront the tyrant, and if necessary, depose him, formally or informally, according to the course of law available.

In most circumstances, a private citizen morally cannot kill a tyrant by oppression, because the tyrant came to power through a legitimate means and thereby the community must depose him.

However, if the tyrant by oppression attacks the citizen, jeopardizes the welfare of the community with the intent leading it to destruction or killing the citizens, or commits other evils, then a private citizen can morally commit an act of justifiable tyrannicide.

Moreover, if because of the tyrant's rule, a nation cannot defend itself, is on the course of destruction, and has no lawful means to depose or to condemn the tyrant, then a citizen may commit an act of justifiable tyrannicide.

Please note that the Church has not definitively taught on this subject. The Church not only recognizes the authority of legitimate rulers and their duty to uphold the common good of the community, but also the duty of citizens to support a legitimate government.

However, the Church also has set standards of just war and even capital punishment which would be applied to a conflict between a community against an unjust tyrannical leader.

Keep in mind that an act of justifiable tyrannicide would have to be an act of last resort, when no other reasonable course of action is available to protect the community.

WHY/WHEN DOES GOD COMMAND US TO OBEY GOVERNMENT?

WHY/ WHEN SHOULD WE NOT OBEY GOVERNMENT?

WHAT ARE MODERN DAY EXAMPLES OF JUSTIFIABLE TYRANNICIDE?

Judges 3:24-25-*"When he had gone, the servants came, and when they saw that the doors of the roof chamber were locked, they thought, "Surely he is relieving himself in the closet of the cool chamber. And they waited till they were embarrassed. But when he still did not open the doors of the roof chamber, they took the key and opened them, and there lay their lord dead on the floor."*

Elgon's servants awkwardly waited outside the door thinking their fat king was taking an embarrassingly amount of time "*relieving himself in the closet of the cool chamber.*" By the time they opened the door "*there lay their lord dead on the floor."*

Who said God doesn't have a sense of humor! "This seems like a strange story to glean a life lesson from, other than 'don't lock yourself in the bathroom with an assassin.' But we can actually learn a great deal from this left-handed judge…

First, God can use abilities and traits others might see as inferior or out of the norm. Although today we'd argue that being left-handed is not an inferior trait, most of history did not hold the same view. Nevertheless, because Ehud preferred his left hand, the guards who checked him didn't even think to look for a weapon on the side where he hid it. Because of this, he successfully carried out the assassination of the king…

Second, we learn that sin has consequences. Every time Israel fell prey to foreign worship practices, they ended up oppressed by a foreign power. In the case of Ehud's story, they wound up under the rule of the Moabites. Still, God heard their cries and sent salvation in the form of a left-handed judge…

Finally, we can actually learn a lesson from Eglon too: be careful about pride and confidence. Eglon dropped his guard and let Ehud into his inner room upstairs to hear a "secret message," from a stranger he'd never encountered before. This led to his downfall and a rather gory death. A great ruler has humility and exercises discernment. This we can learn as a warning from the large king of Moab" (Hope Bolinger, *Bible Study Tools, "Ehud: The Most Interesting Judge You've Never Heard Of"*).

HOW DOES GOD MAKE "INFERIOR" PEOPLE BECOME "SUPERIOR?"

HOW CAN PRIDE AND SELF CONFIDENCE LEAD TO DOWNFALL?

HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU WITNESSED GOD'S SENSE OF HUMOR? LIST A FEW!

Judges 3:26-27-*"Ehud escaped while they delayed, and he passed beyond the idols and escaped to Seirah. When he arrived, he sounded the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim. Then the people of Israel went down with him from the hill country, and he was their leader."*

In the famous old television show, "*Dallas,*" Bobbie Ewing complained to his father, "You gave me the power to run that company, and … I intend to run it!

Incredulous, the senior Ewing snapped back, "So I gave you power, huh? Well, let me tell you somethin' boy, if I did give you power, you've got nothin'! Nobody gives you power. Real power is something you TAKE!"

Though God certainly gave Ehud the "power" to triumph over king Elgon, Ehud had to then "take" that "power" and run with it. After he escaped to "*the hill country of Ephraim*, he boldly "*sounded the trumpet"* and the people gathered. They'd heard of his triumphant escapade— he was now "*their leader."*

"A godly leader is someone called by God with the ability to cast a clear vision and provide direction and guidance to others through his or her example and influence. Godly leaders must lead in a manner that honors the Lord and accomplishes His purposes in the earth realm…

Leaders…

(1) **Stand before God for the people** – Godly leaders must intercede before God on behalf of their employees and those they are responsible for. They must make intercession for them on matters of their spiritual growth, family life, and social and financial development. They must not attempt to handle difficult matters themselves but rather take them before the Lord for guidance, instruction and wisdom…

(2) **Cast the vision** – God always provides His leaders with a clear revelation of the vision. Vision is the ultimate goal that the Lord has given you. It is what you aspire to become. A godly leader must provide the people with clear direction of where they are going. The Bible states that without vision the people perish. People cannot follow a leaderwho is unclear of where he/she is going. Godly leaders must be able to clearly communicate the vision so others can run with it…

(3) **Provide the people with direction and guidance** – Casting a clear vision is not sufficient to ensure effective leadership; the people need to be guided and directed. Godly leaders must be able to teach the people how to realize the vision and equip them with the tools necessary to carry out their responsibilities…

(4) **Raise up others** – Godly leaders are not permanent nor eternal. A key responsibility for godly leaders is to duplicate themselves. You must raise others by delegating responsibilities to them based on their abilities. Trust them to handle those responsibilities and support them in those areas where they are weak…

(5) **Oversee the work** – The ultimate responsibility for the success of the organization always rests on the leader who must be accountable to God for the outcome. Godly leaders must provide oversight to ensure that the work is being accomplished according to plan. As a godly leader, the ultimate responsibility rests with you. You must be prepared to give an account to God" (Nehemiah e-community— Building Kingdom Businesses Together— "*The Responsibility of a Godly Leader"*).

WHAT IS A LEADER?

ARE YOU A LEADER? HOW? WHY? WHERE?

HOW ARE YOU A GODLY LEADER? HOW? WHY? WHERE?

Judges 3:28-30-*"And he said to them, "Follow after me, for the Lord has given your enemies the Moabites into your hand." So they went down after him and seized the fords of the Jordan against the Moabites and did not allow anyone to pass over.*

And they killed at that time about 10,000 of the Moabites, all strong, able-bodied men; not a man escaped.

So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for eighty years.

With God now clearly by his side, Ehud led the people in a great victory over the Moabites. They killed every one of their enemy's 10,000 "*strong, able bodied men; not a man escaped.*" After serving Eglon, the king of Moab, for eighteen years, *"the land had rest for* ***eighty years.***" But note again that just as after the previous judge/deliverer (Othneil), it was the "*land*" that had two generations of "*rest*" after this victory— not necessarily the people.

"*Rest* is freedom from work, toil, strain or activity. *Rest* is the cessation of motion or action of any kind and applicable to any body or being— as *rest* from labor, *rest* from mental exertion, or *rest* of body or mind. A body is at *rest*, when it ceases to move. The mind is at *rest*, when it ceases to be disturbed or agitated. The sea is never at *rest*! (And many believers live their lives more like the sea than their Savior!)

In spiritual terms *rest* means primarily to cease from one's works with the idea of release from anxiety, worry and insecurity. This *rest* is offered to all and is freely available by grace through personal faith in Jesus Christ (Mt 11:28, 29, 30). Only in Christ is our soul fully and truly at *rest*. In this context *rest* means to be done with self-effort as far as salvation is concerned. It means the end of trying to please God by our feeble, fleshly works. In short, God's unmerited *perfect rest* is a *rest* in free grace which can only be entered into or appropriated by faith." (Precept Austin, *"Rest In The Bible"*).

WHAT IS REST?

DO YOU REST? HOW? WHEN/ WHY?

DO YOU REST IN THE LORD? HOW/ WHEN/ WHY?

Judges 3:31-"*After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed 600 of the Philistines with an oxgoad, and he also saved Israel."*

The actions of this third "*judge*" are summarized in only one verse. "He (*Shamgar*) is assigned no tribal designation among the Israelites. His parent, "*Anath,*" carries the name of one of the three great Canaanite goddesses" (Trent Butler, *"Word Biblical Commentary—Judges"*). Because of this, some scholars speculate he may not have even been an Israelite— though this is inconclusive. Why the author of the book of Judges included this short verse without further explanation is subject to much theological debate.

What is clear is that Israel once again needed another judge/deliverer and God supplied one. Nothing is really known of "*Shamgar the son of Anath*" other than the three things written here— (1) he killed 600 Philistines, (2) he killed them with an "*oxgoad*", and (3) he "*also*" just happened to save Israel.

"It has been most needlessly assumed that he slew them single-handed, and not, as is probable, at the head of a band of peasants armed with the same rude weapons as himself… The question here is merely one of interpretation, and nothing is more common in Scripture, as in all literature, than to say that a leader personally did what was done under his leadership (*"Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers— Judges 3:31"*).

An "*oxgoad"* was a long, wooden farming tool used to guide and spur livestock, particularly oxen, that pulled a plow or cart. The smaller end had a sharp prickle for driving the oxen, the other end contained a small spade or paddle of iron for cleansing the plough from clay. "It is evident, however, that the sacred writer here does not attribute the slaughter made, and victory obtained by Shamgar, to the excellence of the weapon which he used, but to the power of God" (*"Benson Commentary— Judges 3:31"*)

"Since at first the 'Sea Peoples' base of land operations in Palestine was located in northern Lebanon and the 'Song of Deborah' (Judges 5) associates Shamgar with problems in northern Israel, the latter's confrontation with the Philistines probably occurred in the north at the beginning of the twelfth century B.C." (Daniel I Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

How long Israel was "saved" is not recorded and "perhaps his (Shamgar's) time is to be reckoned into the eighty years of rest before mentioned or into the forty years of Deborah, the next judge. ("*Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*").

This verse concludes the first three recorded cycles of Israelite apostasy, enslavement, moaning, and redemption in the book of Judges. Stay tuned— it just gets worse!

WHY DO WE KEEP MAKING THE SAME MISTAKES OVER AND OVER AGAIN?

WHY IS GOD PATIENT?

DO YOU NEED TO BE GOADED WITH AN OXGOAD FROM TIME TO TIME?

WHY?

CHAPTERS FOUR AND FIVE

Chapters **four** and **five** of the book of Judges are parallel versions of the same events— the first written as **prose** and the second described in **poetic song** (“*The Song Of Deborah”*). The **prose** rendition is logical and chronological whereas the **poetic** rendition is often more impressionistic, abstract, and emotionally charged.

While the aim of **chapter four** is to inform and educate, **chapter five** celebrates and commemorates the events. We’ll study these two texts side by side to obtain a more complete understandings of what the two chapters try to convey.

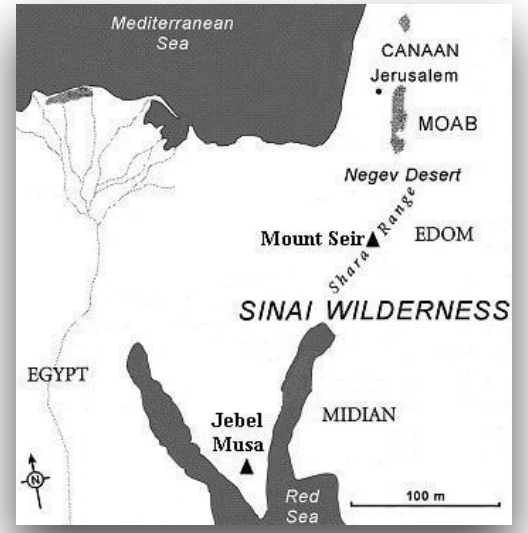
Judges 5:1-5-*“Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day:*

That the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the Lord!

Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the Lord I will sing; I will make melody to the Lord, the God of Israel.

Lord, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens dropped, yes, the clouds dropped water.

The mountains quaked before the Lord, even Sinai before the Lord, the God of Israel.”



Judges 5 (the poetic version) begins with two of the three Israelite protagonists of the narrative singing of God’s accomplishments in leading the people out of their fourth cycle of oppression. Deborah and Barak “*took the lead in Israel*”— God raised up these two individuals and “*the people offered themselves willingly*” to their leadership.

The song cries out for the pagan Canaanite “*kings*” and “*princes*” to acknowledge the one true God to whom Deborah dedicates this poem.

The song imagines the Lord coming down from Mount “*Seir”* and marching “*from the region of Edom*” to come to the aid of His people. “Today, the mountainous region of *Seir* is in the country of Jordan. It is known in Arabic as Jibāl ash-Sharāh” (*GotQuestions.org—“What Is The Significance Of Mount Seir*”).

God prepared the way for His people’s redemption from oppression by first striking terror into their enemies with earthquakes and torrential storms— “*the earth trembled and the heavens dropped.*” It was an announcement to the Canaanites that *Yahweh*, not their false ‘god,’ *Baal*, was supreme. God had been leading the Israelites since coming down from “*Mt Sinai.”* Even the “*mountains quaked before the Lord.*”

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PROSE AND POETRY?

DO YOU SING SONGS OF PRAISE TO THE LORD? WHY? WHEN?

HOW DOES GOD STRIKE TERROR INTO HIS ENEMIES?

Judges 4:1-3-*"And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord after Ehud died. And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord for help, for he had 900 chariots of iron and he oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for twenty years."*

Judges 5:6-7a-*"In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were abandoned, and travelers kept to the byways.*

The villagers ceased in Israel"

The prose rendition begins once again with the statement, "***the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.***" Ehud (the second "judge") had died and during (or soon after) the time of Shamgar (the third "judge") a new enemy arose— "*Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor.*"

"Since Joshua 11:1-15 describes Joshua's victory over Jabin and the total razing of his capitol,…this (Jabin) probably represents a sort of 'dynastic' name at Hazor rather than a 'personal' name" (Daniel I Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

Hazor had dominated the valley north of the Sea Of Galilee for five centuries until Joshua's defeat of this kingdom. But apparently the dynasty of *Jabin* had managed to regroup and reassert its dominance over Israel once again, if only for a short time.

As a result, for fear of being attacked, the Israelites' "*highways were abandoned, and travelers kept to the byways*" to avoid detection by the enemy. "*The villagers ceased in Israel*"— they just stayed home as trade between the cities and villages came to a standstill.

The commander of *Jabin's* army was "*Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim.*" From his fortress he commanded "*900 chariots of iron and he oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for **twenty years**.*" Then, as they had done in the past, "*the people of Israel cried out to the Lord for help.*"

"The history of the world is the story of nations and empires that prospered and later turned to dust. Will we learn the lessons of history? Some empires declined slowly before their demise. Others were destroyed or captured suddenly. The great empires of the past are now little more than artifacts in museums, or broken-down monuments where they once thrived…

Throughout the history of the world, it has been extremely rare to find any society that would turn from its evil ways… God allows people to go their own carnal way of selfishness, war, and violence. But He has a plan.… As we see from history and Scripture, He does intervene in world events to help humanity learn lasting lessons of life and death…

The day of God's judgment against humanity's failed ways is approaching fast. Those nations and individuals who turn to God will be blessed. What should you do? Do not wait for your nation to change. Now is the time for you to seek God with all your heart." (Richard F. Ames, *Tomorrow's World, "Empires Come And Go"*).

DO YOU FEAR BEING "ATTACKED" FOR YOUR FAITH? WHY?

HOW HAVE YOU BEEN ATTACKED?

ARE YOU WAITING FOR YOUR NATION TO CHANGE OR ARE YOU TRYING TO CHANGE YOUR NATION? WHY? HOW?

Judges 4:4-5-*"Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment."*

Judges 5:7b-8-*"…they ceased to be until I arose; I, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel. When new gods were chosen, then war was in the gates. Was shield or spear to be seen among forty thousand in Israel?"*

These two parallel verses introduce Deborah as a "*prophetess*"— a spokesperson for God's direction. "When the sons of Israel come to Deborah "*for judgement*" they are not asking her to settle their legal disputes, but to give them divine answers to their cries." (Daniel I Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

They found her sitting in her usual place "*under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim."*

Deborah is next presented as a unifier of the country—"*as a mother of Israel.*" Most of the people had abandoned the one true God and "*new gods were chosen.*" The various tribes were divided and "*war was in the gates*." Their peace was uprooted as a result of their apostasy. They finally came to Deborah for divine guidance.

When Ronald Regan became president he found our military depleted. "Peace through strength" became the motto of the "Regan Doctrine" advocating augmentation and modernization of the military to act as a deterrent to enemy aggressors. Unfortunately, "*among forty thousand in Israel*" neither "*shield"* nor *"spear"* was now seen among the people. Assimilating into this foreign culture had decimated the Israelites' defensive capabilities.

WHAT DOES PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH MEAN?

WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR PEACE?

WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR STRENGTH?

Judges 5:9-11-*"My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel who offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless the Lord.*

Tell of it, you who ride on white donkeys, you who sit on rich carpets, and you who walk by the way.

To the sound of musicians at the watering places, there they repeat the righteous triumphs of the Lord, the righteous triumphs of his villagers in Israel. Then down to the gates marched the people of the Lord."

Despite the Israelite's depleted military condition, Deborah "*heart*" went out "*to the commanders of Israel who offered themselves willingly among the people"* to come to their defense. She praised the Lord for their individual bravery.

In her song, she then contrasts these noble commanders with the greedy Canaanite merchants who "*ride on white donkeys*" and "*sit on rich carpets*" as they plied their trade for profit while the vulnerable Israelites suffered. Unlike the Israelites, these pagan merchants were able to confidently travel the roads (*"walk by the way"*) without fear of molestation.

Meanwhile, the common Israelite villagers gathered at the "*watering places."* These watering holes were not just to quench thirst, but also acted as communal places to meet and exchange information among villagers. There, *"to the sound of musicians,*" they acknowledged "*the righteous triumphs of the Lord, the righteous triumphs of His villagers in Israel.*" Then "*down to the gates marched the people of the Lord"* that they might begin their quest for freedom.

"When *Starbucks* opened its first store in Pike Place Market in 1971, it didn't serve lattes. But it soon became a hub of connection, a place to sample a cup of Sumatra coffee or learn about beans from Latin America. In 1987, Starbucks expanded into a European café model with added seating and espresso beverages. Customers lingered in stores, even if they had no one to meet for the simple experience of being met with a friendly face and taking a moment to pause in the day…

There wasn't really a term for what was happening until a few years later, in 1989, when sociologist Ray Oldenburg coined the term "*third place,*" describing a place beyond home and work where people could gather, relax and talk. (Starbucks Advertisement, *"Reimagining the Third Place: How Starbucks Is Evolving Its Store Experience"*).

Unfortunately, for many young people, *Starbucks* has today replaced many churches as the "*third place*" — the watering hole where people gather to fellowship. According to a *Barna Group Survey* only two in ten Americans under thirty believe attending a church is important or worthwhile. Thirty-five percent of millennials have an anti-church stance believing the church does more harm than good. And fifty-nine percent of millennials raised in a church have dropped out all together.

Instead of commiserating on the "*righteous triumphs of the Lord"* in church, many young people now prefer to sit in strategically branded coffee houses that use "social change" as a marketing tool—often promoting "inclusion" at the "exclusion" of Christian ideals and values.

For most people, the reasons for avoiding church boil down to a few salient categories:

Irrelevancy
Hurt
Hypocrisy
Fear of being judged
Not feeling God's presence

Suppression of thoughtful doubt
Lack of in-depth teaching about God/Jesus
Difficulty in establishing community with other Christians
Questioning the Gospel message itself

These are vitally important issues— all churches have their faults and are in need of careful self-reflection. But sometimes the blame falls squarely on our own shoulders. Sunday church service isn't just about the hour spent surrounded by strangers. It's about attitude and focus. As Jesus said, "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*" But what does that really mean?

Like the Israelites of old, God doesn't need us— we need Him. God doesn't need Sundays— we do. Church on Sunday morning should be the stimulant needed to keep us focused on Him. It's a jump start to unburden ourselves of the turmoils of the previous week.

But, it's not the end all. We're supposed to use Sunday as a catalyst to keep our focus on Him and away from the distractions of the world. There is no better *"third place"* to gather than at a church filled with like-minded believers in Christ. Besides, the coffee is usually better than *Starbucks* anyway!

WHAT ARE MODERN DAY "WATERING HOLES"?

WHERE IS YOUR "THIRD PLACE" TO GATHER?

ARE YOU GATHERING AT CHURCH? WHY? WHY NOT?

Judges 4:6-9-*"She sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali and said to him, "Has not the Lord, the God of Israel, commanded you, 'Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun. And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand'?"*

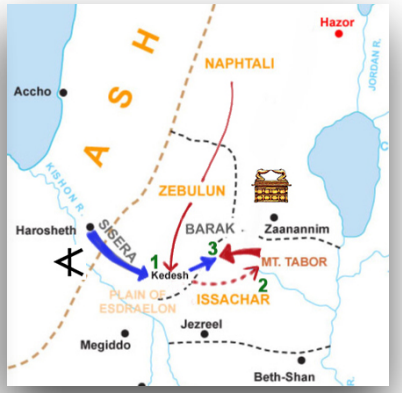
Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go." And she said, "I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh."

With a prophetic message from God weighing upon her shoulders, Deborah "*summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali*" (the Israelite military commander) to remind him of God's command. It was actually more of a rebuke for his reticence— "*has not the Lord, the God of Israel, commanded you?"*

God had instructed him to take "*10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun"* and "*gather men at Mount Tabor*" from where they were to engage "*Sisera, the general of Jabin's army."* God would draw out *Sisera* to "*the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops."*

Though the Israelites would normally be no match against 900 chariots, God would give them into Barak"s hand— victory was guaranteed.

Mount Tabor ***Kishon River*** ***The Battle Plan***



Despite God's assurance of victory, Barak was still hesitant to proceed and said to Deborah, "*If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go."* Barak wasn't asking Deborah to actually fight beside him; he just wanted this spokesperson ("*prophetess*") of God at his side. She agreed, but only after telling him that the glory of victory would not be his, but would instead belong to another—"*for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman."* But which woman? We'll soon find out.

"Christ asks us to be obedient in our lives because He not only knows the future and knows what will hurt us, but he has a huge purpose for our lives. Without our obedience, He can't accomplish all He wants to do with us. He wants to partner with us to complete His Kingdom's will here on earth as it is in Heaven…

How often do we know that God is asking us to do something and yet we still delay our obedience? Maybe we don't tell him no, but we pretend to not hear it…

We often wonder why God isn't doing anything in our lives, but could we be blocking His next move due to our hesitated obedience? If you are not fully obedient to God, then you are most likely conflicted with what and who you are obedient to. If God doesn't have your true allegiance, something else does. Other people and things are more important and taking the place of God's throne on your heart. The Lord wants our full devotion to be His true disciples here on earth which requires our full obedience. ..

God will always lead us and give us direction, but He doesn't always provide every detail. He will just tell us what to do next, and we are to simply obey without hesitation in whatever He asks" (Alisha Hedley, *Focus On The Family*, *"Does God Honor Hesitated Obedience?"*).

WHAT IS OBEDIENCE?

ARE YOU FULLY OBEDIENT OR HESITANTLY OBEDIENT TO GOD?

DOES GOD HONOR HESITANT OBEDIENCE?

Judges 4:10-*"And Barak called out Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh. And 10,000 men went up at his heels, and Deborah went up with him."*

Judges 5:12-18-*"Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, break out in a song! Arise, Barak, lead away your captives, O son of Abinoam.*

Then down marched the remnant of the noble; the people of the Lord marched down for me against the mighty.

From Ephraim their root they marched down into the valley, following you, Benjamin, with your kinsmen; from Machir marched down the commanders, and from Zebulun those who bear the lieutenant's staff;

the princes of Issachar came with Deborah, and Issachar faithful to Barak; into the valley they rushed at his heels. Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings of heart.

Why did you sit still among the sheepfolds, to hear the whistling for the flocks? Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings of heart.

Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan; and Dan, why did he stay with the ships? Asher sat still at the coast of the sea, staying by his landings.

Zebulun is a people who risked their lives to the death; Naphtali, too, on the heights of the field."

Barak "*called out Zebulun and Naphtali"* and 10,000 men followed "*at his heels*" to "*risk their lives to death.*" With the prophetess Deborah proclaiming God to the troops, Barak led these "*captives*" out of their captivity.

These "*people of the Lord"* marched down to meet the "*mighty.*" A battle was about to take place between the Israelites and Canaanites.

What's described next in the poem is which other tribes of Israel would choose to join them in war— and which would not!

The tribes of *Ephraim* and *Benjamin* came from the south. Next marched commanders from *Machir* (a poetic name for the tribe of *Manasseh*— Machir was the eldest of Manasseh's sons (Gen 50:23)). Then came military leaders from the tribe of *Zebulun.* These were followed by "*the princes of Issachar*" and their "*faithful people"* who came with Deborah to join Barak in battle.

Unfortunately the remaining tribes did not see it in their best interest to join the war. The people of *Ruben* searched their hearts and instead decided to "*sit still among the sheepfolds, to hear the whistling for the flocks*" in their homeland. "*Gilead* (*"Gad"*) *stayed beyond the Jordan"* while *Dan* and *Asher* chose to remain in their tribal lands along the coastline of the Mediterranean. Though not mentioned by name, *Judah* and *Simeon* were too far south to enter the fray.

"By definition, battles involve combat between two persons, between factions, between armies and they consist of any type of extended contest, struggle, or controversy (Webster-Merriam). In warfare, battles are fought on different fronts, for different reasons, and with varying degrees of intensity…

The same is true in spiritual warfare. Our spiritual battles and warfare are real, even though we cannot physically see the attacker. But, we can educate ourselves on how the battles are fought and how they impact our lives on a daily basis." (Bible Study Tools, "*Understanding the Battle behind Spiritual Warfare"*).

As Christians, we understand this spiritual war wages around us on a daily basis. And, like the tribes of Israel, we have to make a choice to either engage the enemy in battle or sit on our duffs and hope it doesn't envelop and destroy us. It's a battle others cannot fight for us. Choose wisely and take up arms!!

WHAT IS SPIRITUAL WARFARE?

ARE YOU ENGAGING THE ENEMY OR JUST SITTING ON YOUR DUFF?

HOW ARE YOU PREPARING YOURSELF FOR BATTLE?

Judges 4:11-*"Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the Kenites, the descendants 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."*

The *Kenites, "the descendants of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses"* were introduced earlier in the book of Judges:

Judges 1:16-*"And the descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah from the city of palms into the wilderness of Judah, which lies in the Negev Arad, and they went and settled with the people."*

"Heber, the Kenite" had separated from his tribe in the south of Israel and relocated north. He "*pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaanannim which is near Kedesh*"— Barak's hometown (Judges 4:4–7). "Not satisfied with the arid environment of Arad in southern Judah, he picks up stakes and moves to the more hospitable region of northern Naphtali" (*Daniel I Brock; "The New American Commentary- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

Why this individual and his family suddenly enter the narrative will soon become evident. "Far from being superfluous, the information is important in setting up the events that will follow; the fact that the author draws attention to it out of place, as it were, serves to highlight its importance even more" (C. Brown, *"Joshua, Judge and, Ruth- Judges"*).

In choosing to move to this location, Heber had made a poor decision— he chose to shelter closer to Canaan and went so far as to make peace with the Canaanite king. "The author has prepared the reader for the unexpected story ending via this foreshadowing without the reader comprehending the sense or purpose at this point."(Trent Butler, *"Word Biblical Commentary—Judges"*).

Foreshadowing is a literary device that hints at future events in a story. "One thing that is impossible to miss is that the *Old Testament* foreshadows the *New Testament*. In the *Old Testament*, Israel was promised a Savior, a Messiah. In the *New Testament*, Jesus is proclaimed the Christ (which means Messiah), Savior….

In the *Old Testament* a substitutionary system of sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins is presented, which the Jews were to follow. In the *New Testament*, Jesus is identified as the Perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (Rebecca Luella Miller, A Christian Worldview Of Fiction, "*The Old Testament Foreshadowing The New*").

Heb 10:1-7-*"For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins?*

But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

"Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.

Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'"

WHAT IS FORESHADOWING?

HOW DOES THE OLD TESTAMENT FORESHADOW THE NEW TESTAMENT?

HOW MANY FORESHADOWINGS OF JESUS CAN YOU LIST?

Judges 4:12-14-*"When Sisera was told that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, Sisera called out all his chariots, 900 chariots of iron, and all the men who were with him, from Harosheth-hagoyim to the river Kishon.*

And Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the Lord go out before you?" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him."

Judges 5:19-22*"The kings came, they fought; then fought the kings of Canaan, at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo; they got no spoils of silver.*

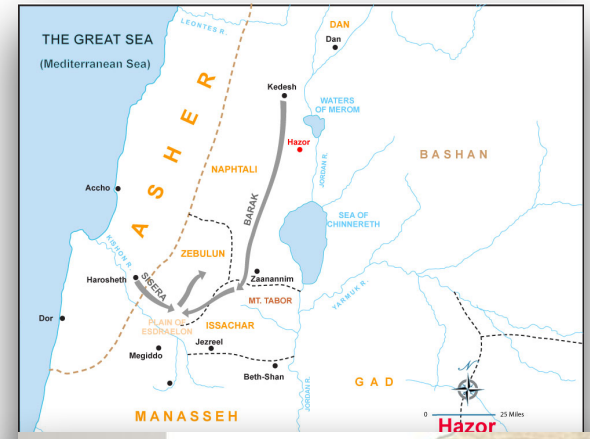
From heaven the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera.

The torrent Kishon swept them away the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon. March on, my soul, with might!

Then loud beat the horses' hoofs with the galloping, galloping of his steeds."

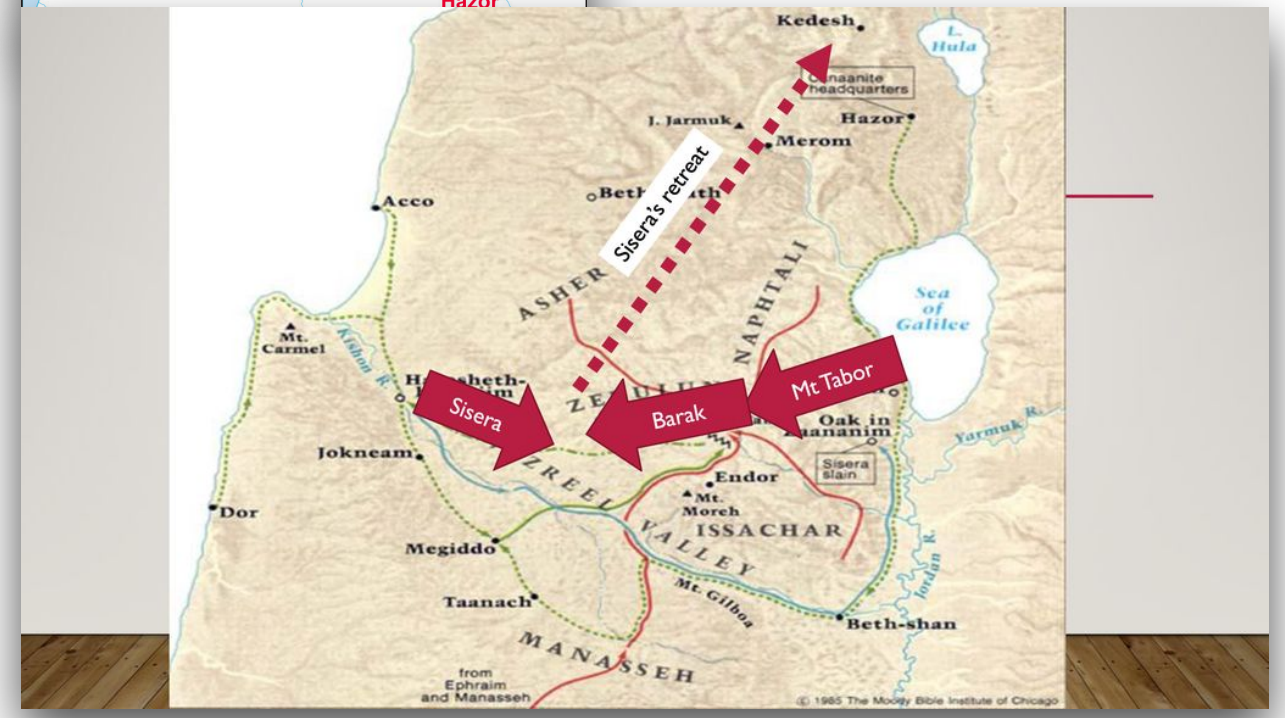
The battle begins! "*The kings came, they fought*"— Sisera with "*900 chariots of iron"* from Harosheth-hagoyim and Barak with "*10,000 men following him"* from Mt Tabor. They met at "*the river Kishon."*

Sisera thought he'd have the advantage with his calvary on the flat plains of the river bed. Little did he know that he was not just fighting 10,000 foot soldiers, but God Himself.



"*Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the Lord go out before you?*

"*From heaven the stars fought from their courses*" bringing torrential rains that caused the river to suddenly swell— sweeping away Sierra's chariots and horses." "*Then loud beat the horses' hoofs with the galloping"* as they tried to flee in confusion before they drowned. "*The kings of Canaan, at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo… got no spoils of silver"* on this day.



*"*That God will fight our battles means we do not have to anguish, be anxious, or be discouraged when bad things happen in our lives. When it seems a situation is hopeless or the matter at hand is too overwhelming, we may be tempted to doubt God. But Christians must remember that no problem is beyond the scope of God's sovereign care for His children…

God is in control, but that does not mean Christians get to avoid the battles—in fact, the Bible states the opposite (2 Tim 3:12). '*Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character*

produces hope' (Rom 5:3–4). In order for a believer to live a life of endurance, character, and hope, we must put on our armor (Eph 6:10–17) and trust the Deliverer…

We *'put no confidence in the flesh*' (Phili 3:3). Our confidence is in God, who will fight our battles and bring us safely home (Jude 1:24–25). '*Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God*' (Psalm 20:7)" (GotQuestions.org, "*What Does It Mean That God Will Fight Our Battles?"*)

DO YOU GET DISCOURAGED WHEN YOU ARE AGAINST OVERWHELMING ODDS?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LET GOD FIGHT OUR BATTLES?

WHAT DOES IT NOT MEAN TO LET GOD FIGHT OUR BATTLES?

Judges 4:15-16-*"And the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword. And Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot. And Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left."*

With his chariots and infantry routed by God, "*Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot"* — leaving his men to fend for themselves. As Sisera fled north, what remained of his army retreated back west to *Harosheth-hagoyim.*

Unfortunately for Sisera's soldiers, "*Barak pursued the chariots and the army"* and "*all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left."* Though admittedly the fate of these men was doomed from the start when they opposed God, Sierra's leadership certainly left much to be desired!

"*Great Leaders Never Abandon Ship*"

Steve Adubato,

"Stand and Deliver"

One of the most important lessons in leadership is the need for leaders to step up and be accountable when things go wrong. No excuses, no caveats, no finger pointing. Yet, it's so rare these days—be it in politics, business, sports, or any professional arena—to see leaders truly taking responsibility.

So what lessons can be learned from such leadership shortcomings? Consider the case of the Costa Concordia and the tragic events that occurred on January 13, 2012 when the captain of this massive cruise liner fled, leaving his passengers aboard the sinking ship to fend for themselves.

The biggest lesson in leadership here is the most obvious one; a captain—in this case Captain Francesco Schettino—should never abandon his ship. The same lesson is true for leaders of any organization. When something goes seriously wrong and you are at the helm, you don't turn your back on the people who depend on you—whether they are your employees or most valued stakeholders. Instead, great leaders must remember the following:

—**Be prepared, because something inevitably will go wrong.** While you can't think of every conceivable scenario where a disaster or crisis could occur, it is important to consistently identify the most likely issues and develop realistic and practical plans to deal with them. A leader's job is to ensure that while all precautions are taken, the preparation for a crisis never stops.

—**Great leadership is required throughout a team.** Even in the best circumstances, no one leader can do it alone. He or she needs others to help execute in a crisis. Develop "situational" leaders positioned to do what needs to be done in case of a crisis or emergency.

—**Never underestimate how bad a situation is by engaging in wishful thinking.** Great leaders always consider the worst-case scenario when something goes wrong. It's not a matter of being negative or pessimistic, but rather of asking yourself, "If the worst happens, what do I and my team need to do?" Further, I'm not advocating that you talk to people in a fashion that produces hysteria and panic, however, leaders must show a degree of candor and communicate the severity of the situation and the need to be calm and deliberate in your actions.

—**Great leaders don't panic.** They have a sense of calm, even in the most dangerous and perilous situation. We saw it during 9/11 with the crew and passengers of Flight 93 that crashed into a field in rural Pennsylvania. We saw it with Captain Chesley Sullenberger, known as "Sully," the pilot of the US Airways plane that landed in the Hudson River. His calm demeanor had a direct impact on the demeanor of others around him. Conversely, when a leader panics, it is inevitable that he or she will induce panic in others.

So the next time something goes wrong when you are in charge, remember, great leaders step up and take responsibility. Anything less is unacceptable and only makes a difficult situation worse."

HAVE YOU EVER ABANDONED YOUR LEADERSHIP?

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN ABANDONED BY YOUR LEADER?

HOW DO YOU KNOW GOD WILL NEVER ABANDON YOU?

Judges 5:23-*"Curse Meroz, says the angel of the Lord, curse its inhabitants thoroughly, because they did not come to the help of the Lord against the mighty."*

The location of *Meroz* is a mystery— it's mentioned nowhere else in the Bible, but some scholars have tried to identified it with el-Murussus, a small village near Kishon. Regardless of it's exact location, the "*angel of the Lord*" cursed its inhabitants "*thoroughly*" ("bitterly") because they "*did not come to the help of the Lord"* against the *"mighty"* Canaanites even though they were obviously near enough to do so.

"The guilt of *Meroz* was worse than that of the tribes which held aloof, because, whatever may have been its exact site, it was evidently in the very heart of the country which had been thus inspired to strike a blow for freedom. Possibly it would have been in the power of the inhabitants at least to cut off the retreat of the enemy" ("*Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*").

"Perhaps Meroz stands here a bit obliquely for the entire non-participating Israelite contingency. At least, Israel is to understand that every component of Israel from tribe to basic family unit has obligations to fight for the defense of every other component of Israel. Those who refuse stand under the curse of *Yahweh*" (Trent Butler, *"Word Biblical Commentary—Judges"*).

"July 2012 marked the 75th anniversary of the first step taken by a guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. It is a sight to see the precision and gallantry of the guard as he takes 21 steps, pauses for 21 seconds, and returns for 21 more steps to honor these fallen warriors. The guards do this over and over again without flaw. When I think of them, one word comes to mind, *"duty."* These guards embody what the word, "*duty,*" means…

To whom much is given, much is required. As Christians, we have a *duty* toward others. It is not a choice, but it is required. What a much different place this would be if we all as Christians would rise up and perform our *duty* as diligently as the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown. Therefore, be encouraged that it is not too late to take your post and serve God and others to the fullness of your *duty*. For if you do not take your post and do your *duty,* who will?" (Chaplain (Capt.) Michael Fox, 3rd Battalion, 60th Infantry Regiment, "*Commentary: Christians Have Duty Towards Others"*).

WHAT IS YOUR DUTY AS A CHRISTIAN?

DO YOU ALWAYS DO YOUR DUTY?

WHY? WHY NOT?

Judges 4:17-*"But 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."*

Sisera, the Canaanite commander, left his dying men and "*fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite." "*Heber posed a double threat to Israel. Not only had he separated from the main clan of Kenites, who were allies of Israel (1:16), but he had also formally bound himself by treaty to their enemy" (Daniel I Brock; *"The New American Commentary- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture—Judges, Ruth"*).

Sisera thought he would be safe in Heber's camp. Unfortunately for Sisera, Heber wasn't home; but his wife was!

"According to the usages of nomadic people, the duty of receiving the stranger in the sheik's absence devolves on his wife, and the moment the stranger is admitted into his tent, his claim to be defended or concealed from his pursuers is established" (*Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*).

"It may well be conceived that the unfortunate general arrived there in miserable plight—a starving and ruined fugitive" ("*Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*").

Deborah told Barak before the battle started that the glory of victory would not be his, but would instead belong to another— "*for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman."* That woman is now introduced— not Deborah as expected, but *Jael,* the Bedouin wife of Heber the Kenite. She will be shown as another anti-hero who's actions may be morally ambiguous, but who's courage cannot be questioned.

WHAT IS GLORY?

WHY / HOW DO MEN SEEK GLORY?

WHY / HOW DO SOME MEN SEEK TO STEAL GOD'S GLORY?

Judges 4:18-19-*"And Jael came out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Turn aside, my lord; turn aside to me; do not be afraid." So 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 skin of milk and gave him a drink and covered him."*

Judges 5:24-25-*"Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, of tent-dwelling women most blessed. He asked for water and she gave him milk; she brought him curds in a noble's bowl.*

As *Sisera* approached the camp, *Jael* met him and invited him inside her tent. She covered him in a blanket, "*opened a skin of milk, and gave him a drink."* She even treated him as royalty by serving it in a *"noble's bowl."*

If the story ended here, *Jael* would be thought of as only a typical Bedouin woman offering hospitality to a person in need— a "*blessed*" act of kindness. Twice in these verses, *Jael* is called "*blessed;"* but as will soon be revealed, she's not given this title for her kindness.

Jael knew exactly who *Sisera* was. She invited him into her tent, but it was definitely not to protect him! "*Jael* came to the assistance of the people of God, and for this she is declared *blessed*" (*InterVarsityPress, "Judges 5:24-27: A Murderer Praised?"*).

"Under the same influence that Meroz was *cursed* (vs 5:23), Jael is *blessed*; the one for not helping Israel in a public way, the other for doing it in a private manner" (*Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*).

Biblically, '*blessed'* means 'finding approval from God.' Max Lucado once defined '*blessed'* as "the smile of God upon us"— divine joy, perfect happiness. It implies an inner satisfaction and sufficiency that is not dependent on outward circumstances. If you want to be '*blessed*,' seek God's approval, not man's.

ARE YOU BLESSED? WHY? HOW?

DO YOU SEEK GOD'S APPROVAL? WHY? HOW?

DO YOU SEEK MAN'S APPROVAL? WHY? HOW?

Judges 4:20-21:*"And he said to her, "Stand at the opening of the tent, and if any man comes and asks you, 'Is anyone here?' say, 'No.'" But Jael the wife of Heber took a tent peg, and took a hammer in her hand. Then she went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple until it went down into the ground while he was lying fast asleep from weariness. So he died."*

Judges 5:26-27-*"She sent her hand to the tent peg and her right hand to the workmen's mallet; she struck Sisera; she crushed his head; she shattered and pierced his temple. Between her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still; between her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell—dead."*

Sisera wanted Jael to guard him from the Israelites who were in hot pursuit; but Jael had another idea for inviting him into her tent. Once Sisera was comfortably resting under the blanket, Jael drove a stake through his temple. Then, in one of the funniest lines in the Bible, the verse states, "*So he died*."

"She killed the Canaanite army commander, a major step in rescuing her people. The victory had been completed in the hands of a woman just as Deborah had prophesied (Judges 4:9). Deborah even called Jael "*the most blessed woman*" in her song praising God for the victory" (Judges 5:24) (Carly Califf, *Renew.org. "Deborah and Jael: Unexpected Leaders"*).

"She was a hero for playing an important role in defeating Israel's enemy, but her methods have made readers and commentators uncomfortable. Not just because of the gruesomeness of her actions, but because she deceived Sisera by breaking cultural and social customs. Her deception just doesn't sit well with modern Christian readers… However, the biblical text paints her in a positive light" (*Fruitfully Women, "Jael in the Bible: A Female Assassin"*)

Some Christians today question if Jael was justified in going against her husband's desire to make peace with the Canaanites. They point to the exhortation for wives to be "*subject to*" their husbands. Unfortunately, many understand this as an admonition for a wife to blindly follow her husband after leaving her brain at the altar— but nothing could be Biblically further from the truth.

"Jael's loyalty to *Yahweh* and His people is her justification. It was part of the old command to exterminate the Canaanites (Deut 20:16). Jael came to the assistance of the people of God, and for this she is declared *blessed*" (*InterVarsityPress, "Judges 5:24-27: A Murderer Praised?"*).

"Six Things Submission Is Not"

From Article by John Piper
Founder & Teacher, desiringGod.org

1. *Submission* is **not** agreeing on everything.
2. *Submission* does **not** mean leaving one's brain at the altar.
3. *Submission* does **not** mean a wife shouldn't try to influence her husband.
4. *Submission* is **not** putting the will of a husband before the will of Christ.
5. *Submission* does **not** mean getting all of one's spiritual strength through a husband.
6. *Submission* does **not** mean living or acting in fear.

WHAT IS SUBMISSION?

WHAT IS A WIFE'S ROLE IN A MARRIAGE??

WHAT IS A HUSBAND'S ROLE IN MARRIAGE?

Judges 4:22-*"And behold, as Barak was pursuing Sisera, Jael went out to meet him and said to him, "Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking." So he went in to her tent, and there lay Sisera dead, with the tent peg in his temple."*

Judges 5:28-30-*"Out of the window she peered, the mother of Sisera wailed through the lattice: 'Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the hoofbeats of his chariots?*

Her wisest princesses answer, indeed, she answers herself,

'Have they not found and divided the spoil?— A womb or two for every man; spoil of dyed materials for Sisera, spoil of dyed materials embroidered, two pieces of dyed work embroidered for the neck as spoil?

As one woman delivered Sisera's head on a stake to Barak, another far away peered out her window and "*wailed through the lattice*." Sisera's mother lamented, "*Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the hoofbeats of his chariots?"* She had expected her son to return with the spoils of war— including subjecting the Israelite women to sexual submission and exploitation ("*A womb or two for every man*").

"Wartime sexual violence is one of history's greatest silences and one of today's most extreme atrocities. In many contexts, sexual violence is not merely the action of rogue soldiers, but a deliberate tactic of warfare. It displaces, terrorizes and destroys individuals, families and entire communities, reaching unthinkable levels of cruelty against women of all ages from infants to grandmothers…

It can leave the survivors with emotional trauma and psychological damage, physical injuries, unwanted pregnancies, social stigma and sexually transmitted infections such as HIV. The fear of sexual violence holds communities hostage and prevents women and girls from participating in public life or attending school. The costs and consequences last for generations. And often, mass rape continues after the guns fall silent and peace treaties are signed…

Rape in conflict, when widespread and systematic, is now recognized as a crime against humanity and a war crime. However, it mostly goes unpunished, perpetuating impunity. Sexual violence is routinely ignored in peace negotiations. After war, it is far more likely that perpetrators will be rewarded as part of disarmament and peace-building agreements than that their victims will receive care, justice or redress. On the contrary, rape survivors are often rejected by their own families and communities…

In many post-conflict countries, gender-based violence tops the list of crimes that the police have to address, even though it is severely under-reported. Even cases brought to the attention of the police are rarely investigated properly, seldom lead to arrests, and hardly ever culminate in convictions" (*United Nations Development Fund For Women, "Rape as a Tactic of War"*).

As Major General (ret.) Patrick Cammaert (a former UN Division Commander) once said:

"It is perhaps more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in an armed conflict"

WHAT IS WARTIME SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

WHY IS IT CONSIDERED A CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY?

WHY IS IT A WAR CRIME?

Judges 4:23-24-*"So on that day God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan before the people of Israel. And the hand of the people of Israel pressed harder and harder against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they destroyed Jabin king of Canaan."*

Judges 5:31-*"So may all your enemies perish, O Lord! But your friends be like the sun as he rises in his might."*

And the land had rest for forty years."

At the end of the day, neither Deborah, Barak, or Jael get the ultimate credit for victory. That honor went to God alone as it was He who "*subdued Jabin the king of Canaan before the people of Israel."* God led the Israelites to press "*harder and harder*" until they eventually destroyed "*Jabin king of Canaan."*

This marked the fourth cycle of apostasy, oppression, wailing, and redemption chronicled in the book of Judges.

"And the land had rest for forty years."

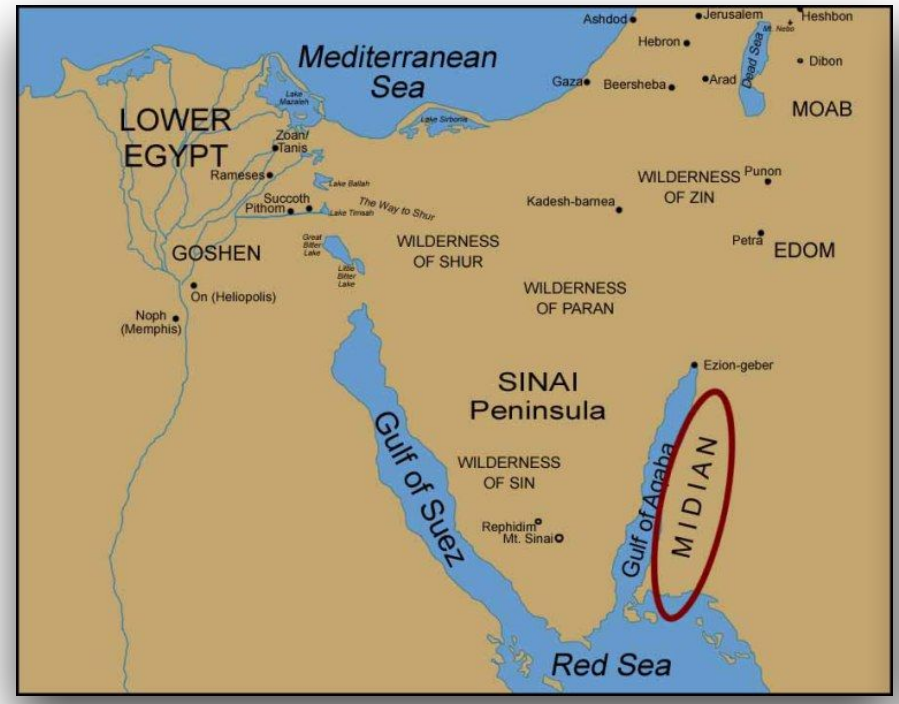
CHAPTER SIX

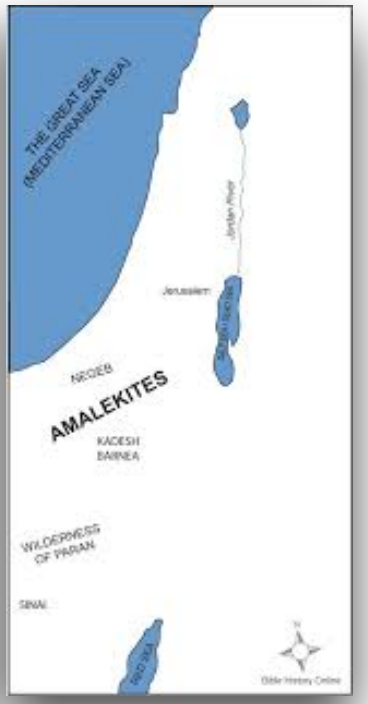
Judges 6:1-2-*"The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian overpowered Israel, and because of Midian the people of Israel made for themselves the dens that are in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds."*

This opening passage introduces the next four chapters of the book of Judges describing a family dynasty. It's a tale replete with many twists and turns— divided loyalty, great fear, reluctant obedience, tremendous bravery, and despicable treachery. But it starts once again with apostate Israel who "*the Lord gave into the hand of Midian* ***seven years****"* after *"****the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.****"*

"The Midianites were a nomadic tribe, meaning they wandered from place to place. While the Midianite tribe was associated with the Israelites through Abraham's lineage, they were not considered part of God's chosen people as the Israelites were. More specifically, the Israelites were descendants of Abraham and his first wife, Sarah, through Isaac, while the Midianites were descendants of Abraham and his second wife, Keturah, through Midian" (*Study.com. "Midian Bible, Life & Culture"*).

"When Moses fled the wrath of Pharaoh, he traveled to Midian (Ex 2:15). There, Moses met and married his wife, Zipporah, and served his father-in-law, Jethro, as a shepherd for forty years. The fact that Jethro was "a priest of Midian" (Ex 2:16) indicates that the Midianites, at least during Moses' time, still retained the knowledge of the God of their father Abraham. At the end of Moses' time in Midian, God appeared to Moses—still in Midian—and commissioned him to lead the Israelites out of slavery (Ex 3-4)…





As the children of Israel traveled through the wilderness, they employed the services of a guide familiar with the desert—Moses' Midianite brother-in-law, Hobab (Num 10:29). However, the relations between the Israelites and the Midianites began to sour when the Midianites joined forces with the Moabites in order to hire Balaam to curse Israel (Num 22)…

Later, when Israel fell into idolatry and sexual sin with the Moabite women (Num 25), we find that a prominent Midianite woman was also involved (Num 25:6). The Lord then told Moses to wage war against the Midianites: "*Treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them. They treated you as enemies when they deceived you in the Peor incident involving their sister Kozbi, the daughter of a Midianite leader*" (Num 25:17–19). The Israelites did eventually attack the Midianites, meting out divine retribution against their enemies (Num 31). Five kings of the Midianites were killed, as was Balaam (Num 31:8). This battle was one of the last things Moses accomplished as leader of the Israelites" (*Gotquestions.org*, "*Who Were The Midianites?*").

We're now told that this tribe of marauders had invaded the Promised Land. They'd overpowered the Israelites— forcing them to seek shelter in "the *dens that are in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds"* for **seven long years**. Fortunately for Israel, God would once again raise up a 'judge' to lead them out of their oppression— a young man named Gideon.

WHAT IS AN ENEMY?

HOW CAN FRIENDS BECOME ENEMIES?

HOW CAN ENEMIES BECOME FRIENDS?

Judges 6:3-5-*"For whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them.*

They would encamp against them and devour the produce of the land, as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel and no sheep or ox or donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents; they would come like locusts in number—both they and their camels could not be counted—so that they laid waste the land as they came in."

The Amalekites were the first nation to attack the Israelites after Moses led them out of Egypt (Ex 17). Years later, they now join the Midianites to "*come up against*" Israel in the southern part of the Promised Land "*as far as Gaza.*" "*Like locusts in number,*" the Midianites, Amalekites, and *"people of the East*" (generic name for Arabs) "*would come up with their livestock and their tents"* and lay waste to the crops and grazing lands of Israel.

"The invasions of these Arab tribes were of the most crushing and irritating kind. Living in idleness and marauding expeditions, they let the Israelites sow their corn, and came themselves to reap and carry it away" (*Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*).

Today, there is much discussion regarding border security in our country. Some believe borders are unnecessary and repressive to society as a whole.

"The solution to endless war, some argue, is to eliminate borders in favor of trans-national governance. H. G. Wells' prewar science-fiction novel "The Shape of Things to Come" envisioned borders eventually disappearing as trans-national polymaths enforced enlightened world governance. Such fictions prompt fads in the real world, though attempts to render borders unimportant have always failed…

Undaunted, the 'Left' continues to cherish the vision of a borderless world as morally superior, a triumph over artificially imposed difference. **Yet the truth is that formal borders do not create difference — they reflect it.** Elites' continued attempts to erase borders are both futile and destructive. (Victor Davis Hanson, *Los Angeles Times Op Ed: Why Borders Matter And A Borderless World Is A Fantasy"*).

National boundaries help countries exist next to each other without encroaching on each other's resources. All nations have, and always will defend their boundaries if they happen to be encroached upon by a neighbor.

God ordained borders— they are mentioned almost 200 times throughout Scripture:

Deut 32:7-8-*"Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you. When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when He divided mankind,* ***He fixed the borders of the peoples*** *according to the number of the sons of God."*

God even gave very specific orders regarding Israel's borders. That border was to be defended with their lives.

Nu 34:1-12-*"The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Command the people of Israel, and say to them, When you enter the land of Canaan (this is the land that shall fall to you for an inheritance,* ***the land of Canaan as defined by its borders)****, your south side shall be from the wilderness of Zin alongside Edom, and your southern border shall run from the end of the Salt Sea on the east.*

And your border shall turn south of the ascent of Akrabbim, and cross to Zin, and its limit shall be south of Kadesh-barnea. Then it shall go on to Hazar-addar, and pass along to Azmon. And the border shall turn from Azmon to the Brook of Egypt, and its limit shall be at the sea."

"Having borders does not mean we should not allow visitors, immigrants and new citizens. **But borders are of God. They should be respected**. Foreigners are to be loved and respected— but they must abide by the same laws that existing citizens have to obey" (Philip W. Shields, *Tactical Christianity, "Did God Create Borders?"*).

"The Bible recognizes our inherent power to defend our borders and exercise our sovereignty. '(*God*) *made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods* ***and the boundaries of their dwelling place****'* (Acts 17:26)…

Borders and walls are found throughout the Bible, from God setting them around the *Garden of Eden* after the fall (Gen 3:24), to the establishment of *Israel* (Ex 23:31), to the city of *New Jerusalem* (Rev 21:10-21)…

If there will be nations, walls and governments in the *new heaven and new earth* (Reve 21:23-24), how much more do we need them in this life! "(Richard Harris, Guest Column, *Pikes Peak Currier, "A Biblical Perspective on The Border Crisis"*).

WHAT IS A BORDER?

DO WE NEED BORDERS? WHY? WHAT KIND?

WHY DID GOD ORDAIN BORDERS?

Judges 6:6-*"And Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel cried out for help to the Lord."*

The Israelites weren't just knocked down by their disobedience, they were "*brought* ***very low.***" For the fifth time in the book of Judges (but who's counting?), "***the people of Israel cried out for help to the Lord***" because of oppression from a foreign nation.

Many a Christian has asked, "Why does God allow so much adversity in my life?" But the truth is adversity is just part of life on this earth. Jesus said, *"In the world you will have tribulation"* (John 16:33). But, whether that adversity is of our own making or from circumstances beyond our control, there is always a spiritual purpose:

"(1) Troubles Mature our Faith. They help us grow. Soldiers and athletes have to go through strict training to become stronger. God allows us adversity so we can lean upon His strength and become stronger through His Spirit. In Hebrews 12:11, we read that we face adversity and discipline because it is a benefit "for those who have been trained by it." Our troubles are part of our spiritual training…

(2) Troubles are Proof of Spiritual Warfare. Whenever a follower of Jesus steps up in his/her level of commitment, he/she can count on a spiritual attack. Are you ready to get out of the bleachers and in the game? Be careful, there is an enemy who will try to injure you to take you out of the game (1 Peter 5:8). If he can't do that, he will try to suppress you into a passive role so you are less of a target for him to attack…

(3) Troubles Intensify our Prayer Life. I know many people who are strong in faith and prayer. Yet when they face a major challenge like illness, a sick family member, loss of a family member, financial problems, or loss of a job, it seems their prayer life has even greater fervor and raw honesty…

(4) Troubles Teach us to Wait. All great people of faith have times of testing and waiting. Look at the great people in the Bible. Not one was perfect, but all had long seasons of waiting— on God, for deliverance, for a son, for a flood, for the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, they waited decades! The encouragement we find for waiting is that God will show up in a great way in His time…

(5) Troubles Keep us Humble. The Apostle Paul had a thorn in his flesh. There is debate as to what this thorn was specifically (possibly he suffered from headaches or vision problems) but whatever the physical ailment was, Paul asked God to take it away three times. This is the same Paul who had done miracles casting out demons and raising people from the dead. And yet, he had no personal power over his "thorn…"

(6) Troubles Reveal our True Friends. When one of our friends goes through a tough time of loss or pain it is hard to know just how to help. Sometimes, we don't even know what to say. We can allow the awkwardness of trying to help a hurting friend be an excuse to just keep our distance, when in reality, just being there with them is what matters…

Jesus understands our troubles. He knew what it was like when all of his disciples abandoned him when He was on trial. Thankfully, Jesus will not abandon us in our lowest times. He becomes a friend who is closer to us than a brother. *"One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother"* (Proverbs 18:24)…

(7) Troubles Prepare us to Help Others. Elisabeth Elliot, the widow of the martyred missionary Jim Elliot, reminds us in her book entitled "Suffering is Never for Nothing" that God never wastes pain. We find this also in God's Word: *"Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain"* (1 Cor 15:58)…

The good news is Jesus just didn't leave us with only a promise of trouble. He also promised victory for our lives over the trouble through Him: "*I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world*." (John 16:33)." (Randy Roberts, "*Why Does God Allow Troubles in Our Lives?*").

WHAT ADVERSITIES HAVE YOU FACED?

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

WHAT ADVERSITIES ARE YOU FACING NOW?

WHAT IS GOD TEACHING YOU NOW?

Judges 6:7-10-*"When the people of Israel cried out to the Lord on account of the Midianites, the Lord sent a prophet to the people of Israel. And he said to them, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of slavery.*

And I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out 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 dwell.'

But you have not obeyed my voice."

The Israelites cried out and God responded, but not before giving them a well deserved lecture about why they were experiencing their self-imposed troubles. He'd led them out of slavery in Egypt, delivered them safely to the Promised Land, drove out hostile nations before them, and gave the Israelites the land. All they had to do was recognize Him as their Lord their God and not worship ("*fear*") the other 'gods' of the land. But they'd failed. God told them bluntly, "*you have not obeyed my voice."*

When I was a child, my mother was the disciplinarian in our family. She was quick with "the ruler" which she wielded with impunity to my backside for my many transgressions. But I knew I was in real trouble when she said, "Wait 'til your father gets home." I'd then beg her to immediately give me the swat I deserved— anything to get out of the hour long lecture my father would administer! That was a fate worse than death.

How often have you had to be disciplined by God for your disobedience? "God can and does use various methods of discipline. He may use trouble at work, hardship at home, or travail in the ministry; Paul had many difficulties in life (2 Cor 11:23–29). God may allow us to experience loss, as David did (2 Sam 12:13–18). God may send physical ailments or even death, as the church of Corinth learned (1 Cor 11:17–22, 30–32). Often, God will simply allow the natural consequences of our sin to run their course. We are forgiven, but we are corrected "*so that we will not be finally condemned with the world"* (1 Cor 11:32)…

He is a good Father who wants what's best for His children. Humanly speaking, no child will reach his or her full potential without training and discipline. The virtuoso violinist would never have reached the concert hall without discipline. The record-setting athlete would never have excelled in any sport without discipline. Following that principle, here are some reasons that we experience God's discipline:

- God disciplines His children because He loves them.
- God disciplines His children to make them more mature.
- God disciplines His children to increase their capacity for virtue.
- God disciplines His children to keep them on the right path.
- God disciplines His children to grow their faith.
- God disciplines His children to purify them from sin…

The result of God's discipline is holiness and maturity: "*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything*" (James 1:2–4). The Lord continues to work with us, as a potter does the clay, and His discipline is for our good and His glory (*GotQuestions.org*, "*When, how, and why does the Lord God discipline us when we sin?*").

HOW / WHY WERE YOU DISCIPLINED AS A CHILD?

HOW /WHY DO YOU DISCIPLINE YOUR CHILDREN?

HOW / WHY DOES GOD DISCIPLINE YOU?

Judges 6:11-12-*"Now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, "The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor.""*

This verse introduces the next anti-hero in the book of Judges—*Gideon*, the son of "*Joash the Abiezrite."* The Abiezrites were a clan of the tribe of Manasseh whose land was originally apportioned on either side of the Jordan River. This clan however was located west of the river in the *Jezreel Valley* (vs 35).

Gideon "*was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites."* "Ancient people threshed their grain by 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 fall to the floor. This is normally done on hilltops to take advantage of the wind…

Because this would have aroused the attention of the marauding Midianites, Gideon resorts to beating the grain under an oak in a sheltered vat used for pressing grapes" (Daniel I Block, "Judges" —*Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary, John H Walton, General Editor*).

While Gideon worked the grain, "*the angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth"* (The terebinth or turpentine tree bears a resemblance to the oak, but it grows singly, not in clumps). Whether this is a theophany of Jesus or just an angel from God is debated by scholars as sometimes angelic messengers are known to speak in the first person to signify the message is directly from God Himself. Regardless, this "*angel of the Lord*" had an important two part message for Gideon: "*The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor."*

"The Lord is with you" is an assurance given to those chosen for God's purpose. However, as will be seen in many aspects of Gideon's life, "divine presence only seems to confer the potential for human success; it does not confirm success as an inevitable result. Instead divine power is limited by the exercise of human freedom to obey or disobey God, to use or misuse human skills" (R. G. Bowman, *"Narrative Criticism: Human Purpose in Conflict with Divine Presence," in"Judges and Method,"* ed. G. A. Yee).

The angel of the Lord's second proclamation stated Gideon was a "*mighty man of valor."* Some argue that Gideon may have previously distinguished himself in battle, but "apparently this was what God was calling Gideon to become and what God's presence would make him" (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary- Judges"*).

IS THE LORD WITH YOU? HOW/ WHY?

HOW HAVE YOU LIMITED GOD'S WORK BY MISUSING THE SKILLS GOD HAS GIVEN YOU?

WHAT IS GOD CALLING YOU TO DO WITH HIS PRESENCE BESIDE YOU?

Judges 6:13-"*And Gideon said to him, "Please, my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian."*

Whether Gideon was being sarcastic or actually wanted an honest answer to his questions is subject to debate. Gideon obviously knew of the "*wonderful deeds"* of God that their "*fathers recounted."* He'd been taught the history of his peoples' Exodus from Egypt and their deliverance to the Promised Land.

But he was now living under "*the hand of Midian"* and couldn't comprehend where all those wonderful deeds he'd heard about were now. He asked, "*Please, my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?"* Either the apostasy that led to this oppression didn't cross his mind or he truly was mocking God.

In the book of Job, the oldest book in the Bible, Job states, *"As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.*" "We reap what we sow" is a phrase repeated over and over in Scripture—yet, God is still openly mocked time and time again.

"To mock God is to disrespect, dishonor, or ignore Him. It is a serious offense committed by those who have no fear of God or who deny His existence. The most easily recognized form of mockery is disrespect typified by verbal insults or other acts of disdain. It is associated with ridicule, scoffing, and defiance. Mockery is a dishonoring attitude that shows low estimation, contempt, or even open hostility…

In the Bible mockery is a behavior and attitude shown by:

- the fool (Psalm 74:22),
- the wicked (Psalm 1:1),
- the enemy (Psalm 74:10),
- the hater of knowledge (Prov 1:22; 13:1),
- the proud (Psalm 119:51; Isaiah 37:17),
- and the unteachable (Prov 15:12)…

A mocker goes beyond mere lack of judgment to making a conscious decision for evil. Mockers are without a spirit of obedience, teachability, discernment, wisdom, worship, or faith…

It is easy for us as believers to point the finger at those outside the church who mock God. But the most subtle mockery of God, and the most dangerous, comes from those of us sitting in church. We are guilty of mockery when we behave with an outward show of spirituality or godliness without an inward engagement or change of heart… There are repercussions for ignoring God's directives and willfully choosing sin" (GotQuestions.org, *"What Does It Mean That God Is Not Mocked?"*).

As we'll soon see, Gideon's allegiance to *Yahweh* was genuine, but divided. He just couldn't see past his nose all the culpability he and his people carried on their shoulders for their worshiping other 'gods.' They were now reaping what they sowed.

Gal 6:7-*"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap."*

WHAT ARE YOU SOWING?

WHAT ARE YOU REAPING?

HAVE YOU EVER OUTWARDLY SHOWN SPIRITUALITY AND GODLINESS WITHOUT AN INWARD ENGAGEMENT OR CHANGE OF HEART ON THE INSIDE?

Judges 6:14-16-*"And the Lord turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?" And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."*

And the Lord said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man."

Despite Gideon's attitude, "*the Lord turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian"* And with His own sense of sarcasm God adds, *"Do not I send you?"* God can definitely dish it out as well as take it!

Gideon then asked an honest question, "*How can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."* He was young and his clan was the the weakest in the tribe of Manasseh— why was he being chosen for this responsibility? God's answer was as simple as it was direct— "*I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man."*

How often have you asked, "Why me?" What was God thinking when He put you in one position or circumstance after another to spread His Word? Can't He find someone smarter, wiser, stronger, or even more Biblically sound? Probably, but it's you He wants. Why? Because he'll be with you every step of the way.

It's your job to act as His postman. Just because you deliver mail to someone doesn't mean you have to pay that person's bills. You don't save people, God does. If you trip over your shoelaces and fall flat on your face, it's because that's part of God's plan— that person you're talking to will certainly remember you and maybe the message you delivered. You don't have to understand God's ways (I certainly don't sometimes), but don't waste the opportunities God gives you— carry out His one overriding command:

> *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* (Matt 28:19-20)

"Why Me Lord"

(Song by Kris Kristofferson)

"Why me Lord, what have I ever done
To deserve even one
Of the pleasures I've known
Tell me Lord, what did I ever do
That was worth loving You
Or the kindness You've shown

Lord, help me Jesus, I've wasted it
So help me Jesus, I know what I am
But now that I know that I've needed You
So Help me Jesus, my soul's in Your hand

Try me Lord, if You think there's a way
I can try to repay
All I've taken from You
Maybe Lord, I can show someone else
What I've been through myself
On my way back to You

Lord, help me Jesus, I've wasted it
So help me Jesus, I know what I am
But now that I know that I've needed You
So help me Jesus, my soul's in Your hand

Lord, help me Jesus, I've wasted it
So help me Jesus, I know what I am
But now that I know that I've needed You
So help me Jesus, my soul's in Your hand
Jesus, my soul's in Your hand"

HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU ASKED, "WHY ME, LORD?"

DID YOU GET AN ANSWER?

WHAT WAS IT?

Judges 6:17-19-*"And he said to him, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. Please do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you." And he said, "I will stay till you return.*

So Gideon went into his house and prepared a young goat and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot, and brought them to him under the terebinth and presented them."

Gideon required proof that this angel of the Lord was who he appeared to be. He requests a sign that God's words were really being spoken. Gideon asks him to stay until he could come back with a "*present*" and set it before him; and the angel of the Lord agrees to stay put.

Gideon goes home, cooks "*a young goat*," and prepares "*unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour.*" "The fact that the kid is prepared as meat and bought to the place rather than bought live and slaughtered there suggests more a meal than a sacrifice (J. Walton et al, *IVP Bible Background Commentary*).

"Unleavened bread is, of course, involved in many offerings; but it is sometimes served in quickly prepared meals (Gen 19:3). This was a substantial meal for such a time of scarcity, since the "*ephah"* of flour was about half a bushel" (*Zanderland NIV Bible Commentary- Volume 1: Old Testament*, Barker& Kohlenberger III, Consulting Editors).

"That he is preparing a meal for 'the gods'/ 'a god' is evident from the nature and size of the offering" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

Satisfied that his "*present*" was substantial enough to impress his guest, Gideon put the meat in a basket, the broth in a pot, "*and brought them to him under the terebinth and presented them."* Gideon's sign would soon come.

WHAT WOULD YOU OFFER AN ANGEL OF THE LORD?

WHAT DO OFFER GOD?

IS YOUR OFFER MEAGER OR SUBSTANTIAL?

Judges 6:20-23-*"And the angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened cakes, and put them on this rock, and pour the broth over them." And he did so.*

Then the angel of the Lord reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes. And fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes. And the angel of the Lord vanished from his sight.

Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the Lord. And Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face."

But the Lord said to him, "Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die."

The angel of the Lord touched the meat and unleavened bread with the tip of his staff "*and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes."* "It's significance is clear: when a deity consumes the meal a worshiper has brought, this is a sign the latter has found favor in the deity's sight" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

After giving Gideon his sign, this messenger vanishes and Gideon realizes he really was in the presence of the angel of the Lord. He becomes worried that he'd actually seen God's face— usually an instant death sentence. But from somewhere unknown, "*the Lord said to him, "Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die."* Gideon may proceed with the mission God had assigned— the defeat of the Midiantes.

Sometimes we know God wants us to do something, but are just not quite sure what that path looks like and we look for signs. "Here are 5 things that will happen in your life when you are truly following God's will for your life:

1. When you are following God's will for your life, you will not always choose the easiest path forward …

2. When you are following God's will for your life, you will not be perfect but you will be progressively moving forward in maturity…

3. When you are following God's will for your life, you will start to think differently than the world around you…

4. When you are following God's will for your life, you will be intentionally making it your goal to follow Him…

5. When you are following God's will for your life, the promises on the pages of Scripture will start manifesting in your life…

When God says something, it always happens. Therefore, whenever the Bible promises a certain result for a certain action, you will always see those results when you take those Biblical actions. Many people feel like this truth has let them down <u>not</u> because the word of God has failed them <u>but because they were taught false promises that are not in the Bible</u>…

<u>God has not promised us health, wealth, and all of our wildest dreams come true when we follow his will</u>. But according to Ephesians 1:3, he has promised us every <u>spiritual blessing</u> in Christ Jesus when we put our faith in him…

Therefore, when you are truly following God's will for your life, the promises of Scripture will manifest in your life. For as Jesus said, "*If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority*" (John 7:17). (Mark Ballenger, *"How to Know if You Are Truly Following God's Will for Your Life"*)

WHAT SIGNS ARE YOU LOOKING FOR? WHY?

WHERE ARE YOU LOOKING FOR THOSE SIGNS?

HAVE YOU OPENED YOUR BIBLE TO LOOK FOR THOSE SIGNS? WHY? WHY NOT?

Judges 6:24-"*Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and called it, The Lord Is Peace. To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites.*"

Gideon builds an altar to commemorate his encounter and calls it "*The Lord is Peace*" (*"yhwh salom"*). To offer validity to the account, the author of the book of Judges stated that it still stood "*at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites.*" Anyone could check it out at their leisure.

"An altar is a structure on which offerings are made to a deity. The *Hebrew* word for altar is *mizbeah* [*eBzim*], from a verbal root meaning "*to slaughter*." *Greek* renders this word as *thusiasterion* [*qusiasthvrion*], "*a place of sacrifice*"… An altar is a place where sacrifice is offered, even if it is not an event involving slaughter…

Altars could be natural objects or man-made constructs. Four materials are recorded as being used in altars: stone, earth, metal, and brick. Archaeology has provided numerous examples of altars from Palestine dating back to approximately 3000 b.c. Natural rocks were also used (Judg 6:20). An altar could stand alone, or it was located in the courtyard of a shrine…

Altars were places where the divine and human worlds interacted. Altars were places of exchange, communication, and influence. God responded actively to altar activity" (*Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology - "Altar"*).

"The term *altar* appears 378 times in the Bible, maintaining a consistent thread throughout the Old and New Testaments…

- In the Old Testament, the altar is portrayed as a venue for sacrificial offerings, worship, establishing covenants, and divine dialogue…

- The New Testament reframes the concept into a metaphor, with Christ's body on the cross forming a spiritual *altar* in lieu of a physical construct…

- Despite the contrasting depictions, both Testaments maintain the *altar* as a significant symbol of the divine-human relationship" (*Christian Power Tools For Living, "Bible Study: Understanding the Significance of Altars"*).

WHAT IS AN ALTAR?

ARE ALTARS STILL NEEDED?

WHO IS THE SPIRITUAL ALTAR?

Judges 6:25-27-*"That night the Lord said to him, "Take your father's bull, and the second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it and build an altar to the Lord your God on the top of the stronghold here, with stones laid in due order. Then take the second bull and offer it as a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah that you shall cut down."*

So Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the Lord had told him. But because he was too afraid of his family and the men of the town to do it by day, he did it by night."

In these verses, we find that the altar Gideon built to the one true God sat within spitting distance of his father's altar to Baal. This mark of apostasy could not stand— the altar to this pagan '*god*' along with its *Asherah pole* had to be taken down. An *Asherah* pole was a sacred tree or pole that stood near Canaanite religious locations to honor the pagan goddess Asherah, also known as Astarte. This pagan altar was substantially built as it would take a bull and ten men to take it down.

But Gideon couldn't just stop there. He was instructed to erect another altar to *Yahweh* over where the pagan altar stood. And with the wood obtained from the Asherah pole, he was to offer his father's prized seven year old bull as a Burnt Offering. This would be a direct challenge to the religious establishment— God would reclaim this paganized land for Himself.

"The ambiguities in Gideon's character are evident in the narrator's description of his response to the divine charge. On the one hand his obedience is immediate… But the necessity to act at night leaves us disappointed with Israel because Gideon's fear arises out of an awareness of the true spiritual condition of the nation in pre- monarchic times. Gideon knows that his own family and his townsfolk will come to the defense of these pagan idols before they defend him, their kinsman, and fellow citizen" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

ARE YOU AFRAID TO FOLLOW GOD "IN THE DAY" WHERE ALL CAN SEE?

DO YOU ONLY FOLLOW GOD "IN THE NIGHT" WHERE YOU CAN HIDE YOUR LOYALTY?

WHY? HOW?

Judges 6:28-30-*"When the men of the town rose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was broken down, and the Asherah beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar that had been built. And they said to one another, "Who has done this thing?" And after they had searched and inquired, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing."*

Then the men of the town said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has broken down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah beside it."

It seems Gideon had reason to be intimidated in following God's instruction. When the men of the city awoke the next morning they discovered Baal's altar had been replaced with the new altar to *Yahweh.*

After a quick investigation, they discovered Gideon was the culprit who had done "*this thing*" and went to his father "*that he may die*" for his infraction. "The Israelites of Ophrah have proven themselves to be perfect Canaanites, protecting Baal in the face of Yahweh's self-evident victory" (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary- Judges"*).

They were living a life of compromise— they recognized the God who gave them the land in which they now lived, but subjected themselves to the 'gods' surrounding them. They wanted their cake and eat it too.

"Maybe it's the gods your parents worshipped or the gods of the culture you live in, but if you're anything like me, your life is filled with idols. Even those of us who are really good at checking off the required boxes may need to take a step back and ask ourselves: What am I worshipping by my life? How am I using my time? How am I using my money? What makes me lose my peace?…

The trouble is that we're trying to live a life of compromise. We want to serve the gods that give us pleasure and throw a little Jesus in to make us feel good about ourselves…

Most of us aren't giving our lives to God and allowing ourselves some down time on occasion, we're giving our lives to this world and giving God what's left over" (Meg Hunter-Kil*mer, Aleteia.org, "How We Bow Down to False Gods"*).

WHAT IS COMPROMISE?

WHAT HAVE YOU HAD TO COMPROMISE IN YOUR LIFE ? WHY? HOW?

WHAT HAVE YOU COMPROMISED ABOUT GOD? WHY? HOW?

Judges 6:31-32-"*But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Will you contend for Baal? Or will you save him? Whoever contends for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been broken down."*

Therefore on that day Gideon was called Jerubbaal, that is to say, "Let Baal contend against him," because he broke down his altar."

Gideon's father made a convincing argument for preserving Gideon's life— since Baal was the offended party, he could defend himself.

"It is plain that Joash had been a worshipper of Baal; either he was now convinced by Gideon's information and action or he makes use of this pretense to preserve his son— being indeed indifferent in matters of religion. And therefore, as he did worship Baal to comply with his neighbors, so now he deserts him to rescue his son" ("*Matthew Poole's Commentary"*).

"Possibly the brave act of his son may have roused his conscience and Gideon may have told him that he had acted under Divine guidance. But he saves his son's life, not by excusing his act, but by feigning such a zeal for Baal as to denounce it as a blasphemous impiety to suppose that Baal will not avenge his own insult— an impiety so monstrous that the man who was guilty of it should be at once put to death" ("*Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers"*).

Regardless of the spiritual reasons for his argument, Joash managed to turn the tide from those calling for Gideon's death to arguing for death to those who would follow Baal in this controversy. He saved his son with his words and Gideon received the nickname *Jerubbaal*— meaning, "*Let Baal contend against him."*

There's an old proverb that states, "actions speak louder than words." And, in many cases, this is certainly true. But sometimes words can be more powerful than actions.

"With words you can influence someone into thinking something. It is the way we communicate and learn. Actions can cause physical pain to us and force us to undergo a certain circumstance, but words can actually take over our body…

Think about it, Hitler used words to overcome an entire nation; he killed 6,000,000 people with words. He lied, but did he physically punch anyone to achieve these goals? Did he physically do anything? No, he used words…

People are influenced daily through the power of words. Words cannot only make us think, but they can change the way we actually live our lives. Words can allow someone to take over your mind completely, while actions can only force you to do something out of fear. (*Teen Ink, "Words Speak Louder Than Actions"*).

HOW DO YOU USE YOUR WORDS?

DO YOU USE YOUR WORDS TO SPREAD THE GOSPEL? HOW? WHY?

ARE YOU A GOOD CHRISTIAN APOLOGIST? WHY? WHY NOT?

Judges 6:33-35-*"Now all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East came together, and they crossed the Jordan and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel.*

But the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon, and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, and they too were called out to follow him. And he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they went up to meet them."

Saved from death by his father's quick thinking and rhetoric, Gideon is next clothed in "*the Spirit of the Lord*" to begin leading his countrymen out of their oppression.

"To be filled with the Spirit in the *New Testament* speaks of spirituality; that is, the one who is filled with the Spirit is controlled by the Spirit with the consequent actions being spiritual activities. In the *Old Testament* the notion is that of empowerment for a particular task, though it is apparent that the recipient might misuse this empowerment…

Therefore in the case of Gideon, the Spirit's work reflects God's sovereign will to set things in motion for the deliverance He has planned, not Gideon's condition of faith or spirituality" (K.L. Younger, Jr, "*Ancient Conquests Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near East and Biblical History*").

As the "*Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East came together, and they crossed the Jordan,"* Gideon gathered his forces— his Abiezrite clan and the rest of the Manasseh tribe along with the tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Nephatali. They would meet the enemy "e*ncamped in the* ***Valley of Jezreel****"* (also called the "***Plain Of Megiddo****"*).

"*Tel Megiddo* is located about 15 miles east of the Mediterranean Ocean and about 25 miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee. ***Megiddo*** lay at the juncture of several key routes (the main route is called the *Via Maris)* which linked Africa to Asia and Europe. For this reason, any country that rose to world power had to control *Megiddo* due to its strategic location. **More battles have been fought in this location than any other place in the entire world**…

The name, ***Armageddon*** is derived from "*Har-Megiddo*" which is translated, "*Armageddon.*" *Har* means hill, and *Megeddon* is the place. When these words are joined together it is *Armageddon*. Today, this place is called *Megiddo* in English. It's located in the most fertile valley in Israel called, the ***Jezreel Valley***…

It is a "Tel," which is made up of layer upon layer of different civilizations that make up an artificial hill. *Tel Megiddo* is made up of 25–26 layers of civilizations…

Part of the last battle of *Armageddon* will be fought in *Megiddo* and the other part in *Jerusalem.* The war seems to happen simultaneously. This battle will take place at the end of the ***Great Tribulation Period***— a time when God pours out His wrath on a world who has rejected Him after all He has done for them" (*Holylandsite.com, "Bringing the Bible to Life by Seeing Where It Took Place!"*).

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE VALLEY OF JAZREEL?

WHY HAVE MORE BATTLES TAKEN PLACE HERE THAN ANY OTHER PLACE IN THE WORLD?

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ARMAGEDDON?

Judges 6:36-40-*"Then Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said, behold, I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said."*

And it was so. When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water.

Then Gideon said to God, "Let not your anger burn against me; let me speak just once more. Please let me test just once more with the fleece. Please let it be dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground let there be dew."

And God did so that night; and it was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew."

Despite Gideon's earlier encounter with the Angel of the Lord under the terebinth at Oprah, despite the wondrous signs already given him, and despite God now giving him 32,000 troops to command, Gideon still questioned if God would truly use him to save Israel. He asked for not one, but two more signs— he wanted to test God's veracity.

"Gideon's problem is that with his limited experience with God he cannot believe that God always fulfills His word. The request for signs is not a sign of faith but unbelief… The remarkable fact is that God responds to his tests. He is more anxious to deliver Israel than to quibble with this man's semi- pagan notions of deity" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

"To question God is not in itself wrong… Many godly men in the Bible expressed doubts to God about their ability to serve Him…. Although God does not always answer our questions the way we want or expect, God welcomes any sincere question from an earnest heart…

Insincere questions, or questions from a hypocritical heart, are a different matter. The Pharisees and Jewish leaders often presented their questions to trick or trap Jesus (John 7:53–8:11; Matt 21:23–27; 22:15–22;), but He refused to answer them. The Bible says, "*Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him*" (Heb 11:6). Unbelief is a failure to trust the Lord (Psalm 78:22) and a sign of rebellion and disobedience against God (Heb 3:12; 11:31)…

In short, an honest question is not wrong or sinful. But cross-examination from a bitter, untrusting, or rebellious heart is the fruit of unbelief. God is not intimidated, shocked, or displeased by our heartfelt questions… Our inner intentions determine whether it is right or wrong to question God." (*GotQuestions.org, "Is it wrong to question God?"*).

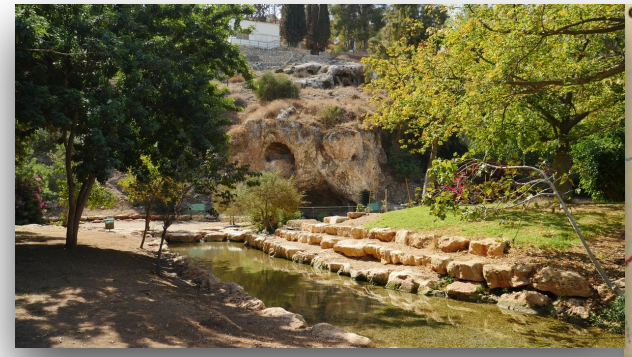
WHAT IS A QUESTION?

WHY DO YOU QUESTION GOD?

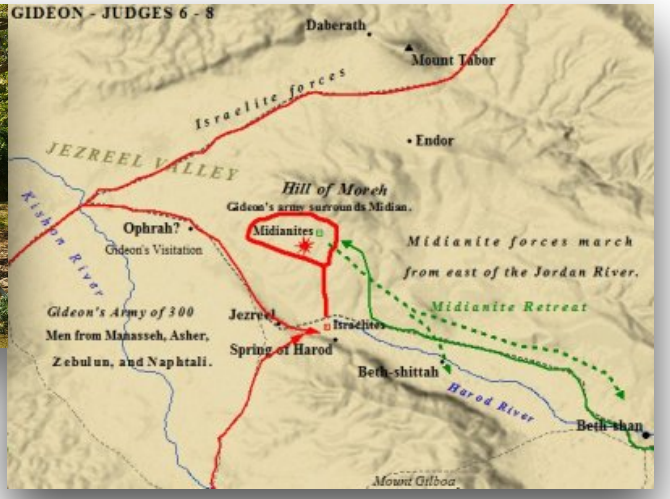
WHAT IS THE FIRST QUESTION YOU WILL ASK HIM IN HEAVEN?

CHAPTER SEVEN

Judges 7:1-"*Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod. And the camp of Midian was north of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley."*



HAROD'S SPRING TODAY



The last chapter ended with Gideon questioning God's veracity. Apparently satisfied with God's answer after He gave two more signs of His power, Gideon prepares his 32,000 troops for battle. "*All the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod"*— an all-year spring in the easternmost part of the *Jezreel Valley* on the northwest corner of *Mount Gilboa*.

Across the valley, four miles to the north, the Midianite army of 135,000 was encamped on the *Hill of Moreh*. Based on troop strength alone, the 4:1 odds against the Israelites' success was dismal and would soon get much worse by God's own design.

The phrase "what are the odds" essentially means what are the chances of something occurring. It's the probability of an event occurring divided by the probability of the event not occurring.

There are over 300 prophesies about a coming Messiah in the Old Testament. The chances of one person fulfilling just 8 of those prophecies is $10^{17:}$:1. The chances of one person fulfilling 48 of those prophecies is 10^{157} :1. Jesus fulfilled over 300 of those prophesies. Try calculating those odds!

WHAT ARE ODDS?

DOES GOD LEAVE ANYTHING TO CHANCE?

HAVE YOU EVER BET AGAINST GOD? WHAT HAPPENED?

Judges 7:2-3-*"The Lord said to Gideon, "The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, 'Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead.'" Then 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained."*

God told Gideon He didn't want the Israelites to think victory would be at their own hands— that honor was to go to God, and God alone. To make His point, God instructed Gideon to send home any troops who were *"fearful and trembling"* about going to battle and a whopping 22,000 troops scurried away home! The odds against victory (based on troop strength) went from 4:1 to 13:1 in the blink of an eye. But God was not finished stacking the deck against Gideon and his troops, not by a long shot.

"The United States maintains a military force to protect the homeland from attack and to safeguard its interests abroad… Three vital interests have been specified consistently by a string of Administrations over the past few decades:

- **Defense** of the homeland;
- **Successful conclusion** of a major war that has the potential to destabilize a region of critical interest to the U.S.; and
- **Preservation** of freedom of movement within the global commons (the sea, air, outer space, and cyberspace domains) through which the world conducts its business

To defend these interests effectively on a global scale, the United States needs a military force of sufficient size: what is known in the Pentagon as "**capacity**"…

The Heritage Foundation's *Index of U.S. Military Strength* employs a standardized, consistent set of criteria, accessible both to government officials and to the American public, to gauge the U.S. military's ability to perform its missions in today's world…

No matter how much America might wish that the world were a simpler place, … the patterns of history show that competing powers inevitably emerge and that the U.S. must be able to defend its interests in more than one region at a time…

This *Index* therefore embraces the two-war or two-contingency requirement so that America will have the ability to respond to an emergent threat while retaining the capacity to respond to a second… We conclude that a standing two-war–capable force would consist of:

- **Army:** 50 brigade combat teams ;
- **Navy:** 400 battle force ships and 624 strike aircraft;
- **Air Force:** 1,200 fighter/ground-attack aircraft;
- **Marine Corps:** 30 battalions; and
- **Space Force:** metric not yet established…

Future security threats cannot be predicted in their time, place, and severity, but they are nevertheless knowable with certainty because history has demonstrated repeatedly that threats arise with regularity in spite of efforts to deter and thwart them… It is therefore incumbent on national leaders and the American people to approach investing in the nation's security with the utmost seriousness and consistency…

As currently postured, the U.S. military is at significant risk of not being able to defend America's vital national interests. This is the inevitable result of years of prolonged deployments, underfunding, poorly defined priorities, wildly shifting security policies, exceedingly poor discipline in program execution, and a profound lack of seriousness across the national security establishment even as threats to U.S. interests have surged" *(heritage.org, "Executive Summary of the 2024 Index of U.S. Military Strength")*.

WHAT IS TROOP STRENGTH?

WHY IS TROOP STRENGTH IMPORTANT?

WHY IS GOD STRENGTH MORE IMPORTANT?

Judges 7:4-*"And the Lord said to Gideon, "The people are still too many. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' shall go with you, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' shall not go."*

Not yet satisfied that the people would give Him credit for victory, God decides to whittle the Israelite forces down even further. This time the soldiers would be tested by God Himself at the stream coming out of the Spring of Herod. As we'll soon see, God would choose an unlikely criteria for choosing who "*shall go*" and who "*shall not go*" with Gideon to confront the Midianites

Sometimes we just don't get God's reasonings and say, "'Just give me an explanation!" But agreement (after being given an explanation) is not obedience. Reliance on agreement means that our real master is our own understanding (and sometimes God happens to get it right). Real obedience arises from believing God knows more than we do. Only when obedience doesn't make sense do we begin to learn to obey…

Godly obedience means trusting the inexplicable commands of God no matter how strongly our hearts speak to the contrary, or our cultures disagree, or our feelings rebel, or our desires overwhelm. (Sam Williamson, *beliefsoftheheart.com, "When Obedience Doesn't Make Sense"*).

"When we ask why God tests us or allows us to be tested, we are admitting that testing does indeed come from Him. When God tests His children, He does a valuable thing… His purpose is to prove that our faith is real. It's not that God needs to prove it to Himself since He knows all things, but He is proving to us that our faith is real, that we are truly His children, and that no trial will overcome our faith…

The testing or trials we undergo come in various ways. Becoming a Christian will often require us to move out of our comfort zones and into the unknown. Perseverance in testing results in spiritual maturity and completeness. This is why James wrote, "*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds*"' (James 1:2)…

When we experience the storms of life, we should be like the tree that digs its roots ever more deeply for a greater grip in the earth. We must 'dig our roots' more deeply into God's Word and cling to His promises so we can weather whatever storms come against us…

Most comforting of all, we know that God will never allow us to be tested beyond what we are able to handle by His power. His grace is sufficient for us, and His power is made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor 12:9). That is why Paul said, "*for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*" (*Gotquestions.org. "Why Does God Test Us?"*).

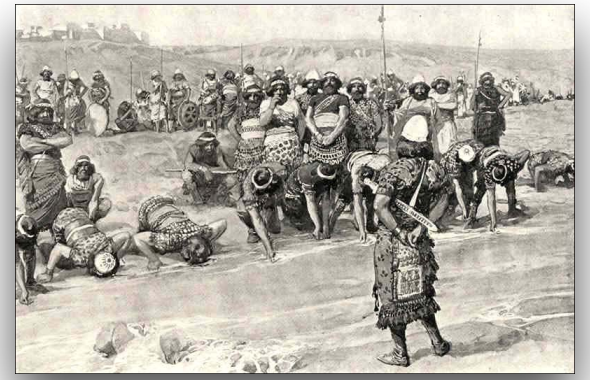
WHY / HOW DOES GOD TEST US?

ARE YOU PASSING GOD'S TESTS?

HOW DO YOU KNOW?

Judges 7:5-8-*"So he brought the people down to the water. And the Lord said to Gideon, "Every one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set by himself. Likewise, every one who kneels down to drink." And the number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouths, was 300 men, but all the rest of the people knelt down to drink water.*

And the Lord said to Gideon, "With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand, and let all the others go every man to his home. So the people took provisions in their hands, and their trumpets. And he sent all the rest of Israel every man to his tent, but retained the 300 men. And the camp of Midian was below him in the valley"



The "test" God gave the soldiers was indeed quite arbitrary— how they drank water from the stream. Despite some who try to make a theological statement out of how they consumed the water, most scholars see it as nothing more than a simple way to whittle down the forces. There was no deep philosophical meaning, no Biblical right way or wrong way to drink water from a stream.

Regardless, Gideon's army was reduced once again— this time to only 300 men. The odds (based on troop strength alone) went down to a whopping 450:1 against victory. But what are odds when God is on your side?

Not all decisions in life are right or wrong— some are just right or left. As long as we're following God's principles in our decision making, He doesn't care what car we buy, what house we live in, or how we drink water from a stream.

"Our lives, not only our physical lives, but also our mental, emotional, and spiritual lives, are the combination and summation of a series of everyday choices— choices we make. There are, of course, aspects of our lives that occur outside our control, but, in many respects, God has given us agency and freedom to make decisions each day that shape and direct the trajectory of our lives. The seminal question is whether we will make everyday choices that honor God and move our lives in a positive direction…

The challenge for all of us is to make the regular, moment-by-moment, everyday decisions that most honor God and move our lives toward greatest fulfillment. It will not always be easy, but the choice is always yours!" (Essentino A. Lewis, Jr., *Thomasnelson bibles.com, "Everyday Decisions"*).

WHAT ARE RIGHT OR WRONG DECISIONS?

WHAT ARE RIGHT OR LEFT DECISIONS?

HOW DO YOU MAKE GODLY DECISIONS?

Judges 7:9-11-*"That same night the Lord said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hand. But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant. And you shall hear what they say, and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp." Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outposts of the armed men who were in the camp."*

The Lord said to Gideon, "*Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hand."* But God knew Gideon was only human and would have much trepidation going against such a formidable force with his miserly 300 men. So He instructed Gideon to take his servant, Purah, and sneak around the Mideonite encampment to hear what their troops were saying about the impending battle. It would encourage him— his "*hands shall be strengthened greatly*." He obeyed and "*went down"* across the valley to the enemy's outposts.

The terms "*anxiety,*" "*anxiousness*," and "*fear*" are used over three-hundred-fifty times in the Bible and are usually depicted as the more common human reactions of worry, uncertainty, and dread. Unfortunately, most of us discount and hide these emotions because they denote an uneasiness we won't concede lest we be perceived as weak and indecisive. But God gave these emotions for a reason. They're meant to protect us and are detrimental only when experienced outside God's purpose.

Why can't we admit weakness and uncertainty? All men experience the same pangs of doubt and confusion— we wouldn't be human if we didn't. Why do we pretend to be bulletproof? The reason is simple— pride!

We don't want anyone to think they have a edge up on us— including God. We rely on our own understanding instead of His. Our worry, dread, and fear would be greatly reduced if we'd simply rely on God's understanding of the situation more than our own. He always has a plan.

ARE YOU FEARFUL? OF WHAT?

DO YOU ADMIT YOUR FEARS? WHY? WHY NOT?

ARE YOU RELYING ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTAND RATHER THAN GOD? WHY? WHY NOT?

Judges 7:12-14-*"And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the East lay along the valley like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance.*

When Gideon came, behold, a man was telling a dream to his comrade. And he said, 'Behold, I dreamed a dream, and behold, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian and came to the tent and struck it so that it fell and turned it upside down, so that the tent lay flat.' And his comrade answered, 'This is no other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp.'"

Gideon looked out upon his enemy. They were spread out across the valley "*like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance."* Gideon rightfully feared his 300 men would be no match against such overwhelming odds. But then God allowed him to hear what the Mideanite forces were saying among themselves about the upcoming battle.

Gideon overheard a strange dream one of their soldiers recounted to his comrade. In his dream, the soldier saw a giant loaf of bread tumbling into the Mideanite encampment and destroying it. His friend immediately interpreted the "*cake of barley bread"* as the *"sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel"* and that God would give "*Midean and all the camp*" to Gideon. After hearing this, Gideon felt his hand "*strengthened to go down against the camp* (vs 11).

"God used dreams (occurring while asleep) and visions (occurring while awake) several times in the Bible to communicate with people. God used visions in the *Old Testament* to reveal His plan, to further His plan, and to put His people in places of influence— such as the dreams or visions presented to:

Abraham (Genesis 15:1)
Abimelech (Genesis 20:1-7)
Jacob (Genesis 28:10-17)
Joseph (Genesis 37:1-11)
Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker (Genesis 40)
Pharaoh (Genesis 41)
The Midianite and Amalekite armies (Judges 7:12-15)
Solomon (1 Kings 3:5)
Daniel (Daniel 2; 4)

Visions in the *New Testament* also served to provide information that was unavailable elsewhere. Specifically, God used visions and dreams to identify Jesus and to establish His church— such as to:

Zacharias (Luke 1:5-23)
Joseph (Matthew 1:20; 2:13)

Pilate's wife (Matthew 27:19)
Ananias (Acts 9:10)
Cornelius (Acts 10:1-6)
Peter (Acts 10:9-15)
Paul (Acts 16:9-10; Acts 18:9-11; 2 Corinthians 12:1-6)
John (Revelation)

With the completion of the Bible, God does not have to use dreams and visions as much as He did before. That is not to say that He cannot or does not; God can communicate with us however He chooses. But when we have a decision to make, our first stop should always be the Bible, not a dream" (*gotquestiopns.org, "How did God use dreams and visions in the Bible?"*).

"Is God giving people in closed countries dreams and visions to bring them to faith in Christ?"

(gotquestions.org)

"In Acts 10, a man in Caesarea named Cornelius receives a vision from God instructing him to send for a man named Peter (Simon Peter, an apostle of Jesus), who was in Joppa. Meanwhile, Peter receives a vision that instructed him to go with the men Cornelius sent. Peter arrives at Cornelius's house, shares the gospel, and Cornelius and his entire family receive Jesus Christ as Savior. What an amazing and miraculous account!

In recent years, there have been many reports of people coming to faith in Christ through dreams and visions. The reports are most common in "closed" countries, that is, places where access to the Bible and the gospel is limited.

The stories are inspiring: a missionary's car breaks down, and as he is waiting for help, a man approaches him and asks if he is God's messenger. The missionary learns of a dream the man had that told him to go to that exact location to find "God's messenger." The missionary returns with the man to the village and proclaims the gospel, and the entire village comes to faith in Christ.

A Muslim man experiences a vision in which Jesus reveals Himself as the true prophet of God, the only Savior, and the only way of reconciliation with God. The Muslim man, at the risk of his life, forsakes Islam and embraces Christ.

What are Bible-believing Christians to do with miraculous claims like these? First, we should recognize that such events are entirely possible. As seen in Acts 10, God has worked in this way. Also, the apostle Paul was brought to faith in Christ through a vision (Acts 9:3–6); and Ananias, who later ministered to Paul, was sent to Paul through a vision (Acts 9:10–19). God at times worked through dreams and visions in the Bible, and there is no reason He could not do so today.

Second, we need to approach claims of dreams and miracles with an appropriate amount of discernment. It is highly unlikely that *all* such claims are true, even if the results appear to be good. People of false religions also report converts due to dreams, visions, prophecies, etc. Satan is a counterfeiter (2 Corinthians 11:14), and the Bible declares that miraculous revelations can be faked (Ezekiel 13:7; 1 John 4:1–6).

Third, when we hear of such amazing miracles—even if they are verified as true—we need to refocus our attention on the Word of God. Only the Word of God never fails (1 Peter 1:25). Only the Word of God is inerrant, infallible, and authoritative. As Jesus said, if people will not listen to the Word of God, they will not listen even if the most amazing of miracles is performed in front of them (Luke 16:31).

Finally, we are to worship and praise God for the amazing ways that He works. Whether a person is brought to faith in Christ through a simple gospel presentation or through a dream or vision, we should be rejoicing with the angels (Luke 15:10)."

WHAT ARE DREAMS AND VISIONS?

HAVE YOU EVER HAD A DREAM YOU THOUGH WAS OF GOD?

WHAT CRITERIA DO YOU USE TO DIFFERENTIATE IF A DREAM IS FROM GOD OR NOT?

Judges 7:15-*"As soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped. And he returned to the camp of Israel and said, 'Arise, for the Lord has given the host of Midian into your hand.'"*

Gideon returns to his own camp, awakens the troops, and says, "*Arise, for the Lord has given the host of Midian into your hand."*

"The problem of Gideon's faithfulness had been resolved. Now he is ready to proceed with *Yahweh's* agenda… God must bring His servants to a moment when all human confidence is stripped away, when they sit silently in humble adoration of God as the One who is totally sufficient against all odds to accomplish His divine will" (K. L. Younger Jr, *NIV Application Commentary, "Judges, Ruth"*).

Hearing of the Midianite soldier's dream "represents the last communication Gideon has with God, and the worshipping resulted from the Midianite's interpretation brings Gideon to his knees in worship for the final time in the narrative… But Gideon still has a problem…. (His) worship (will) prove momentary, without having further influence on his (later) actions and attitudes" (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary- Judges"*).

IS YOUR WORSHIP ONLY TEMPORARY?

HAVE YOU EVER FORGOTTEN ABOUT WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR YOU?

HAS YOUR WORSHIP ACTUALLY INFLUENCED YOUR ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES?

Judges 7:16-18*"And he divided the 300 men into three companies and put trumpets into the hands of all of them and empty jars, with torches inside the jars. And he said to them, "Look at me, and do likewise. When I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then blow the trumpets also on every side of all the camp and shout, 'For the Lord and for Gideon.'"*

Instead of arming his men with swords and shields, Gideon puts into their hands *"trumpets"* in one and "*empty jars with torches inside*" in the other. Dividing his "*300 men into three companies,"* he then readies them for battle. Gideon instructs them to follow him to the "*outskirts of the camp*" and *"blow the trumpets on every side of all the camp and shout, 'For the Lord and for Gideon.'"*

The text doesn't say if Gideon's men thought he'd totally lost his marbles, but surely they had questions. However, "obedience is not only necessary for swift and efficient military action, but is also a character trait that demonstrates trust in one's superiors and in the legitimacy of military demands. Military personnel need to cultivate the habit of obedience so that they do not hesitate when ordered to act" (Jessica Wolfendale, *springer.com, "Obedience in the Military"*).

"Article 90 of the UCMJ makes it a crime for service members to disobey a lawful command of a superior commissioned officer willfully. A lawful command is an order not contrary to law, regulations, or a service member's rights" (*https://ucmjdefense.com/"Article 90: Willfully Disobeying a Superior Commissioned Officer"*)

Unfortunately, not all orders are legal and some should be disobeyed. "Rule 916(d)" of the "Manual for Courts Martial" says:

> "It is a defense to any offense that the accused was acting pursuant to orders unless the accused knew the orders to be unlawful or a person of ordinary sense and understanding would have known the orders to be unlawful."

Despite what Gideon's men thought of the wisdom of leading them into battle with just horns and lanterns, Gideon's command was not only lawful, but wise! They were required to obey.

WHY IS OBEDIENCE NECESSARY IN THE MILITARY?

WHY IS OBEDIENCE NECESSARY IN CHRISTIANITY?

DO YOU ALWAYS OBEY? WHY? WHY NOT?

Judges 7:19-21-*"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 set the watch. And they blew the trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands. Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars. They held in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the trumpets to blow. And they cried out, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!"*

Every man stood in his place around the camp, and all the army ran. They cried out and fled."

Gideon's army obeyed, and they were rewarded. Surrounding the Midianite encampment at "*the beginning of middle watch*" (midnight), Gideon's army "*blew the trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands"* turning their lanterns into fiery weapons. They cried out, "*A sword for the Lord and for Gideon"* and held their ground around the camp. Because the sounds and lights caused then to think a much larger army approached, confusion and fear consumed the Midianite troops and "*all the army ran. They cried out and fled."*

"Military deception (MILDEC) is an attempt by a military unit to gain an advantage during warfare by misleading adversary decision makers into taking action or inaction that creates favorable conditions for the deceiving force. This is usually achieved by creating or amplifying an artificial fog of war via psychological operations, information warfare, visual deception, or other methods…

Deception in warfare dates back to early history. '*The Art of War*,' an ancient Chinese military treatise, emphasizes the importance of deception as a way for outnumbered forces to defeat larger adversaries. Examples of deception in warfare can be found in ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, the Medieval Age, the Renaissance, and the European Colonial Era…

Deception was employed during World War I and came into even greater prominence during World War II. In modern times, the militaries of several nations have evolved deception tactics, techniques and procedures into fully fledged doctrine" (*wikipedia.org, "Military Deception"*).

God has many tools at His disposal to protect us. Sometimes He lets the enemy destroy themselves with disinformation. He allows them to falsely believe they can successfully mount a campaign against Him as their overconfidence, rage, and selfish desires destroy them from the inside out.

Avoid overconfidence, rage, and selfish desires. If you follow God's path of righteousness, you can simply let the enemy weaken themselves. Their sea of disinformation will cover them and they'll sink like lead in mighty waters.

WHAT IS MILITARY DECEPTION?

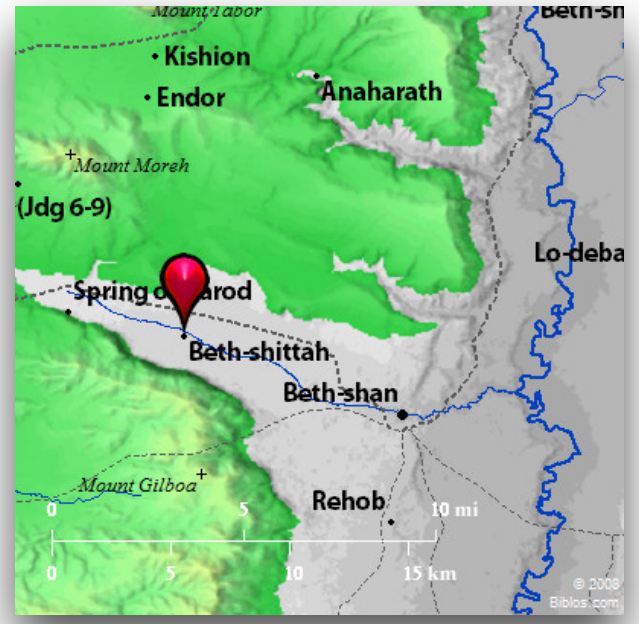
WHY IS 'MILDEC' NECESSARY TODAY?

WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF 'MILDEC' TODAY?

Judges 7:22-23-*"When they blew the 300 trumpets, the Lord set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army.*

And the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath. And the men of Israel were called out from Naphtali and from Asher and from all Manasseh, and they pursued after Midian."

Gideon's 'MILDEC' had its desired effect. The fog of war enveloped the Midianites and they "*fled as far as as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath."* Gideon then summoned the men of Israel from "*Naphtali and from Asher and from all Manasseh, and they pursued after Midian."*



The Midianite army was so confused that they even turned their weapons on their own troops (“*the Lord set every man's sword against his comrade”*) — what is today referred to as ‘friendly fire.’

In recorded military history, ‘friendly fire’ has accounted for 2–20% of all battle casualties. “‘Friendly fire’ represents an extremely serious aspect of war. It is a situation in which military forces, members of the same army or allied soldiers, unintentionally open fire on each other…

The U.S. Department of Defense has professionally defined the term ‘friendly fire’ as a circumstance in which members of the U.S. military or an allied military force are mistakenly or accidentally killed or injured in action by U.S. or friendly forces actively engaged in combat with the enemy’…

According to one study, 10-15% of American casualties in all wars in the 20th century were the result of ‘friendly fire.’ It is between 177,000 and 250,000 American soldiers who were mistakenly killed by the Americans themselves” (Matija Šerić, *eurasiareview.com, “Friendly Fire: An Unwanted Phenomenon Of Modern Warfare – Analysis*

WHAT IS THE FOG OF WAR?

WHAT IS FRIENDLY FIRE?

HOW DOES THE FOG OF WAR LEAD TO FRIENDLY FIRE?

Judges 7:24-25-*"Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against the Midianites and capture the waters against them, as far as, and also the Jordan." So all the men of Ephraim were called out, and they captured the waters as far as Beth-barah, and also the Jordan.*

And they captured the two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at the winepress of Zeeb. Then they pursued Midian, and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon across the Jordan."

Beth-barah (Bethany) was near a shallow point in the river where the fleeing Midianites could walk across the streams emptying into the Jordan. Gideon called upon the nearby Ephraimites to capture these crossing points before the Mideonites could escape.

The Ephraimites responded, captured "*the waters,"* and killed "*two princes of Midian,— Oreb and Zeeb*."

"Following an ancient Near Eastern custom, the Ephraimites memorialized the victory where they killed the commanders (as) "*the rock of Oreb*" and the "*winepress of Zeeb,*" respectively. (*"Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary," John H Walton, editor*).

"Then they pursued Midean and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon across the Jordan."

But, as we'll soon see in the following chapter, the Ephraimites were not pleased with what they thought was an insignificant role given to them by Gideon. The many tribes of Israel were far from a unified nation pursuing a unified goal.

"The author of Judges…expressed the typical reality of tribal division… Throughout Judges the leaders are represented, not as national, but local leaders whose sphere of influence is determined in accordance with the conditions of time and place" (Yaira Amit, *"Book of Judges"*).

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NATIONAL AND REGIONAL CONCERNS?

HOW ARE THEY ALIGNED IN OUR COUNTRY?

HOW DO NATIONAL VERSES REGIONAL CONCERNS SOMETIMES CONFLICT IN OUR COUNTRY?

CHAPTER EIGHT

Judges 8:1-3-*"Then the men of Ephraim said to him* (Gideon)*, "What is this that you have done to us, not to call us when you went to fight against Midian?" And they accused him fiercely.*

And 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 grape harvest of Abiezer? God has given into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. What have I been able to do in comparison with you?"

Then their anger against him subsided when he said this."

The Ephraimites felt snubbed by Gideon. Unlike the Manassites, Asherites, Zebulunites, and Naphtalites, the tribe of Ephraim had been invited to the battle only late in the game. "The facts are clear, (1) the Ephraimites had not been summoned initially, (2) they were not involved in the primary rout of Midian, and (3) they were called upon only at the last minute when it appeared the enemy might escape through their territory." (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

Gideon's diplomatic skills were now needed to cool the Ephraimites' heated heads and he decides to stroke their egos. "Gideon tries to dismiss the charges as insignificant by building up the importance of Ephraim at the expense of his own accomplishments and those of his own clan of Abiezer." (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary- Judges"*). Gideon's diplomacy works and "*their anger against him subsided.*"

"Diplomacy is the established method of influencing the decisions and behaviors of foreign governments and people through dialogue, negotiation, and other measures short of war or violence…

Today's geopolitical landscape is fraught with tensions stemming from divergent interests, incompatible ideologies, and a re-emphasis on inter-state competition for power and influence. While economic, environmental, and technological challenges are significant, security issues dominate foreign policy and global affairs…

In this strategic environment, statesmen, diplomats, and military leaders leverage relationships to reduce instability and posture their countries for strategic advantage. They conduct traditional diplomacy via bilateral and multilateral negotiations that seek peaceful settlements according to their interests, conduct intelligence diplomacy to spur collective action and prepare for defense, and military diplomacy to keep partners and allies in the fight" (Derek Ping, Michael Wise, *warroom.armywarcollege.edu, "Military Diplomacy: A Vital Component Of Strategic Competition"*).

Prov 15:1-"*A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*"

WHAT IS DIPLOMACY?

WHY / HOW SHOULD YOU USE DIPLOMACY IN SPREADING THE GOSPEL?'

DO YOU ANSWER YOUR CRITICS WITH SOFT OR HARSH WORDS?

Judges 8:4-6-*"And Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over, he and the 300 men who were with him, exhausted yet pursuing. So he said to the men of Succoth, "Please give loaves of bread to the people who follow me, for they are exhausted, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian."*

And the officials of Succoth said, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?"

Gideon and his exhausted 300 troops crossed the Jordan and came upon the area of *Succoth*— a valley just east of the Jordan River and north of the Jabot River. During Moses' time, the territory had been part of the kingdoms of *Sihon* and *Og* but were now apportioned to the Israelite tribe of *Gad* (Joshua 13:28). It was sometimes used as a boundary indicating the outer eastern reaches of the Promised Land.

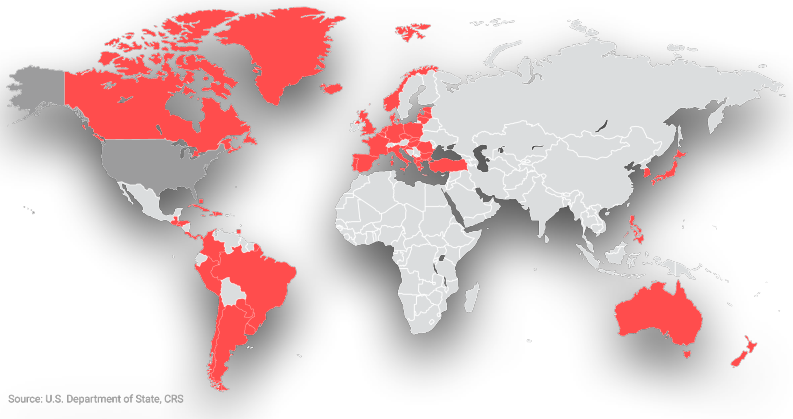
Out of fear of retribution from *Zebah* and *Zalmunna* (the kings of Midian), the people of *Succoth* refused to extend hospitality to Gideon's troops. Turning away allied soldiers in a time of war was an unthinkable, loathsome act.

"The men of *Succoth* reasoned that the fleeing Midianites would soon re-group and easily defeat the makeshift army thrown together by Gideon. Any assistance given to Gideon would implicate *Succoth* and bring certain retaliation from the feared nomads" (*Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary, Volume I, Old Testament, Barker & KohlenbergerIII, consulting editors*).

They wanted proof that Gideon would win the war before helping him. Because it was an ancient custom to cut off the hands of dead enemies as a means of establishing the body count, they asked Gideon, "*Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand*?" Though they should have come to the aid of their Israelite brothers without question, their response was tepid at best.

Meriam-Webster defines an ally as: "(1) a sovereign or state associated with another by treaty or league and (2) one that is associated with another as a helper: a person or group that provides assistance and support in an ongoing effort, activity, or struggle." The men of *Succoth* were poor allies indeed..

Of note, "the United States is committed (by treaties) to defending more than 1.4 billion people abroad—a number more than four times larger than the U.S. population—in at least 51 countries" (Natalie Armbruster and Benjamin Friedman, *defensepriorities.org, "Who Is An Ally And Why Does It Matter?"*). [Below is a map of our obligations]



WHY DO WE COME TO THE AID OF ALLIES?

WHY SHOULD OUR COUNTRY BE CAREFUL WHO WE ALIGN WITH?

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A COUNTRY REFUSES TO COME TO THE AID OF AN ALLY?

Judges 8:7-9-*"So Gideon said, "Well then, when the Lord has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will flail your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers."*

And from there he went up to Penuel, and spoke to them in the same way, and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered. And he said to the men of Penuel, "When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower."

Gideon was rightly peeved and disgusted with *Succoth's* lack of aid— neutrality should not have been an option when the conflict was on their own soil. Gideon promised that after victory he would come back to "*flail*" their flesh with "*thorns*" and "*briers*. "

When the men of *Penuel* (the next nearby Israelite region) also refused to render aid to his men, Gideon said to them, "*When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower."* Towers in ancient Israel were known as 'citadels' and were built for defensive reasons. They were generally the highest landmark within a city, making surprise attacks very difficult.

"Gideon now operated in Gideon's own strength, not in the Lord's wisdom" (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary- Judges"*). "He is simply taking the law into his own hands as soon as the events have permitted him with reasonable pretense and situation to do so" (K. L. Younger Jr, *NIV Application Commentary, "Judges, Ruth"*).

"The coward has become confident; he directs far flung mopping up operations which are carried out effectively. But the voice of the Lord is stilled, not to be heard for the balance of Gideon's narrative. And the spirit of the Lord, which brought the courage to fight a far greater military force, seems to slip from Gideon's shoulders in the process" (L.R. Klein, "*Triumph of Irony"*).

HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU TRIED TO OPERATE IN YOUR OWN STRENGTH INSTEAD IN THE LORD'S WISDOM? WHY? HOW?

HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU TRIED TO SNATCH MATTERS FROM GOD'S HANDS AND TAKEN THEM INTO YOUR OWN? WHY? HOW?

WHAT WERE THE ULTIMATE RESULTS?

Judges 8:10-12-*"Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with their army, about 15,000 men, all who were left of all the army of the people of the East, for there had fallen 120,000 men who drew the sword. And Gideon went up by the way of the tent dwellers east of Nobah and Jogbehah and attacked the army, for the army felt secure.*

And Zebah and Zalmunna fled, and he pursued them and captured the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and he threw all the army into a panic."

The two kings of Midea, "*Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with their army."* Of the 135,000 men they began with, only 15,000 remained— 120,000 lay dead on battlefields. The term *"Karkor"* actually meant a safe *"enclosure"* of some kind. It was located near *Nobah* [in the Israelite territory belonging to the half-tribe of Manasseh in Gilead (Nu 32:40)] and *Jogbehah* [in land belonging to the tribe of Gad (Nu 32:34-35)].

"They (the Midianites) would have thought it most unlikely that the Israelites, with their mere handful of men, would pursue so large an army for so long a distance. They fancied themselves beyond the reach of pursuit because they miscalculated the energy and powers of Gideon" (*Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers — Judges*).

"Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east— he tracked the fugitives across the mountain range of Gilead to the northeast of the Jabbok (tributary of the Jordan River from the east), and there came upon them unexpectedly while they were resting secure among their own nomadic tribes" (*Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary—Judges)*).

Gideon attacked and *"Zebah and Zalmunna fled." "He pursued them and captured the two kings of Midian ... and he threw all the army into a panic."* For all intent and purposes, the war against the Midianites was over— Gideon was victorious. God had allowed Gideon, another anti-hero 'judge,' to deliver the Israelites from their most recent oppression.

"'*Victory*' as a concept is problematic in general and even more so in the context of modern war and armed conflict. First, definitional issues occur. Different lenses can be used to look at the idea including the tactical, strategic and grand strategic levels of war, or the way in which the status quo is affected…

Second, some factors impede a clear understanding of what '*victory*' entails. These include challenges around the clear and unambiguous definition of the desired end state or the goals and the way to measure them once established…

Derived from Latin ('*victoria*,' from '*vinco victus*,' 'to conquer'), the word '*victory*' is mostly associated with fighting, battle, and competition. One of the most common synonyms for '*victory'* is 'winning' meaning to prevail, to triumph; whilst another common synonym is 'success.' Although apparently similar, these words convey slightly different meanings and these linguistic variations contribute to the lack of precise understanding of the meaning of '*victory*' that could reflect on the design and subsequent outcome of policy.

Defeating an opponent militarily is not identical to achieving the object of war, the reason for which the war was fought. A '*victory*' in the true sense implies that the state of peace and of one's people, is better after the war than before.

However, such a '*victory*' requires considerable patience, because while the military contest may have a finite ending, the political, social, and psychological issues may not be resolved even years after the formal end of hostilities." (Colonel E.A. de Landmeter, *Militairy Spector, "What Constitutes Victory In Modern War?"*).

Gideon was victorious, but would the people really be better off? Keep reading. The "Book of Judges" is far from complete.

WHAT IS VICTORY?

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MILITARY AND DIPLOMATIC VICTORY?

HOW DO YOU MEASURE VICTORY

Judges 8:13-17-*"Then Gideon the son of Joash returned from the battle by the ascent of Heres. And he captured a young man of Succoth and questioned him. And he wrote down for him the officials and elders of Succoth, seventy-seven men.*

And he came to the men of Succoth and said, "Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, about 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 exhausted?'"

And he took the elders of the city, and he took thorns of the wilderness and briers and with them taught the men of Succoth a lesson.

And he broke down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city."

Gideon was not finished— he wanted to deliver some personal 'payback.' Returning to *Succoth* "*by the ascent of Heres*" (location unknown today), he captured a young man and obtained from him the names of the "*seventy-seven"* elders of the area who were complicit in denying aid to his men earlier. Parading the two Midianite kings before the elders, Gideon (as he had promised) "*took the elders of the city, and he took thorns of the wilderness and briers and with them taught the men of Succoth a lesson."*

Gideon next went to *Penuel* and didn't just tear down their defensive tower as he had threatened, but also "*killed the men of the city"* — his fellow Israelites! "He acted like a general out of control, no longer bound by rules of civility, let alone national loyalty" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

'Vengeance' is punishment inflicted in retaliation for an injury or offense (*Merriam Webster*). Though punishment for certain behaviors is Biblical, personal 'vengeance' is not— God ordained governments that responsibility. As the apostle Paul reiterated what was said in Deuteronomy 32:35:

> *"Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."* (Rom 12:19)

WHAT IS VENGEANCE?

HAVE YOU EVER TAKEN PERSON VENGEANCE ON SOMEONE? WHY?

WHY IS PERSONAL VENGEANCE DANGEROUS?

Judges 8:18-21-*"Then he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, "Where are the men whom you killed at Tabor?" They answered, "As you are, so were they. Every one of them resembled the son of a king." And he said, "They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As the Lord lives, if you had saved them alive, I would not kill you.*

So he said to Jether his firstborn, "Rise and kill them!" But the young man did not draw his sword, for he was afraid, because he was still a young man.

Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Rise yourself and fall upon us, for as the man is, so is his strength." And Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and he took the crescent ornaments that were on the necks of their camels."

"With the two Midianite kings in hand, Gideon interrogated them regarding an otherwise unrecorded incident— the slaying of several of his brothers at *Tabor* (a small mountain just north of the *Hill of Moreh*). It is not stated whether this took place in the current invasion or on a previous Midianite invasion of the *Jezreel Valley*. Since Gideon felt obligated by the duty of blood vengeance, probably his brothers were murdered in their homes or fields, not in battle" (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary- Old Testament, Walvoord and Zuck, general editors*).

The two kings may have tried to flatter Gideon by saying about his siblings, *"As you are, so were they. Every one of them resembled the son of a king."* Or these kings may have just been attempting to put Gideon in his place by inferring "*sons of kings*" were inferior to kings (as these two were). Regardless, Gideon felt he could not let them live.

When his young son, Jether, proved too fearful to take his sword to the two Midianite kings, they mocked Gideon to prove himself a man by saying, *"Rise yourself and fall upon us, for as the man is, so is his strength."* Gideon obliged *Zebah and Zalmunna* and killed them. He then took the customary trophies of victory— the crescent ornaments from their camels.

The campaign was officially over— the Midianite army was scattered, their kings were dead, and Israel was once again free— at least for a while. What comes later, however, will not be pretty.

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN OPPRESSED?

WHAT'S THE FIRST THING YOU'D DO AFTER WINNING FREEDOM?

DOES THANKING GOD AT LEAST RANK IN YOUR TOP TEN?

Judges 8:22-23-*"Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian." Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you.""*

"Not just a few tribes, but Israel as a whole, is ready for a king like the nations (surrounding them). They see the weakness of their political system and want to change it drastically. They want not just a momentary king, but a dynasty… They are interested in someone restoring strength, peace, prosperity, and possibly even tribal unity to Israel" (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary- Judges"*).

"The irony of the situation is that the impiety from which Gideon recoils is of his own making. From the moment he crossed the Jordan he has acted more and more like a king, especially in his dispensing of summary punishments on those who resist his authority. In crossing the Jordan he had already exceeded his commission and begun to move toward the kind of rule which is now formally offered to him" (B.G. Webb, "*The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading"*).

"There is no hint that Gideon had been divinely chosen to be a king or that the Israelites were concerned about this issue in the least" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

Gideon, for the first time in quite a while, seemingly recognizes God as their true king and verbally rejects their offers to become king. But is he truly rejecting kingship? The tribute he willingly accepts in the next verses seem to cast some doubt.

"Why was asking for a king wrong? Because the Lord was to be the ruler of Israel….Their request for a king was a rejection of God's way of leadership over them…

Another reason it was wrong to ask for a king is that the Israelites did so in order to be like other nations. God had created Israel as a unique people. He was their leader…

When the Israelites wanted a king like other nations had, they were rejecting their unique, set-apart position as God's people. The nation whose God was to be the Lord alone was envious of the nations who followed false gods." (*Gotquestions.org, "Was It Wrong for the Israelites to Ask for a King?"*).

WHAT IS A KING?

WHY DID THE UNITED STATES REJECT THE KING OF ENGLAND?

WHY DOES THE UNITED STATES REJECT THE TRUE KING OF THE WORLD?

Judges 8:24-27-*"And Gideon said to them, "Let me make a request of you: every one of you give me the earrings from his spoil." (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) And they answered, "We will willingly give them." And they spread a cloak, and every man threw in it the earrings of his spoil.*

And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian, and besides the collars that were around the necks of their camels.

And Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah. And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family."

Offering their earrings was a symbolic gesture of submission. Gideon accepted tribute from the people of Israel— 1,700 shekels of gold (about $1,500,000 in todays dollars) along with crescent ornaments, pendants, purple garments, and camel collars taken from the Midianite kings. He then "*made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah."*

"Perhaps Gideon's 'ephod' refers to a high-priestly type garment with an unusual amount of ornamentation or to a replica of the high-priestly garment made of pure gold. However, the amount of gold and the verbs used to describe Gideon's actions ("made," "put it") mitigate against this understanding. Here 'ephod' is perhaps used figuratively to represent not only the garment that clothed a sacred image but also the (pagan) image over which the garment was draped…

If anything, the ephod should have been made by a priest and then used in the tabernacle in the worship of *Yahweh*. But Gideon… fully intends for the ephod to bring himself and his family glory" (K. L. Younger Jr, *NIV Application Commentary, "Judges, Ruth"*):

"*All Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family.*"

"Gideon began by transforming a Baal shrine on his own father's property to an altar for *Yahweh*. He concludes by turning this Ophrah shrine into a pagan one marked by an image or priestly garment that he himself created" (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary- Judges"*).

WHAT FALSE IDOLS HAVE YOU LED OTHERS TO WORSHIP?

HOW ? WHY?

HAVE YOU CORRECTED YOUR MISTAKES? HOW? WHY?

Judges 8:28-*"So Midian was subdued before the people of Israel, and they raised their heads no more. And the land had rest forty years in the days of Gideon."*

Despite Gideon's frailties, God honored the Israelites and gave their land "*forty years of rest.*" But note again as in previous redemptions, it was the land that had rest from outside oppressors— not necessarily the Israelites themselves!!!

CAN WE STILL SUFFER WHEN OUTSIDE OPPRESSION IS OVER? HOW? WHY?

IS SOME OF YOUR SUFFERING SELF INFLICTED? HOW? WHY?

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

Judges 8:29-35-*"Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and lived in his own house. Now Gideon had seventy sons, his own offspring, for he had many wives. And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he called his name Abimelech. And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father, at Ophrah of the Abiezrites.*

As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god. And the people of Israel did not remember the Lord their God, who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies on every side, and they did not show steadfast love to the family of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in return for all the good that he had done to Israel."

The remaining days of Gideon were marked by a lack of foreign oppression. He had seventy sons (and probably many daughters) from his many wives, and one son from his concubine in Shechem— "*he called his name Abimelech."* Gideon then died "*in a good old age*" and was buried in the family plot in Ophrah.

Unfortunately, "a*s soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god."* They "*did not remember the Lord their God who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies*" and they even turned on Gideon's family. Israel was once again set up for another round of apostasy and oppression.

"Forgetting has always been a real problem for God's people… There are several reasons why Christians suffer spiritual short-term memory loss. For one thing, we are human beings with weak, fallen minds. We do genuinely forget things that we've just learned…

But forgetting can also be due to an active rebellion in our hearts. Our sinful hearts can jettison the truth from our minds and replace it with lies. Or, we really aren't committing truth to memory, nor paying attention to the important things in life…

Finally, we may be experiencing short-term memory loss because we are not teaching our children God's Word and what He has done in our lives (Deut 4:9)…

So what's the cure for spiritual short-term memory loss? Christians have to read God's Word daily in order to remember. We need to preach the gospel to ourselves every day. We need to hear sermons and Bible lessons over and over again. We need to be reminded each day of who we serve and whose we are. We need to teach our children and youth God's Word (they are forgetful beings too, right?)…

In a sense, we need to re-learn and remember our Christianity every day! (John C. Kwasny, Ph.D., *pearorchard.org,"The Problem of Spiritual Short Term Memory Loss"*).

> *"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart…You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."* (Deuteronomy 6:6, 8-9)

WHY DO WE FORGET?

WHY DO WE SOMETIMES FORGET GOD IS WATCHING?

HOW DO YOU KEEP FROM FORGETTING GOD?

CHAPTER NINE

Judges 9:1-2-*"Now Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem to his mother's relatives and said to them and to the whole clan of his mother's family, "Say in the ears of all the leaders of Shechem, 'Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal rule over you, or that one rule over you?' Remember also that I am your bone and your flesh."*

It didn't take long for Gideon's family tree to be shaken to its roots. Abimelech, the son of Gideon's concubine in Shechem, wanted power and would stop at nothing to obtain it. While his seventy half-brothers lived in Gideon's hometown of Ophrah, Abimelech traveled six miles to his mother's town of Shechem to stir up trouble. He wished to align his mother's clan against the seventy sons of Gideon's many wives (Abimelech' half-brothers — Gideon's rightful heirs) in order to establish his own reign as king.

He asked the leaders of Shechem a simple question— wasn't the rule of one man preferable to seventy? Additionally, he reminded them that, unlike his half-brothers, he was the only one of Gideon's sons who was of their own "*bone"* and "*flesh,*" They should therefore follow him as he was one of their 'family.'

Today, the phrase "blood is thicker than water" usually means that the bond you share with family is stronger than any other bond. It suggests you should be more committed to your family members than to friends, lovers, co-workers, etc.

But this is a shortened version of the original phrase that had quite the opposite meaning— "blood of the covenant is thicker than water of the womb." The original version meant the agreement made with a blood sacrifice was more significant than that formed by the amniotic fluid of the womb. In other words, the bonds we choose are more significant than those formed by our familial or blood relations. The saying was often used of soldiers who shed blood together in battle and so formed a blood covenant.

IS BLOOD THICKER THAN WATER?

OR

IS BLOOD OF THE COVENANT THICKER THAN WATER OF THE WOMB?

Judges 9:3-5-*"And his mother's relatives spoke all these words on his behalf in the ears of all the leaders of Shechem, and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our brother." And they gave him seventy pieces of silver out of the house of Baal-berith with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows, who followed him.*

And he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, for he hid himself.

Abimelech's ploy worked— "*his mother's relatives spoke all these words on his behalf in the ears of all the leaders of Shechem and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech."* The elders went into the pagan temple of *Baal-berith* and withdrew *"seventy pieces of silver*" to hire mercenaries, "*worthless and reckless fellows*" who would do whatever Abimelech ordered.

"Abimelech's half-brothers may have been princes, sons of Gideon, but in the face of his inordinate hubris, their lives were incredibly cheap" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

The hired killers went to Ophrah, rounded up seventy sons of Gideon, and slaughtered them "*on one stone"* — only Jotham, the youngest son, survived after hiding himself. The price of their lives was a measly one piece of silver each.

How much is a human being really worth? This question has provoked divergent answers throughout history.

Humanists claim man is the product of an evolutionary process. They believe man's persona is simply derived from the imprint of the society surrounding him. Man is just one colossal organic accident worth absolutely nothing.

John Muir, the famous *Naturalist*, believed Man is simply one small part of the cosmos on equal footing with animals, plants, and the "*mineral arrangement of matter endowed with sensation of a kind that we in our blind exclusive perfection can have no manner of communication with."* He believed Man is worth no more than a rock.

Economists think of Man in terms of dollars and cents. The *United States Government* has conflicting estimates regarding the intrinsic value of man. In 2020, The *Environmental Protection Agency* (EPA) valued man's life at $7.4 million; whereas the *Federal Aviation Administration* (FAA) asserted that same individual was worth $9.6 million.

According to some estimates, a human body could claim as much as $45 million if calculated by selling the bone marrow, DNA, lungs, kidneys, heart, etc. as components. Or, if determined simply by adding up the monetary value of its chemical elements, that same body would command as little as $160. Man is only a stack of nickels, dimes, and quarters.

But, are we really just some organic accident? Are we no better than a pile of rocks? Are we merely an accumulation of shekels? Surely we have more intrinsic value than claimed by the *Humanist*, *Naturalist,* or *Economist*.

Our *Bible* teaches Man is the only being created in the image of God. We occupy a unique position and bear a distinct responsibility in the world. We possess a spirit that not only defies monetary value, but also spurns the decay of aging and death. We possess an eternal lifespan far exceeding the 3 score and 18 years quoted by most of today's actuary tables.

God endowed us with physical, mental, and moral attributes allowing us to make critical decisions affecting our eternal futures. He made covenants with us assuring our position in His overall design. He gave us a free-will that, despite allowing us to sin, also enables us to choose a path offered for redemption from those transgressions.

Yes, we are much more than our 11 essential chemical elements, 78 organs, 206 bones, 650 muscles, and $2x10^{22}$ DNA strands. We are special in God's eyes. Our worth is incalculable!

WHAT IS A HUMAN BEING WORTH?

HOW MUCH ARE YOU WORTH IN MAN'S EYES?

HOW MUCH ARE YOU WORTH IN GOD'S EYES?

Judges 9:6-"*And all the leaders of Shechem came together, and all Beth-millo, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar at Shechem"*

Abimelech's mother's clan ("*the leaders of Shechem"*) and others nearby (*"all Beth-millo"*) crowned Abimelech as king. But, his coronation was the "result of human interests and not of divine choice" (Amit, "*Book of Judges*"). God didn't call him to be a 'judge.'

The ceremony took place "*by the oak of the pillar at Shechem"*— an area scholars identify as a pagan worship site. Whereas God had ordained Gideon as a 'judge' to lead Israel from oppression, Abimelech's kingship was the result of his own despicable actions— his rule would not last long.

HOW MANY KINGS HAVE COME TO POWER THROUGH TREACHERY? NAME SOME.

HOW MANY POLITICIANS HAVE COME TO POWER THROUGH TREACHERY? NAME SOME.

HOW MANY BUSINESSMEN HAVE COME TO POWER THROUGH TREACHERY? NAME SOME.

WHAT WILL YOU DO FOR POWER?

Judges 9:7-15-"*When it was told to Jotham, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim and cried aloud and said to them, "Listen to me, you leaders of Shechem, that God may listen to you.*

The trees once went out to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us.' But the olive tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my abundance, by which gods and men are honored, and go hold sway over the trees?'

And the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come and reign over us.' But the fig tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit and go hold sway over the trees?'

And the trees said to the vine, 'You come and reign over us.' But the vine said to them, 'Shall I leave my wine that cheers God and men and go hold sway over the trees?'

Then all the trees said to the bramble, 'You come and reign over us.' And the bramble said to the trees, 'If in good faith you are anointing me king over you, then come and take refuge in my shade, but if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon.'"

Jotham stood upon Mt Gerzim, where the men of Israel once proclaimed God's blessings on Israel (Deut 11:29; 27:12), and related an old, bitter fable to the leaders of Shechem who followed Abimelech. It described the folly of a monarchy. He compared the men of Shechem to "*trees*" who go out to anoint a king over them. The "*trees*" first ask the "*olive tree,*" next the "*fig tree*," and finally the "*vine*" to rule over them. Each declines— satisfied with their own roles in life.

In desperation for a king, the *"trees*" then approached the lowly "*bramble,*" who's protective shade was marked by nothing but pricks and sticks. The *"bramble*" agreed, but only after threatening drastic action if its anointing as king is in bad faith. The result would be fire coming out of the "*bramble*"— enough to destroy all the "*cedars of Lebanon.*" Making the "*bramble*" king might backfire in dramatic fashion!

The parable indicated "the only kind of men who desire political authority for its own sake are '*bramble'* men— unproductive men who seek to attain fame and fortune by taking it from others who are productive" (J.B. Jordan, "*Judges—God's War Against Humanism*").

The fable also suggested "monarchy is a necessary evil and that many kings are useless; but the political arrangement, flawed as its is, has a chance to work only when both parties enter into the agreement in good faith… It directed a stinging criticism at Abimelech's coup and kingship" (S. Niditch, "*Ancient Israelite Religion*").

WHAT IS A MONARCHY?

WHAT IS A DEMOCRACY?

WHAT ARE THE INHERENT BENEFITS AND DANGERS OF EACH?

Judges 9:16-19-*"Now therefore, if you acted in good faith and integrity when you made Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house and have done to him as his deeds deserved— for my father fought for you and risked his life and delivered you from the hand of Midian,*

and you have risen up against my father's house this day and have killed his sons, seventy men on one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his female servant, king over the leaders of Shechem, because he is your relative—

if you then have acted in good faith and integrity with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you."

After relating the fable to the leaders of Shechem, Jotham added some sarcasm.

(1) If they felt they had acted in "*good faith and integrity*" in making Abimelech king,

(2) If they felt they had dealt fairly with Gideon and his family (who fought for them and delivered them from the oppression of Midian),

and…

(3) If they felt if was right to kill Gideon's seventy sons and make Abimelech king simply because he was a blood relative,

Then they had obviously…

"*acted in good faith and integrity with Jerubbaal* (Gideon) *and with his house this day"*

and they should then…

"rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you."

Oscar Wilde once proclaimed, "Sarcasm is the lowest form of wit, but the highest form of intelligence." From the Greek and Latin for "to tear flesh," sarcasm has been called "hostility disguised as humor." It expresses the poisonous sting of contempt, exposing contradictions between intended meanings. Though it can sometimes be hurtful, sarcasm also allows people to find humor in the truth — often making us more creative and honest.

WHAT IS SARCASM?

WHEN / WHY IS SARCASM SOMETIMES HURTFUL?

WHEN / WHY IS SARCASM SOMETIMES HELPFUL?

Judges 9:20-21-*"But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and devour the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the leaders of Shechem and from Beth-millo and devour Abimelech."*

And Jotham ran away and fled and went to Beer and lived there, because of Abimelech his brother."

Abimelech ruled over Israel three years."

Jotham next offered the reason for his sarcasm. If it was eventually deemed that "*the leaders of Shechem and Bet-millo"*…

(1) Had <u>not</u> acted in good faith,

(2) Had <u>not</u> dealt fairly with Gideon's family, and

(3) Were <u>not</u> right in murdering the seventy sons of Gideon simply because Abimelech was their blood relative

then…

"*let fire come out from the leaders of Shechem and from Beth-millo and devour Abimelech."*

After giving this admonition, Jotham "*went to Beer and lived there because of Abimelech, his brother.*"

DO YOU ALWAYS ACT IN GOOD FAITH?

DO YOU ALWAYS DEAL FAIRLY WITH OTHERS?

DO YOU PUT YOUR FAMILY FIRST EVEN IF THEY ARE WRONG?

Judges 9:22-25-"*Abimelech ruled over Israel three years.*

And God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem, and the leaders of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers.

And the leaders of Shechem put men in ambush against him on the mountaintops, and they robbed all who passed by them along that way. And it was told to Abimelech."

Abimelech, after just three years on the throne his father refused, was about to see his fortunes take a turn for the worse—"*God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem."* Jotham's predictions were about to come to fruition.

God allowed this "*evil spirit*" to stir up suspicions, jealousies, hatred, and ill will between Abimelech and the "*men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers."* "Both the lords of Shechem and Abimelech had flaunted their evil decisions in God's face. Now He pits them against one another to abolish both evil parties" (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary- Judges"*).

The leaders of Shechem decided to deal treacherously with Abimelech and adopted a strategy of highway robberies to disrupt his autocratic rule over them— a form of "*gorilla warfare.*"

"The Spanish word "*guerrilla*" means "*little war*." Guerrilla warfare is sometimes called "*partisan warfare*" or "*irregular warfare*." In general, the words "*guerrilla warfare*" are used to designate any military activity carried on by a comparatively small independent force or unit and irregularly conducted, with or without military organization, in connection with a regular war…

Guerrilla warfare was a part of major and minor wars conducted in ancient times and is reported in connection with most historical accounts of the wars of the past and the present…

In general, although guerrilla warfare has not been the primary means of settling great military conflicts, it has had an important contributing effect on the final results of many a major war" (Captain Nelson J. Anderson, Chemical Warfare Service, *Military Review—The Professional Journal Of The U.S. Army, "Guerrilla Warfare"*).

WHAT IS GUERRILLA WARFARE?

HOW / WHY IS IT USED?

WHERE / HOW HAS IT BEEN USED IN RECENT HSTORY?

Judges 9:26-27-*"And Gaal the son of Ebed moved into Shechem with his relatives, and the leaders of Shechem put confidence in him. And they went out into the field and gathered the grapes from their vineyards and trod them and held a festival; and they went into the house of their god and ate and drank and reviled Abimelech."*

Nothing is known of "*Gaal, the son of Ebed*" other than he obviously commanded respect from some of the inhabitants of Shechem. Arriving with his relatives, many of the town's inhabitants "*put confidence in him*" and they decided to throw him a party.

They "*gathered the grapes from their vineyards*" and drank their wine "*in the house of their god"* (perhaps the local bar was closed). Then, as often happens, the longer the festivities lasted, the more they drank; and the more they drank, the more they *"reviled Abimelech*." It wouldn't take long for the alcohol to falsely bolster their confidence.

"'Alcohol courage,' or 'liquid courage,' is a term that originated in the 17th century. Soldiers heading to the front lines to face cannons and gunfire were given a good dose of gin, which was thought to boost their confidence. Today, people use 'alcohol courage' for other purposes. Drinking gives them the (false) confidence to do things they are otherwise too scared to do — flirting, fighting, singing karaoke at a bar…

Alcohol causes our brain to release a flood of dopamine. This chemical is associated with pleasure and can make you feel confident and powerful. Alcohol also directly impacts the part of the brain associated with good judgment. This reduces your inhibitions and fears, making you more likely to make an impulsive decision without thinking things through" (Gateway Foundation, "*Can Alcohol Really Make You More Confident?"*).

WHAT IS ALCOHOL?

WHY DO PEOPLE DRINK ALCOHOL?

WHAT POOR DECISIONS HAVE YOU MADE WHEN DRINKING ALCOHOL?

Judges 9:28-29-*"And Gaal the son of Ebed said, "Who is Abimelech, and who are we of Shechem, that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal, and is not Zebul his officer? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him? Would that this people were under my hand! Then I would remove Abimelech. I would say to Abimelech, 'Increase your army, and come out.'"*

Sure enough, the alcohol had its desired effect. With inhibitions stymied, Gaal made his pitch to overthrow Abimelech. He claimed Abimelech was only a half-breed— his father (Gideon) was not really one of the men of "*Hamor*"— the founder of Shechem (Gen 33:19). Why were they subservient to Zebul, the commander Abimelech put over their city? If the people would follow him, he would taunt Abimelech into a fight to return their city to its rightful owners! The seed of rebellion was planted.

Rebellion is an act of violent or open resistance to an established government or ruler. It often emerges as a result of perceived injustices, oppression, or failures of authority. But rebellion can also be defined as "resistance to or defiance of any authority, control, or tradition" (*definition.com*) that leads to social upheaval and/or political change.

WHAT IS REBELLION TO AUTHORITY? IS IT EVER JUSTIFIED?

WHAT IS REBELLION TO CONTROL? IS IT EVER JUSTIFIED?

WHAT IS REBELLION TO TRADITION? IS IT EVER JUSTIFIED?

Judges 9:30-33-*"When Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled.*

And he sent messengers to Abimelech secretly, saying, "Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his relatives have come to Shechem, and they are stirring up the city against you.

Now therefore, go by night, you and the people who are with you, and set an ambush in the field. Then in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, rise early and rush upon the city. And when he and the people who are with him come out against you, you may do to them as your hand finds to do."

Once Zebul got wind of Gaal's intent, he secretly sent messengers to Abimelech to warn him of the plot. Zebul was not just the administrator over the city, he was Abimelech's commander. The thought of losing his position angered him and he suggested a military solution to this 'sedition' and 'insurrection.'

"Generally, 'sedition' is conduct or speech that incites individuals to violently rebel against the authority of the government. 'Insurrection' includes the actual acts of violence and rebellion. In a monarchy, sedition might refer to actions instigating the removal of a king or queen. In a constitutional democracy, sedition and insurrection refer to inciting or participating in rebellion against the constitutionally established government, its processes and institutions, or the rule of law.

In other words, in the United States' democracy, violently overthrowing the government or its institutions is overthrowing the Constitution itself. One cannot commit sedition or insurrection to overthrow a government while still claiming to uphold and defend the Constitution. The U.S. government, the rule of law, and the Constitution are inextricably linked, and violent attacks on any of the three are not protected actions…

It is a serious federal crime to commit 'seditious conspiracy' or to participate in an insurrection against the government. Under 18 U.S.C. § 2384, 'seditious conspiracy' occurs when two or more persons conspire:

- to overthrow, put down, or to destroy by force the Government of the United States, or
- to levy war against them, or
- to oppose by force the authority thereof, or
- by force to prevent, hinder, or delay the execution of any law of the United States, or
- by force to seize, take, or possess any property of the United States contrary to the authority thereof…

Individuals charged with 'seditious conspiracy' can be fined and could serve up to 20 years in prison…

It is important to consider that federal law refers to 'seditious conspiracy' as opposed to just 'sedition.' There is the added burden of proof that an individual must actively be conspiring and taking steps toward a violent action against the government, not just making comments that seem to merely reflect that desire…

This is to ensure that First Amendment activity is protected under the Constitution, and only actions that overtly demonstrate individuals' plans to take dangerous steps toward overthrowing the United States' constitutional government are charged" (*Center of Strategic and International Studies, "Understanding Insurrection and Sedition"*).

WHAT IS SEDITIOUS CONSPIRACY? GIVE EXAMPLES

WHAT IS INSURRECTION? GIVE EXAMPLES

WHAT IS PROTECTED SPEECH?

WHAT SPEECH IS NOT PROTECTED?

Judges 9:34-38-"*So Abimelech and all the men who were with him rose up by night and set an ambush against Shechem in four companies. And Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance of the gate of the city, and Abimelech and the people who were with him rose from the ambush.*

And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the mountaintops!" And Zebul said to him, "You mistake the shadow of the mountains for men." Gaal spoke again and said, "Look, people are coming down from the center of the land, and one company is coming from the direction of the Diviners' Oak."

Then Zebul said to him, "Where is your mouth now, you who said, 'Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?' Are not these the people whom you despised? Go out now and fight with them."

Abimelech followed his military commander's advice and "*set an ambush against Shechem.*" When Gaal stood at the gates of the city, he saw Abimelech's troops "*coming down from the mountains.*" But Zebul twice tried to convince Gaal that his eyes were deceiving him. Finally, Zebul admitted that Abimelech's troops were indeed coming to take him on in battle (just as Zebul had planned).

Zebul then taunted Gaal by asking him, "*where is your* (big) *mouth now?... go out now and fight with them*"— put your money where your mouth is.

"Your mouth is writing checks your *"@$$"* can't cash," is something TV Dr. Phil McGraw's father said to him as a boy when he would voice wild plans or notions. It means that talk is cheap relative to performance, or that promising something and delivering on it are two different things. A phrase similar in meaning is "Money talks, "*bull$#!+*" walks." (*Urban Dictionary*).

HAVE YOU EVER WRITTEN A "CHECK" YOUR "@$$" COULDN'T CASH?

HOW / WHY IS TALK CHEAP?

HOW / WHY ARE ACTIONS LOUDER THAN WORDS IN SPREADING THE GOSPEL?

Judges 9:39-41-*"And Gaal went out at the head of 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. And Abimelech lived at Arumah, and Zebul drove out Gaal and his relatives, so that they could not dwell at Shechem."*

Gaal fought Abimelech's troops and the result was not what he had hoped— the battlefield was littered with the wounded bodies of his followers *"up to the entrance of the gate."* Abimelech returned to Arumah (his hillside dwelling place nearby) and allowed Zebul to continue the cleanup operation of driving Gaal and his relatives out of Shechem. Gaal's revolution had failed.

"In 'Rules for Radicals,' the legendary activist Saul Alinsky observed that every revolution inspires a counterrevolution. That is the physics of change. Every action provokes a reaction because, if an idea is important, it threatens the status quo, which never yields its power gracefully. If you seek to make change in the world, you can be sure that some people aren't going to like it and will fight against it…

Successful revolutionaries, on the other hand, understand that power will not fall simply because you oppose it, but it will crumble if you bring those who support it over to your side. That's why lasting change is always built on the common ground of shared values." (Greg Satell, *Human-Centered Change and Innovation, "Why Revolutions Fail"*).

Jesus led the greatest revolution in history— not with war, but by changing minds. "More than 2,000 years have passed since he was among us. His public life was extremely short, extending over just three decades. He had a team of collaborators of scarcely a dozen people. At the time of his death, his supporters did not exceed more than several hundred. He left no writings (of his own). …

Nonetheless, with more than a billion current followers of all races and languages in all corners of the planet, he is without a doubt the greatest leader in history—the most transcendent of all time" (Dr. Leonel Fernández, *Global Foundation For Democracy And Development, ""Jesus, the Greatest Leader in History"*).

HOW / WAS JESUS A REVOLUTIONARY?

HOW WHY DOES HE CHANGE MINDS?

HOW / WHY DID HE CHANGE YOUR MIND?

Judges 9:42-45-*"On the following day, the people went out into the field, and Abimelech was told. He took his people and divided them into three companies and set an ambush in the fields. And he looked and saw the people coming out of the city. So he rose against them and killed them. Abimelech and the company that was with him rushed forward and stood at the entrance of the gate of the city, while the two companies rushed upon all who were in the field and killed them.*

And Abimelech fought against the city all that day. He captured the city and killed the people who were in it, and he razed the city and sowed it with salt. "

Not content with just quashing the revolution by routing its leaders and followers, Abimelech turned his attention to the rest of the inhabitant of the city. "The common folk of Shechem tried to resume their normal lives, going out of the city the next day to work in the fields. But the man who had earlier

victimized his own family members now turned on the innocent residents of Shechem" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*). Abimelech, as he saw the people coming out of the city, "*rose against them and killed them."* He then "*captured the city and killed the people who were in it, and he razed the city and sowed it with salt."*

Revolution inevitably leaves 'innocent victims' in its path. 'Innocent victims' are those individuals who experience harm despite not being involved in wrongdoing. According to the United Nations, ninety percent of wartime casualties are civilians.

"People in war zones are killed in their homes, in markets, and on roadways, by bombs, bullets, fire, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and drones. Civilians die at checkpoints, as they are run off the road by military vehicles, when they step on mines or cluster bombs, as they collect wood or tend to their fields, and when they are kidnapped and executed for purposes of revenge or intimidation…

Many times more people die from reverberating effects like the destruction of infrastructure and resulting consequences for population health. For example, war refugees often lose access to a stable food supply, resulting in increased malnutrition and vulnerability to disease" (*Watson Institute For International and Public Affairs, "Costs of War—Civilians Killed and Wounded"*).

WHO ARE INNOCENT VICTIMS?

HOW ARE THEY HARMED IN WAR?

WHY SHOULD WE HELP INNOCENT VICTIMS?

Judges 9:46-49-*"When all the leaders of the Tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the stronghold of the house of El-berith. Abimelech was told that all the leaders of the Tower of Shechem were gathered together.*

And 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 bundle of brushwood and took it up and laid it on his shoulder. And he said to the men who were with him, "What you have seen me do, hurry and do as I have done."

So every one of the people cut down his bundle and following Abimelech put it against the stronghold, and they set the stronghold on fire over them, so that all the people of the Tower of Shechem also died, about 1,000 men and women."

After destroying the lower part of the city (where the commoners resided), Abimelech next turned his attention to Shechem's remaining civilian leaders who had retreated to the fortified '*Tower of Shechem'* at the top of the hill. It was the stronghold of the pagan temple of *'El-berth.*'

Not content to draw them out with a long siege, he ordered his men to gather "*brushwood*" and "*put it against the stronghold."* Following Abimelech's lead, *"they set the stronghold on fire"* so that "*all the people of the Tower of Shechem also died, about 1,000 men and women."* Abimelech took his revenge upon the last vestiges of Shechem, but as we'll soon see, even this was not enough to satisfy his anger.

WHAT IS ANGER?

WHAT MAKES YOU ANGRY?

WHAT FOOLISH THINGS HAVE YOU DONE OUT OF ANGER?

Judges 9:50-54-*"Then Abimelech went to Thebez and encamped against Thebez and captured it.*

But there was a strong tower within the city, and all the men and women and all the leaders of the city fled to it and shut themselves in, and they went up to the roof of the tower. And Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it and drew near to the door of the tower to burn it with fire.

And a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull. Then he called quickly to the young man his armor-bearer and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest they say of me, 'A woman killed him.'" And his young man thrust him through, and he died."

After finally completing the total annihilation of Shechem, Abimelech inexplicably "*went to Thebez and encamped against Thebez and captured it."* No reason is given for this move, but some scholars speculate it was simply to expand his empire. Regardless, he once again encountered a "*strong tower within the city"* to which "*all the men and women and all the leaders of the city fled to it and shut themselves in."* As he had just done in Shechem, Abimelech "*drew near to the door of the tower to burn it with fire."*

But then something unexpected happened— "*a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull."* Dying, "*he called quickly to the young man, his armor-bearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest they say of me, 'A woman killed him"*— an indignity worse than death itself for a king as the belief was that only a weak man could be killed by a woman. With a single thrust of his sword, the young man did what Abimelech commanded *"and he died."* Abimelech chose suicide since he wouldn't be dying in battle at the hand of a worthy opponent.

"The Bible mentions six people who committed suicide (Judges 9:54; 1 Samuel 31:4-6; 2 Samuel 17:23; 1 Kings 16:18; Matthew 27:5). None of them were righteous, to say the least. The Bible nowhere explicitly states, "it is a sin to commit suicide," but the Bible does condemn murder (Exodus 20:13)…

Suicide is 'self-murder,' therefore suicide is a sin since murder is a sin. Aside from the "do not commit murder" command, suicide is also a sin for the following two reasons, one theological and one practical: (1) it is God and God alone who has the right to determine life and death, and (2) suicide reveals a belief that God is not powerful enough to help you solve your problems…

A side issue related to suicide… is whether Jesus' death should be considered a suicide. After all, Jesus knew what was going to happen to Him, yet He did nothing to avoid it. In fact, He walked straight towards it. Isn't that suicide? No, it most definitely is not…

Sacrificing your life on behalf of others is not suicide. Sacrificing your own life in order to save others is an admission that "you are not your own…you were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20), and that God's purposes for your life are greater and higher than your preferences" (S. Michael Houdmann. *GotQuestion.Blog, "What Does The Bible Say About Suicide?"*).

WHAT IS SUICIDE?

WHY IS SUICIDE WRONG?

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE CONTEMPLATE SUICIDE?

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUICIDE AND SACRIFICING YOUR LIFE ON BEHALF OF OTHERS?

Judges 9:55-56-"*And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, everyone departed to his home. Thus God returned the evil of Abimelech, which he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers. And God also made all the evil of the men of Shechem return on their heads, and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal."*

Abimelech's reign started by conspiring with the leaders of Shechem to kill his seventy half-brothers—the sons of Gideon. Jotham, the only other surviving son of Gideon, had predicted this end to Abimelech and the men of Shechem in a scathing fable.

"God declares the battle between Abimelech and treacherous Shechem a no contest. Both are losers and God exacts His His revenge on Abimelech and Shechem, fulfilling Jotham's fable. God is the only winner… Shechem refused to listen to God's messenger, Jotham, elected a briar as king, and suffered fiery results. Thus ends not only the Abimelech narrative but also the Gideon cycle" (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary- Judges"*).

"The structure of the book (of Judges) and the timing of this episode suggest that in the mind of the narrator, Israel's Canaanite character is set. From here on it will all be downhill…

At the same time, however, with an eye to the welfare of the nation as a whole, the elimination of Abimelech, the bramble king, has the effect of surgical amputation. In the removal of this cancer only three years into Abimelech's reign, the nation has been saved" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

HOW DOES GOD SURGICALLY INTERVENE IN MAN'S BAD ACTIONS?

WHY WILL GOD ALWAYS WIN?

WOULDN'T YOU RATHER BE ON THE WINNING TEAM?

CHAPTER TEN

Judges 10:1-2-"*After Abimelech there arose to save Israel Tola the son of Puah, son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, and he lived at in the hill country of Ephraim. And he judged Israel twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried at Shamir."*

These two verses describe the second of six 'minor judges' in the book of Judges— the first was *Shagmar* (3:1). Next will be *Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon,* and *Abdon* interspersed throughout the book. They are called 'minor judges' not because they were insignificant, but because little is known about them other than that they 'judged' different parts of Israel for periods of time.

"Rather than describing the personal achievements of these secondary rulers, the author simply summarizes their roles— these governors functioned as local rulers (who) administered justice and/or defended the population from external threats" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

"*Tola*," the first 'minor judge' listed after the time of Abimelech, "*lived in the hill country of Ephraim.*" He arose to "*save Israel*"— not all of Israel, but his local region. No specific threat is mentioned and we are left with only a minimal amount of information about this 'judge':

(1) Name— Tola
(2) Father— Puah
(3) Grandfather— Dodo
(4) Tribe of Origin— Issachar
(5) Residence— Hill country of Ephraim
(6) Length of reign— 23 years
(7) Burial place— Shamir

By some estimates, almost 97% of history has been lost. How far back in your family tree have you explored? And more importantly, besides their names, what have you really learned about your ancestors? We barely know Tola's 'name, rank, and serial number,' yet he's listed in the most important book of all times— the Bible. That certainly counts for something.

Most of us want to be remembered after we have passed from this earth— but why? How do you want to be remembered when you die? I'd certainly like for my family to remember me fondly, but the best legacy I can leave them is to have lived a life spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He's the only One I really need to remember me.

WHY IS SO MUCH HISTORY LOST?

WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY

HOW DO YOU WANT TO BE REMEMBERED? WHY?

Judges 10-3-5-"*After him arose Jair the Gileadite, who judged Israel twenty-two years. And he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities, called Havvoth-jair to this day, which are in the land of Gilead. And Jair died and was buried in Kamon."*

The next 'minor judge' was "*Jair*," who judged the Gilead region of Israel for twenty-two years (not an insignificant amount of time). Gilead refers to a geographical region primarily associated with the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh. It was a mountainous area situated east of the Jordan River in what today is modern-day Jordan. The area was called *Havvoth-jair* ("Havvoth" means "villages") when the book of "Judges" was written.

Jair ruled over a conglomerate of "*thirty cities*" scattered throughout Gilead. He had thirty sons (an indication of his rank and position) who rode on "donkeys." It was customary for only the noblest persons to ride on these animals.

"The grant of a village to each of his thirty sons was striking proof of his extensive possessions" (*Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*).

No specific enemy is described and it's assumed that Jair's "judgeship' was peaceful until his death and subsequent burial in "*Kamon*," located somewhere within the region he ruled. Unfortunately, Israel did not enjoy their peace long before they fell into apostasy once again.

WHAT IS PEACE?

WHAT'S THE LONGEST YOU'VE EVER EXPERIENCED PEACE IN YOUR LIFE?

WHAT INTERRUPTED YOUR PEACE?

Judges 10:6-*"The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. And they forsook the Lord and did not serve him."*

Once again, "*the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord"* (one of many times this phrase is repeated in the book of Judges). They abandoned the one true God to follow the many 'gods' of the land. There were a plethora of them:

- the *Baals* and the *Ashtaroth*
- 'gods" of Syria (*Dagan, El, Ishtar, Baal,* and *Hadad*)
- 'gods' of Sidon (*Baal, Astarte,* and *Eshmun.*)
- 'god' of Moab (*Chemosh*)
- 'gods' of the Ammonites (*Milcom* and *Molech*)
- 'gods' of the Philistines (*Dagon, Baal, Asherah,* and *Astarte*)

In 1928 archaeologists excavated the ancient city of *Ugarit* (modern-day *Ras Shamra, Syria*), an important urban trading center from around 1450 to 1185 BC. They unearthed a large collection of clay tablets inscribed with cuneiform texts known as the "*Ugaritic Texts.*" *Ugaritic* is a Northwest Semitic language and is a close linguistic relative of Biblical *Hebrew*.

These texts included epic poems, descriptions of *Ugaritic* cults and rituals, and over a hundred letters of correspondence. They also detailed the myths, rituals, and names of Canaanite gods and goddesses. In total, more than 234 deities were recorded!

WHO / WHAT ARE FALSE 'gods' TODAY?

HOW MANY FALSE 'gods' HAVE YOU FOLLOWED?

WHY? HOW?

Judges 10:7-8-*"So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the Ammonites, and they crushed and oppressed the people of Israel that year. For eighteen years they oppressed all the people of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead."*

God's response to His people's apostasy was crushing—"*the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel."* He '*sold'* them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the children of Ammon.

"That is, He 'delivered' them into their hands, and they became subject and were in bondage to them—sold for 'slaves.' (Those) who lay to the west of the land of Israel, fell into the hands of the *Philistines*; and (those) who lay to the east, were oppressed by the children of *Ammon*" ("Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible").

Additionally, for 18 years those Israelites living east of the Jordan River were also harassed by the Amorites north of Ammon in the Gilead region.

"It would be foolish to ignore the passages in Scripture that talk about God's 'anger.' Yes, God does get angry; there are many examples in the Bible of this. He "*displays his wrath every day*" (Psalm 7:11)…

However, we must not equate God's anger with our own human experiences of that emotion… Ephesians 4:26–27 tells us it is possible to experience anger but not sin. As God cannot sin, we know that His anger is righteous, unlike the common experience of anger in ourselves. As James 1:20 says, "*Human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires"…*

The context of the verses of God getting angry reveals why He gets angry. God gets angry when there is a violation of His character. God is righteous, just, and holy, and none of these attributes can be compromised (Ex 20:4–6; Isaiah 42:8)… Just as a parent becomes angry at anything that would hurt his children, so God's anger is directed at that which would harm His people and their relationship with Him…

Romans 1:18 tells us God's anger, or wrath, comes against "*the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness.*" So God gets angry at the wickedness in people, and He opposes that wickedness in an effort to turn them from evil, that they may find true life and freedom in Him. Even in His anger, God's motivation is love for people; to restore the relationship that sin destroyed" (GotQuestions.org., *"Does God Get Angry?"*).

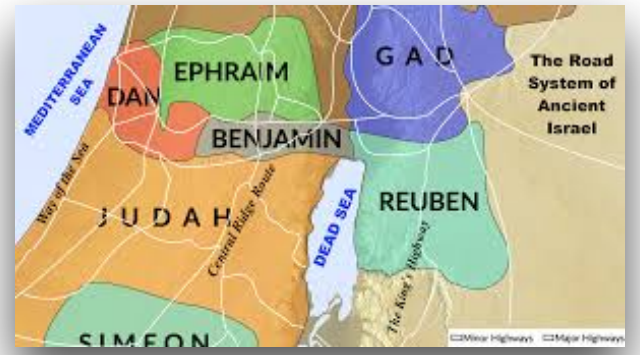
DO YOU GET ANGRY? WHY?

DOES GOD GET ANGRY? WHY?

HOW IS YOUR ANGER DIFFERENT THAN GOD'S ANGER?

Judges 10:9-"*And the Ammonites crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah and against Benjamin and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was severely distressed.*"

Not satisfied with oppressing only those Israelites living east of the Jordan river, the Ammonites pressed westward across the Jordan into the lands occupied by the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim.



"Nations attempt to conquer other nations primarily to gain more land, resources, political power, or to spread their ideological beliefs, often driven by economic motivations, a desire for global influence, or even religious reasons; historically, this has been called imperialism, where conquest is used to expand a nation's territory and control over other region…

Key reasons for conquest:

Economic gain: Access to valuable natural resources like minerals, fertile land, or strategic trade routes can be a major motivator for conquest…

Political power: Expanding territory and controlling other nations increases a country's influence on the world stage, enhancing its political standing…

Ideological spread: Some nations may seek to spread their political or religious beliefs through conquest, aiming to establish a dominant ideology…

Security concerns: A nation might conquer neighboring territories to create a buffer zone or prevent potential threats from those regions…

Historical grievances: Past conflicts or perceived injustices can motivate a nation to seek revenge or reclaim lost territory." (*Google AI Overview*).

WHAT IS IMPERIALISM?

WHY DO NATIONS ENGAGE IN IMPERIALISM?

WHAT IS THE RESULT OF IMPERIALISM?

Judges 10:10-*"And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, saying, 'We have sinned against you, because we have forsaken our God and have served the Baals.'"*

The Israelites finally realized they had messed up royally and "*cried out to the Lord.*" They even admitted that they had "*sinned*" by forsaking their one true God for multiple false 'gods' and 'goddesses.' But as will soon become evident, realizing sin (and it's temporal consequences) is not the same as repenting from sin (to avoid eternal consequences)— confession is not repentance!

"To confess is essentially to agree out-loud – literally, 'to say with' or 'to say the same' (*homologeo)*. It is to agree with God that what He has said on a matter is in fact true… Repentance is to change your mind, to be converted, or to turn away from something. It is a turning from sin in order to turn to holiness…

Be careful that your confession not become another way of avoiding repentance. Sometimes, I fear that when we confess, we use the confession to avoid repentance. Rather than turning from sin, we are seeking absolution from our guilt…

What's missing is repentance. Repentance turns away from sin. Repentance seeks to avoid it. Confession answers, "What have you done?" Repentance asks, "What will you do?" Confession says, "I've wasted God's money and gone into debt." Repentance cuts up credit cards, carries enough cash for the day's needs, and makes no provision for the flesh" (Travis Rymer, Associate Pastor Grace Harbor Church, *"Don't Just Confess From Your Sin, Repent From It"*).

DO YOU CONFESS YOUR SINS? WHEN? WHERE? HOW?

DO YOU REPENT FROM SINS" WHEN? WHERE? HOW?

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE?

Judges 10:11-14-*"And the Lord said to the people of Israel, 'Did I not save you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites and from the Philistines? The Sidonians also, and the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, and you cried out to me, and I saved you out of their hand. Yet you have forsaken me and served other gods; therefore I will save you no more. Go and cry out to the gods whom you have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress.'"*

God answered the Israelites with a history lesson that they should have learned from their parents. He lists seven nations from which He had saved them:

(1) *Egyptians*— The Israelites' Exodus to the Promised Land
(2) *Amorites*— Moses' victory over Og and Sidon (Nun 21:21-35)
(3) *Ammonites*— Ehud's victory over Moab with whom the Ammonites were aligned (Judges 3:15-30)
(4) *Philistines*— Shamgar's victory (Judges 3:31)
(5) *Sidonians*— Canaanites defeated by Barak (Judges 4)
(6) *Amalekites*— Allies of Moab (Judges 3:3) and Midian (Judges 6:3, 33; 7:2)
(7) *Maonites*—Possible confederates of the Midianites

With the history lesson finished, God stated He would save them "*no more.*" Their sorrow didn't equate with repentance— He sarcastically told them to call out to the 'gods' they chose over Him. They'd made their bed and they needed to lie in it for a while.

How often have you withered on the vine when you selfishly abandoned God? God produced a drought to make you turn back to Him. Admit it, when you were fat and happy, you forgot about Him. Only when you were harshly reminded of your need did you return. Out of pain you found joy. Sometimes God allows our worry, uncertainty, dread, and fear to bring us back to Him.

HOW MANY TIMES HAS GOD LET YOU WITHER ON THE VINE WHEN YOU IGNORED HIM?

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

DO YOU NEED A HISTORY LESSON OF ALL THE TIMES GOD HAS COME THROUGH FOR YOU?

Judges 10:15-16-*"And the people of Israel said to the Lord, "We have sinned; do to us whatever seems good to you. Only please deliver us this day." So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord, and he became impatient over the misery of Israel."*

"(The Israelites') response appears to be completely submissive, an appropriate response to their own habit of "doing what is evil in the eyes of the Lord," but their surrender is belied by the following demand to rescue/deliver them immediately ("*this day*"). The people's verbal response to *Yahweh's* rejection betrays a blindness not only to the fundamental contradiction in their demand, but also to the manner in which *Yahweh* has consistently worked heretofore in the book" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary-Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

The Lord eventually "*became impatient over the misery of Israel."* Some scholars believe this meant He recognized the sincerity of their confession— the King James Bible translations this verse as "*His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel*." But many others take a different view and claim it meant that God had grown wearisome of their unrepentant cries for help— they just wanted relief from their oppression.

"Their words alone had failed to manipulate God and produce the results that they had desired. It appears now that they have attempted to go a step farther. Perhaps if they put away their gods then God will see their actions and give them what they desire…

But their efforts are nothing more than attempts to manipulate God and God has grown tired of it. He is a jealous God who wants their undivided worship — not for a season or a time, but always. What He wants from the Israelites is for them to repent and return to worship Him and Him alone" (Matt Morgan, *Escalate Church Sermon Series: "In Need of a Greater Rescue"*).

Other Biblical scholars take a more ambivalent view of this verse:

"Since there is no explicit description of either the original or final state of the relationship between the people and *Yahweh*, it is not possible to say whether or not an original state of peace between the actors has been restored in the end" (M. Sjoberg, "*Wrestling With Textural Violence: The Jephathah Narrative in Antiquity and Modernity""*)

DO YOU TRY TO MANIPULATE GOD? HOW? WHY?

CAN GOD BE MANIPULATED?

CAN YOU BE MANIPULATED? HOW? WHY?

Judges 10:17-18-*"Then the Ammonites were called to arms, and they encamped in Gilead. And the people of Israel came together, and they encamped at Mizpah. And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said one to another, "Who is the man who will begin to fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."*

As the Ammonites "*were called to arms*," the Israelites encamped in *Gilead* in the town of *Mizpah* (literally translated *"watchtower"*). Without a military commander, they realized they were in a heap of trouble. God had not called up a leader— divine silence echoed loudly in their ears.

In their despair, they ask among themselves, "*Who is the man who will begin to fight against the Ammonites?"* Whoever would step up would be given the headship over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

"There was no consciousness of being the people of *Yahweh*, no appeal to God to solve the crisis in leadership, and subsequently no reference to *Yahweh* raising this man. This was a purely secular moment" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

As you analyze possible solutions to problems, do you include God or rely solely on human intervention? While you should certainly seek all possible worldly solutions, don't be blinded by your own presuppositions and exclude God from the equation. How often have you been tempted to go around God's chain of command? That'll just get you in a heap of trouble. He wants to help. He's a proven resource!

HAVE YOU BEEN BLINDED BY PRESUPPOSITIONS ABOUT GOD? HOW? WHY?

DO YOU EXCLUDE GOD IN YOUR DECISIONS? HOW? WHY?

HAVE YOU EVER GONE AROUND GOD'S CHAIN OF COMMAND? HOW? WHY?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Judges 11:1-3-*"Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute. Gilead was the father of Jephthah. And Gilead's wife also 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.' Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob, and worthless fellows collected around Jephthah and went out with him.*

Gilead was probably named after his ancestral clan or the region of Gilead itself— there were many instances where an individual was named after an important ancestor. Regardless of the origin of his name, Gilead was the father of Jephthah via a "*prostitute*" whose name is not mentioned.

But Gilead also fathered other sons with his wife and a conflict arose as they "*grew up*." These half-brothers would not acknowledge Jephthah's right to an inheritance and drove him out of town. Despite being a "*mighty warrior*," Jephthah fled and settled in the town of "*Tob*" where he became an outcast who gathered "*worthless fellows*" around him.

> *"A worthless person, a wicked man, goes about with crooked speech, winks with his eyes, signals with his feet, points with his finger, with perverted heart devises evil, continually sowing discord; therefore calamity will come upon him suddenly; in a moment he will be broken beyond healing"* (Prov 6:12-15).

"Outcasts often experience feelings of loneliness, isolation, low self-esteem, and can be prone to mental health issues due to the social rejection they face; however, some individuals may find strength in their outsider status, using solitude to cultivate creativity and unique perspectives, potentially leading to personal growth and achievement in different areas of life" (*Google AI Overview*). Jephthah experienced both sides of the outcast coin.

WHAT IS AN OUTCAST?

WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE INFLUENCES OF BEING AN OUTCAST?

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN AN OUTCAST? WHEN/ HOW? WHY?

Judges 11:4-7-*"After a time the Ammonites made war against Israel. And when the Ammonites made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to bring Jephthah from the land of Tob. And they said to Jephthah, 'Come and be our leader, that we may fight against the Ammonites.'"*

But Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me and drive me out of my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?"

Sometime after Jephthah was unceremoniously driven out of town, "*the Ammonites made war against Israel.*" The elders of Gilead looked around and could find no one among them to lead the Israelites in battle. With hat in hand, they approached Jephthah and said, "*Come and be our leader, that we may fight against the Ammonites.*" They wanted him as their battlefield commander, but not as their civilian ruler.

However, as they would soon discover, one can negotiate from either a position of strength or weakness and they were definitely bargaining from the latter. Jephthah held all the cards and he was about to play them out.

> "Successful negotiation is not about getting to 'yes'; it's about mastering 'no' and understanding what the path to an agreement is" (Christopher Voss).

"Christopher Voss is a former FBI hostage negotiator turned CEO, author and academic, so he knows what he's talking about regarding the art of negotiation. Here he stresses the importance of using the word '*no*' when attempting to reach an agreement. While this might seem counterintuitive, knowing when to say '*no*' is arguably more essential than knowing when to say '*yes*.' Negotiators have to walk a fine line, you don't want to use the word too often and end up in a stalemate, but you also don't want to use it infrequently and end up accepting a substandard deal…

The path to an agreement requires you to know your *ZOPA* (*Zone of Possible Acceptance*) and your *BATNA* (*Best Alternatives to a Negotiated Agreement*) inside and out. That way, you can judge when to say '*no*' without becoming an obstacle…

For example, if a deal falls below your minimum pricing threshold, you can turn down the offer and counter it with your own, more acceptable alternative. It can also be helpful to keep a ranked list of goals and desires based on their importance to you or the other party so that you can make smart bargaining decisions" (Scotwork, "*Top 5 Negotiation Quotes"*).

WHAT IS A NEGOTIATION?

WHAT HAVE YOU NEGOTIATED?

DID YOU NEGOTIATE FROM A POSITION OF STRENGTH OR WEAKNESS?

Judges 11:8-10-*"And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "That is why we have turned to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the Ammonites and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."*

Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you bring me home again to fight against the Ammonites, and the Lord gives them over to me, I will be your head." And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The Lord will be witness between us, if we do not do as you say."

As the elders of Gilead negotiated with Jephthah, they came to realize they needed to offer more. Jephthah would only risk his life in battle if he was also anointed civilian ruler over Gilead. Reluctantly, the elders agreed and said to Jephthah, *"The Lord will be witness between us, if we do not do as you say."*

"Jephthah shrewdly capitalizes on the elders' obvious desperation, even extracting an oath so as to guarantee the validity of their proposal" (Terry Brensinger, *"Believers Church Bible Commentary- Judges"*).

Oaths were common in Levitical times as they demonstrated one would carry through with a promise. On the other hand, a rash oath made without forethought or not meant to be kept at all was a sin that required confession and atonement. A *Sin Offering* was to be performed as a means of forgiveness (Lev 5:4-13).

Today, God still expects us to keep our word. But Jesus tells us that a *Christian* doesn't need to issue an oath— his word should be his bond:

Mat 5:33-37- *"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.'*

But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil"

HAVE YOU EVER MADE AN OATH? WHY?

DID YOU KEEP IT?

IS YOUR 'YES' A YES AND 'NO' A NO? WHY? WHY NOT?

Judges 11:11-*"So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and leader over them. And Jephthah spoke all his words before the Lord at Mizpah."*

"Far from playing the decisive role as He had in the provision of all the other judges, God is relegated to the role of silent witness to a purely human contract between a desperate people and an ambitious candidate… In reality, the witness Jephthah is concerned about is not *Yahweh*, but the army of Gilead encamped at Mizpah" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

"Here Jephthah and the Gileadite leaders go through the 'religious motions,' fulfilling the ritual their tradition have taught them" (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary- Judges"*).

Sometimes we all just go through 'religious motions.' "But, going through the motions is no way to go through the Christian life because if we're just going through the motions in our faith, we're merely marking boxes on a checklist of Christian activity…

• Go to church on Sundays. Check…

• Give a little money online. Check…

• Occasionally open the Bible. Check…

While we may be doing the right things on the outside, we often carry out our religious routine like a robot without a heart. We are present in body but not in spirit. We have a sense of duty but not delight – creating a walk with the Lord that is lifeless and void of enthusiasm. Worse still, we have no interest in letting the Lord transform us from the inside out. We are perfectly content to keep Him at a distance, living as if He doesn't exist." (Jonathan Munson, Executive Director, RFTH, *rightfromtheheart.org,* "*Going Through The Motions*").

WHAT DOES 'GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS' MEAN?

HAVE YOU EVER JUST GONE THROUGH RELIGIOUS MOTIONS? WHY?

WHAT BOXES HAVE YOU CHECKED TRYING TO KEEP GOD AT A DISTANCE?

Judges 11:12-13-*"Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites and said, "What do you have against me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?" And the king of the Ammonites answered the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Israel on coming up from Egypt took away my land, from the Arnon to the Jabbok and to the Jordan; now therefore restore it peaceably."*

Seeking to avoid bloodshed, Jephthah follows normal diplomatic protocol and sends his representatives to the king of the Ammonites; but the king refuses their overtures. Instead, he makes a false claim that Israel had long ago taken land belonging to the Ammonites between the *Arnon* and *Jabot* tributaries to the *Jordan River.*

But the Ammonites had never occupied that land. The Israelites had gained possession by way of Moses' defeat of the Amorite king Sihon on their exodus to the Promised Land (Deut. 2:30-34)— the Israelites had previously passed peacefully by the Ammonites on their journey. The Ammonite king was simply making a power play for more territory.

'Diplomacy' is defined as "the art and practice of conducting negotiations between nations— skill in handling affairs without arousing hostility" (Merriam Webster). But often diplomacy and military force go hand in hand.

"By their very nature, diplomacy and military force are means to the ends of statecraft as well as channels by which governments press their agendas onto others. Neither is inherently more or less useful than the other… Far from being antithetical to one another, diplomacy and military force are complementary insofar as they serve the same political ends…

Diplomacy verbally communicates realities that may move nations, while (the the threat of) military action physically communicates a government's wishes by trying to sweep away resistance to them…

Diplomacy is often popularly thought of as the peaceful alternative to violence, but in fact, diplomacy serves to prepare as often as to avoid war. It is an important part of waging war, often makes the difference in who wins, and nearly always codifies wars' results…

Whereas diplomacy represents realities, military operations create them. Diplomacy is the verbal representation of compelling international realities, and military force is one of those realities" (Angelo M. Codevilla, Foreign Policy Research Institute, '*The Tools of Statecraft- Diplomacy and War*").

WHAT IS DIPLOMACY?

HOW CAN DIPLOMACY PREVENT WAR?

HOW CAN DIPLOMACY PREPARE FOR WAR?

Judges 11:14-24-"*Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites and said to him, 'Thus says Jephthah: Israel did not take away the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites, but when they came up from Egypt, Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh.*

Israel then 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 sent also to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh.

'Then they journeyed through the wilderness and went around the land of Edom and the land of Moab and arrived on the east side of the land of Moab and camped on the other side of the Arnon. But they did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was the boundary of Moab.

Israel then sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, king of Heshbon, and Israel said to him, 'Please let us pass through your land to our country,' but Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory, so Sihon gathered all his people together and encamped at Jahaz and fought with Israel. And the Lord, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them.

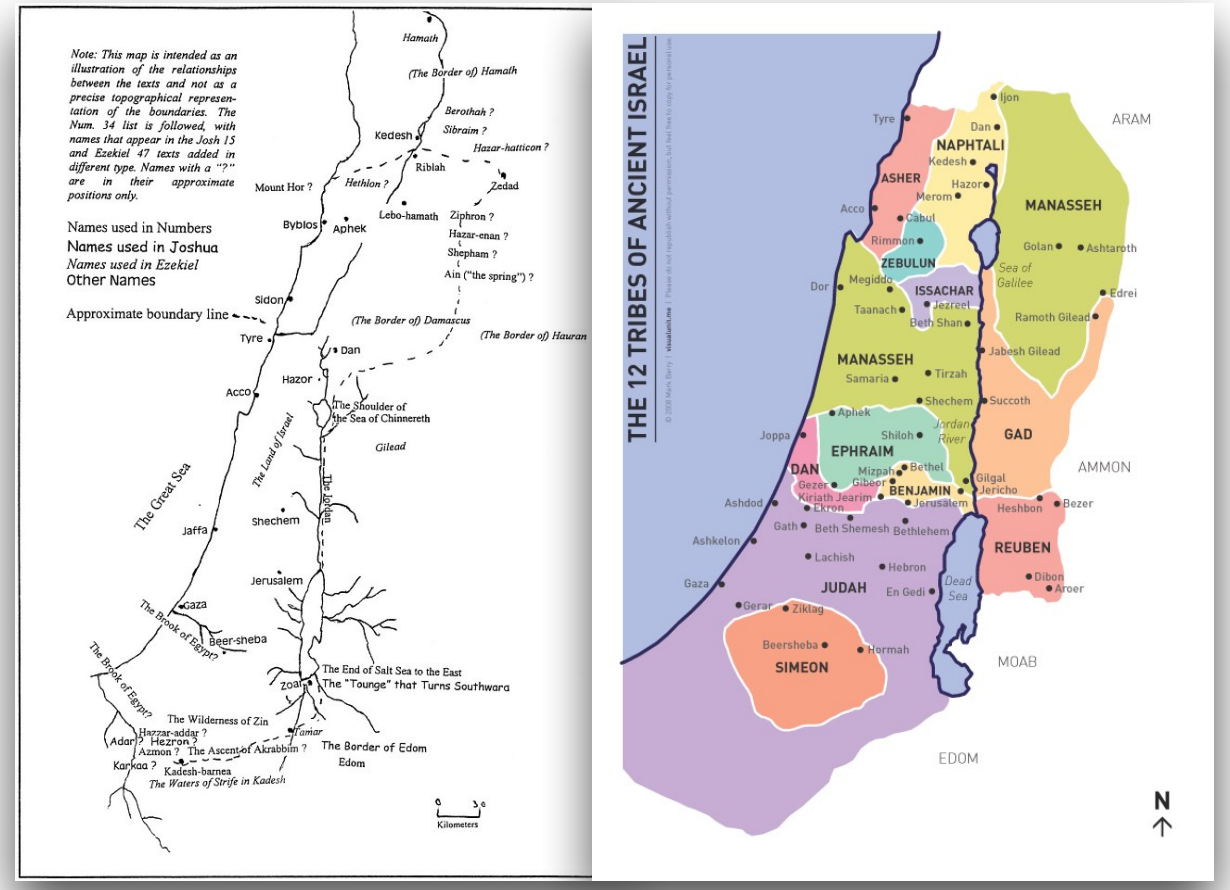
So Israel took possession of all the land of the Amorites, who inhabited that country. And they took possession of all the territory of the Amorites from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. So then the Lord, the God of Israel, dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel;

and are you to take possession of them?

Will you not possess what Chemosh your god gives you to possess? And all that the Lord our God has dispossessed before us, we will possess."

Jephthah again sends messengers to the king of the Ammonites, but this time he decides to give him a detailed history lesson. The land the king was claiming had simply never belonged to the Ammonites. It had been given to Israel by the "*God of Israel.*"

The Ammonites currently occupied land that their 'god' *Chemosh* (actually the 'god' of Moab) had supposedly given them "*to possess*" east of the disputed land. They should remain in their own territory and the Israelites would keep the land the Lord their God had given them.



The eastern border of the Promised Land given to the Israelites by *Yahweh* was outlined in detail:

> "*You shall draw a line for your eastern border from Hazar-enan to Shepham. And the border shall go down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain. And the border shall go down and reach to the shoulder of the Sea of Chinnereth on the east. And the border shall go down to the Jordan, and its limit shall be at the Salt Sea. This shall be your land as defined by its borders all around."* (Nu 34:10-12)

Additionally, their inheritance also now included the lands in the northern Transjordan given to Israel by the defeat of their Amorite enemies, Sidon and Og, before they crossed the Jordan to complete their conquest of the Promised Land. If Sidon and Og had allowed the Israelites safe passage through their lands it might not have become part of Israel's territory!

> *"Moses commanded the people of Israel, saying, "This is the land that you shall inherit by lot, which the Lord has commanded to give to the nine tribes and to the half-tribe. For the tribe of the people of Reuben by fathers' houses and the tribe of the people of Gad by their fathers' houses have received their inheritance, and also the half-tribe of Manasseh. The two tribes and the half-tribe have received their inheritance beyond the Jordan east of Jericho, toward the sunrise."* (Nu 34:13-15).

Today, Israel's land does not include any areas in the Transjordan. It's bounded to the north by Lebanon, to the northeast by Syria, to the east and southeast by Jordan, to the southwest by Egypt, and to the west by the Mediterranean Sea. Additionally, much of the land within its borders is occupied by self-proclaimed 'Palestinians' in Gaza and the West Bank.

HOW HAS ISRAEL'S MAP CHANGED FROM ANCIENT TIMES?

HOW MUCH OF MODERN DAY ISRAEL IS TOTALLY CONTROLLED BY ISRAEL TODAY?

HOW MUCH OF THE PROMISED LAND IS CONTROLLED BY OTHERS?

Judges 11:25-28-*"Now are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever contend against Israel, or did he ever go to war with 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, 300 years, why did you not deliver them within that time?*

I therefore have not sinned against you, and you do me wrong by making war on me. The Lord, the Judge, decide this day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon."

But the king of the Ammonites did not listen to the words of Jephthah that he sent to him."

Jephthah asks a simple question— did the king have any more right to the land than his neighbor to the south, *"Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab?* Israel had passed peacefully through both of their territories during their exodus and had not taken any of their lands— they'd only claimed land from the Amorites taken in battle. Besides, the Israelites had been living there for the last 300 years— why claim it only now?

Jephthah explains that the Israelites had not sinned against the king of the Ammonites— the king was doing wrong by making war on Jephthah and his people. Unfortunately, "*the king of the Ammonites did not listen to the words of Jephthah that he sent to him"* and Jephthah responded, "*The Lord, the Judge, decide this day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon."*

For the first time, Jephthah acknowledges that *Yahweh* may have more than just an observer's role in the conflict! Jephthah may actually need "*the Lord, the Judge*" on his side if he was to have success going against the king of the Ammonites.

A great warrior prepares diligently for battle. He decides who to fight and where the battle should take place. He draws up meticulous plans and conveys them to the troops for execution. When the time comes, a true warrior leads his men in battle, fights along side them, and carries them on his shoulders to victory.

God is a warrior— He's not a pacifist. He's prepared a battle plan for us, gives us the equipment to succeed, and fights alongside us. All we have to do is obey Him and follow His lead.

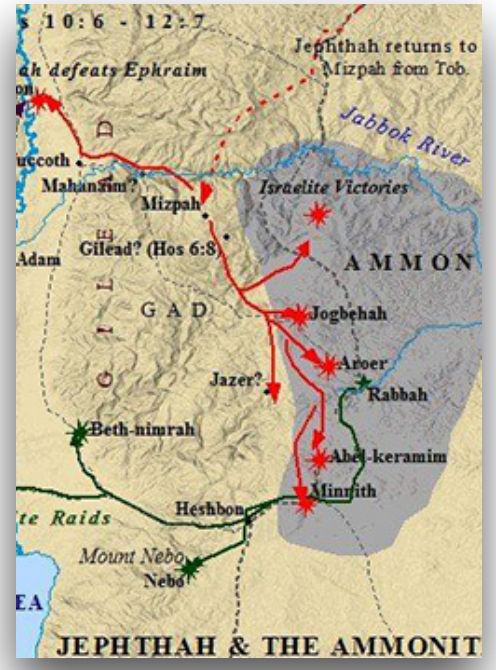
"The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is his name." (Ex 15:3)

WHAT IS A WARRIOR?

DO YOU LET GOD DECIDE THE BATTLE PLAN OR DO YOU TRY TO PLAN IT ALONE?

HOW HAS GOD EQUIPPED YOU FOR BATTLE?

Judges 11:29-*"Then the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh and passed on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed on to the Ammonites."*



With Jephthah's acknowledgment of his need for *Yahweh*, God ceases to be a silent witness and becomes actively involved in Jephthah's life— *"the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jephthah."* But God comes to his aid on His own terms— not Jephthah's.

"(The coming of the Spirit) is a mark of divine presence and purpose and provides him with true legitimacy for his role as Gileadite leader and as charismatic marshal of a larger body of the Israelite tribes" (V. Matthews, "*Judges and Ruth*").

With the wind of God at his back, Jephthah travels along the northern Transjordan through the regions of Gilead and Manasseh to rally able bodied men for the battle. He returns to his home base at Mizpah of Gilead with troops in hand ready to begin the attack on the Ammonites.

But before he leaves, Jephthah tries to make a deal with God for assurance of victory. As will soon be seen, it has disastrous personal consequences.

"When we examine the descriptions of the 'Spirit of God' in the scriptures, we should remember that they are efforts to express the inexpressible God. In both Hebrew and Greek the word which we translate as 'spirit' indicates 'a movement of 'air.' Thus 'the Spirit of God' could correctly be translated 'the wind of God' or 'the breath of God.' This invisible movement of air is an inspired image for God's presence and action among us." (Fr. George M. Smiga, Buildingontheword.org, "*The Spirit Of God*").

WHAT IS THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD?

HOW IS THE SPIRIT OF GOD AN IMAGE OF GOD'S PRESENCE AND ACTION AMONG US?

HAS GOD'S PRESENCE MOVED YOU TO ACTION? HOW/? WHY?

Judges 11:30-31-*"And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, "If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering."*

"Having favorably negotiated terms for his leadership over Gilead, but having unsuccessfully avoided confrontation with the Ammonites through negotiation, he (Jephthah) sought to secure victory with words. But he was still negotiating— manipulating God and seeking to wrest concessions and favors from Him like he had from the Gileadites and Ammonites…

With the Gileadites he achieved all he wanted; with the Ammonites he received a verbal if negative response; with *Yahweh* there would only be silence" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

"Verses 30 and 31 present two of the most controversial versers in the Old Testament… In the face of battle, Jephthah decides he needs more than faith. He needs to make a deal with God. Apparently he has no idea what the real result of his vow will be" (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary- Judges"*).

Jephthah tries to negotiate with God for victory and safe return from battle. In return he is willing to offer up "*whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return*" as a "*burnt offering to the Lord.*" He will soon regret his promise.

"The commercial world largely operates on the principle of haggling and making deals or contracts— an agreement between two or more people or groups where each helps the other in some way. An example is an employer and employee come to an arrangement that says, 'If you do this I will give you this amount of money'. It is exchanging one thing of value (normally money) for another (time and expertise). It is only successful if both parties have something the other lacks or needs, and both fulfill what they have agreed to…

The difference between bargaining and asking for something is that asking admits my own weakness (it involves something I can't do myself), while bargaining exploits a weakness in the other party or their being vulnerable to manipulation. A request comes from a place of humility while bargaining comes from a place of power, implying that we hold influence over the other…

Some people mistakenly think they can manipulate God. Yet God doesn't lack or need anything. He is self-sufficient, thus is not dependent on anyone or anything. He can exist without us and needs nothing from us (Ex 3:14; Act 17:24,25). In contrast we humans derive our existence from Him our creator and live in

dependence on Him (Col 1:17). If we try to bargain with God, it is offering Him things we don't possess and He doesn't want, in hopes to receive something we know we don't deserve" (Bible- dictionary.info, "*Bargaining With God*").

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BARGAIN WITH GOD?

HAVE YOU EVER TRIED TO BARGAIN WITH GOD? WHY? HOW?

WHY IS IT IMPOSSIBLE TO BARGAIN WITH GOD?

Judges 11:32-33-"*So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them, and the Lord gave them into his hand. And he struck them from Aroer to the neighborhood of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim, with a great blow. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel."*

With what he thought was a guaranteed-to-work vow in his back pocket, "*Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them."* He struck twenty Ammonite cities with a great blow and subdued the Ammonites "*before the people of Israel.*"

God's Spirit had enabled the win, but it wasn't because of any prior negotiation on Jephthah's part. In fact, Jephthah may as well have been negotiating with the reflection in his mirror. God had remained silent— He doesn't make deals. God had graciously given Jephthah the win to deliver the Israelites from the Ammonites, but now Jephthah would have to cope with his own rash vow— a vow that would result in an abomination to the Lord.

HAVE YOU MADE STUPID PROMISES TO GOD?

WAS GOD SILENT WHEN YOU MADE THOSE PROMISES?

WHAT DO YOU THINK HE WAS TRYING TO TELL YOU WITH HIS SILENCE?

Judges 34-35-"*Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah. And behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances. She was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter.*

And as soon as he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow."

It was common for children to greet their fathers coming home from war with "*tambourines and dances"* in celebration of their safe return. Following this tradition, Jephthah's daughter, his only child, was the first to "*come out from the doors"* of his house to meet him. "*And as soon as he saw her, he tore his clothes"*— a symbolic act of mourning, grief, and loss.

Whether Jephthah had contemplated this possibility when he made his vow has been the subject of debate among scholars. Some believe he may have expected only an animal to come out first from the house.

Others argue he anticipated a household servant and was willing to engage in human sacrifice— the phrase "*to meet me*" indicating a person and not an animal. Still others see the possibility that he was even willing to risk his daughter's life with his vow to guarantee his own safety.

"In simple terms, 'risk' is the possibility of something bad happening. Risk involves uncertainty about the effects/implications of an activity with respect to something that humans value (such as health, well-being, wealth, property or the environment), often focusing on negative, undesirable consequences…

'Risk' is ubiquitous in all areas of life and we all manage these risks, consciously or intuitively, whether we are managing a large organization or simply crossing the road." (*wikipedia.org*).

Jephthah took a risk and he lost. "The attempt to give Jephthah the benefit of the doubt only makes him look worse— stupid and thoughtless, as well as unfaithful" (C. McCann, "*Judges: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching"*).

WHAT IS RISK?

WHAT RISKS HAVE YOU TAKEN? WHY?

HOW DO YOU MITIGATE RISK?

Judges 11:36-*"And she said to him, 'My father, you have opened your mouth to the Lord; do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the Lord has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites.'"*

Jephthah's daughter response is remarkable — she states, "*do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth."* She's willing to be sacrificed to honor her father's rash vow. "The despicable behavior of this hero in Israel contradicts with the sensitivity and submissiveness of the child" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

Self- sacrifice is defined as "sacrificing one's interests, desires, etc., for duty or the good of another" (*dictionary.com*). Biblically, self-sacrifice means denying one own desires and following the path of Jesus.

"Self-sacrifice is one of the major themes of the *New Testament.* Jesus modeled it for us in the way He lived. Though He was God, He did not demand His rights as God, but demonstrated servant leadership in everything He did (Phil 2:6–8). He said to His disciples, *"Whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Matt 20:27–28)…

When we willingly limit our freedoms, set aside our own rights, and pursue the best interest of those God has called us to serve, we are being biblically self-sacrificial. Self-sacrifice demands that we daily die to the passions of our flesh that are in opposition to God's will for our lives (Rom 6:6–7; Gal 2:20)…

We don't do this in order to appease God or earn His favor. We already have that because of Jesus (2 Cor 5:21; Eph 1:4–7). We choose it because we know it pleases our Father and we want to be more like His Son (Rom 8:29)" (*Gotquestions.org*, "*What does the Bible say about self-sacrifice / being self-sacrificial?*).

WHAT IS SELF-SACRIFICE?

WHAT IS BIBLICAL SELF SACRIFICE?

WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO SELF- SACRIFICE ?

Judges 11:37-40-*"So she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me: leave me alone two months, that I may go up and down on the mountains and weep for my virginity, I and my companions."*

So he said, "Go." Then he sent her away for two months, and she departed, she and her companions, and wept for her virginity on the mountains. And at the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow that he had made.

She had never known a man, and it became a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went year by year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year."

Her only request before her death was to be allowed two months to "*go up and down on the mountains and weep for* (her) *virginity"* with her companions. Not only would she die never having conceived a child, but Jephthah's familial line would die with her as he had no other children. To die without progeny was considered a terrible fate.

After two month, Jephthah carries out his vow. "The text speaks volumes by its very silence. It refrains from saying what the father did in order to communicate more dramatically, more forcefully, what he did" (C. Brown, "*Commentary on the Book of Judges*").

"Jephthah delivers the Israelites from the Ammonites, who along with their neighbors sacrifice their children to their gods; then he sacrifices his daughter to *Yahweh*, who does not accept human sacrifice" (K. L.Younger, Jr, in *"The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches"— "Early Israel in Recent Biblical Scholarship*").

Afterwards, it became a custom in Gilead that her self-sacrifice be honored four days a year by the "*daughters of Israel.*"

HOW WILL YOUR SELF-SACRIFICES BE REMEMBERED?

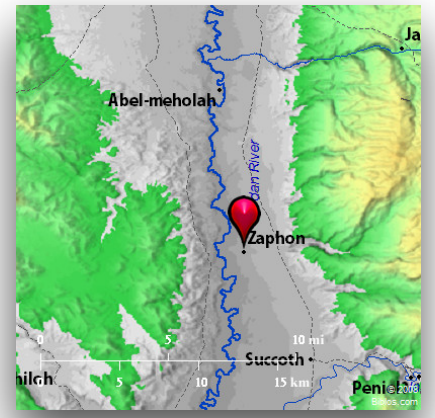
HOW IS CHRIST'S SELF-SACRIFICE REMEMBERED?

HOW DO YOU HONOR CHRIST'S SELF-SACRIFICE?

CHAPTER TWELVE

Judges 12:1-*"The men of Ephraim were called to arms, and they crossed to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, "Why did you cross over to fight against the Ammonites and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house over you with fire."*

Shortly after Jephthah's defeat of the Ammonites, a dispute arose between Jephthah, now the ruler of Gilead, and his fellow Israelite neighbor across the Jordan River to the west. The tribe of Ephraim felt slighted that they were not included in the campaign against the Ammonites. In reality, they were merely protesting that they were denied the opportunity to share in the bounties of victory.



With "*a call to arms*" the Ephraimite troops crossed over the Jordan River to Zaphron in Gillead. Their animus was such that they threatened to burn Jephthah's "*house*" with fire. Whether this threat applied to Jephtah home alone or the entire region of Gilead is unclear. Regardless, they were ready to do battle over the issue.

This was not the first time the Ephaimites felt slighted by not being included in a battle. Many years before, Gideon had assigned them only mop-up duty in his battle with the Midianites (Judges 7 and 8).

Fortunately, Gideon was able to cool the Ephraimites' heated heads by stroking their egos and war was averted—"*their anger against him subsided.*"

"Feeling slighted" means "to feel insulted because someone has done or said something that shows that they think you are not important" (*Cambridge Dictionary*). We've all experienced it, but sometimes we put blame where it doesn't belong— even in church.

"Church- Hurt? You're Not Alone!"

Steve Glaser

"Have you ever been blamed for something you didn't do? Think how God feels when we blame Him for the crappy things His people do. And make no mistake about it— people in church sometimes hurt other church people. It's so common that it even has a name — '*Church Hurt.'*

The term refers to the emotional or psychological pain individuals experience as a result of negative or hurtful experiences within a church community. Though few people intend harm, even well-meaning Christians do and say insensitive things leading to anger, sorrow, disappointment, embarrassment, rejection, and pain. In its most egregious form, '*Church Hurt'* can lead to trauma having lasting effects on mental and emotional well-being.

When men and women in church do things contrary to God's perfect character, it influences how we see God Himself— it distorts our image of Him. Spiritual or emotional immaturity, church politics, and personality differences all contribute to '*Church Hurt'*.

Even ministry leaders such as pastors, elders, deacons, and teachers can have a hand in it. And, when '*Church Hurt'* is caused by abuse of power, the ramifications can be devastating. Those we look up to the most are able to hurt us the most.

When we experience '*Church Hurt'* it's tempting to give up on church altogether. Many do, maybe even you. But you wouldn't throw out the baby with the bath water or junk a car just because it gets a flat tire.

Why avoid God's house because of something some knucklehead once did? You may blame God, but all He did was let a sinner pass through the 'idiot detector' at the front door. I'm glad He still does— after all, He allows you and me in, doesn't He?

The first step to returning to God's house after '*Church Hurt'* is to name the pain. Pain is a symptom, not a diagnosis. Identify the specific cause of the hurt— false accusations, using the Bible as justification for wrongs, or even psychological, emotional, or physical abuse. You can't fix what you can't identify.

Second, separate '*Church Hurt'* from being hurt by God. '*Church Hurt'* is caused by sinful people— what happened was not God's will. Since the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden, God has been leading us down a path of redemption. His entire Bible is a roadmap back to the eternal, perfect, tearless home that awaits us. God is a loving God who wants only the best for us.

Next, reclaim control— others (including Satan) have only the power we give them. Protect yourself. Just make sure you know what's worth protecting— your relationship with God. Don't let others stand between you and Him. Use the skills God's given you to adapt, discern, and differentiate between matters of convention and conviction. Have a plan and implement it.

Finally, lean on others. Those you need the most just might be sitting in that building you're avoiding. Everyone in church has suffered from '*Church Hurt'* at one time or another— join the club. Jesus certainly experienced His fair share!

Commiserate with fellow members and come up with solutions to help others. But most importantly, learn to forgive others as God forgives you. You're never alone— God can and will help you recover from '*Church Hurt.'* Just ask Him! (Steve Glaser, *"It's Time To 'Get REAL' In Church— Avoid The Digital Loneliness Epidemic"*)

WHAT IS "CHURCH-HURT?"

HAVE YOU BEEN "CHURCH-HURT?" WHY? HOW?

WHAT IS THE PAIN YOU NEED TO NAME?

WHO / WHAT DO YOU NEED TO FORGIVE??

Judges 12:2-3-*"And Jephthah said to them, "I and my people had a great dispute with the Ammonites, and when I called you, you did not save me from their hand. And when I saw that you would not save me, I took my life in my hand and crossed over against the Ammonites, and the Lord gave them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?"*

Unlike Gideon, Jephthah had no intention this time of using diplomacy to cool the Ehraimites' heated heads. Where were they when he first called them to help as he rallied his troops along the Transjordan just across the river? They hadn't lifted a finger when he took his life in his hand and crossed over against the Ammonites. The Lord had given him victory— not them!

Not only that, but they now dared to cross eastward over the Jordan River into Gilead territory to threaten him? They'd pushed too far. If they wanted civil war, he'd give it to them.

As Sun Tzu said in his famous treatise, *"The Art of War,"*

"He who wishes to fight must first count the cost."

The Ephraimites had failed to count the cost. They hadn't heard of another principle Su Tzu would record centuries later:

"The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting."

How many wars are the result of one side pushing too far? How many people have died in wars because their leaders did not understand that the greatest victories are those that require no battles. Sometimes war is necessary, but war should be started only if victory is assured. As Sun Tzu also said:

"A victorious army first wins and then seeks battle; a defeated army first battles and then seeks victory."

As we'll soon see, the Ephraimites will be the latter.

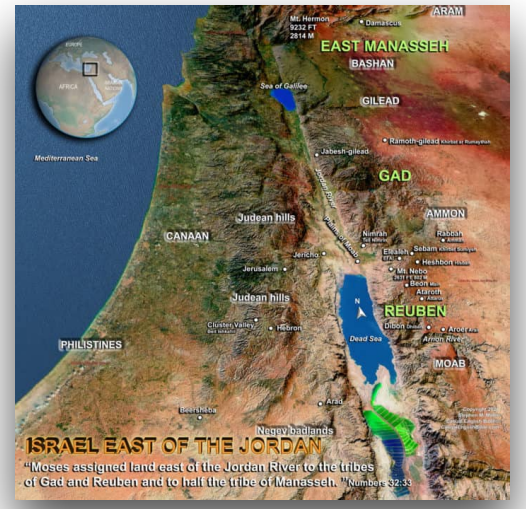
HOW DOES ONE COUNT THE COST OF WAR?

CAN AN ENEMY SOMETIMES BE SUBDUED WITHOUT FIGHTING? HOW? WHY?

WHY / HOW SHOULD WAR BE PURSUED ONLY IF VICTORY IS ASSURED?

Judges 12:4-*"Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought with Ephraim. And the men of Gilead struck Ephraim, because they said, 'You are fugitives of Ephraim, you Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim and Manasseh.'"*

The men of Ephraim foolishly taunted the Gileadites by calling them "*fugitives of Ephraim,"*— meaning they had no identity of their own and were dependent on the two half-tribes of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim.



"It may well have been an Ephraimite way of saying that Gilead was not really a tribe of Israel and would not find acceptance or land among the tribes of Joseph even though historically Gilead was one of the clans from the tribe of Manasseh" (Walton, *IVP Bible Background"*).

Regardless of the reasons for the taunt, "*Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought with Ephraim"*— the civil war began. "What is important for the downward spiral of (the book of) Judges is that the taunt was along tribal lines, which emphasizes Israel's increasing lack of unity and fragmentation into tribes" (Tammi Schneider, *"Berit Olam: Judges"*).

'Taunting' can be defined as provoking someone in an insulting or contemptuous manner.

"Nations taunt each other through public statements, political cartoons, propaganda, social media posts, or even subtle actions that are designed to mock, belittle, or criticize another nation's policies, leadership, culture, or achievements often aiming to provoke a reaction or undermine their international standing. This can include using inflammatory language, historical grievances, or highlighting perceived weaknesses…

Examples of how nations might taunt each other:

Political speeches:
Leaders making direct jabs at another nation's policies or leadership during public addresses…

Media manipulation:
Using state-controlled media to spread negative narratives about another country…

Cartoons and satire:
Creating satirical cartoons or memes that depict the other nation in a derogatory way…

Economic sanctions:
Imposing economic sanctions and then publicly boasting about their impact on the targeted nation…

Military displays:
Conducting large-scale military exercises near a rival nation's borders as a show of force…

Historical revisionism:
Publicly reinterpreting historical events to portray another nation in a negative light" (Google *AI Overview*).

WHY DO PEOPLE TAUNT ONE ANOTHER?

WHY DO NATIONS TAUNT ONE ANOTHER?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT TAUNTING?

Judges 12:5-6-*"And the Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan against the Ephraimites. And when any of the fugitives of Ephraim said, "Let me go over," the men of Gilead said to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?"*

When he said, "No," they said to him, "Then say Shibboleth," and he said, "Sibboleth," for he could not pronounce it right.

Then they seized him and slaughtered him at the fords of the Jordan. At that time 42,000 of the Ephraimites fell."

'Fords' are the shallow points in a river where people can cross on foot. "*The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan"* preventing the retreat of the Ephraimites back to their homeland. Since the Gileadites and Ephraimites were ethnically related in appearance, a test was created to identify and separate the two peoples.

In Hebrew, the word '*Shibboleth*' meant either an 'ear of corn' or a 'flood' depending on context. But it was also a word that was hard to enunciate for the Ephraimites— they pronounced it '*Si-bboleth..'* When an Ephraimite attempted to escape undetected across the "*fords of the Jordan*" and failed to enunciate the word as a Gileadite would, "*they seized him and slaughtered him."* By the time the civil war ended, 42,000 Ephraimites had fallen at the hands of the Gileadites.

Today, the word '*Shibboleth'* has a new meaning— "a peculiarity of pronunciation distinguishing one group of people from another" (*dictionary.com*). "A shibboleth is a kind of linguistic password— a way of speaking (a pronunciation, or the use of a particular expression) that is used by one set of people to identify another person as a member, or a non-member, of a particular group" (*Words in English—"The Story Of The Shibboleth"*).

"English-speaking Allied personnel in Europe, during the Second World War, frequently made use of passwords in which "*w*" or "*th*" sounds were prominent, as these are unusual in spoken German (ie. the letter "*w*" is normally pronounced "*v"* by native speakers of German). For instance, following D-Day (1944) US forces used the challenge-response, "Thunder" – "Welcome" (*Wilkpedia— Lists of Shibboleths"*).

WHAT IS A CIVIL WAR?

WHAT CAUSES CIVIL WARS AMONG FELLOW COUNTRYMEN?

HOW CAN CIVIL WARS BE PREVENTED?

Judges 12:7-"*Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in his city in Gilead.*"

Jephthah's life ran the gamut— illegitimate son, shameful outcast, valiant warrior, shrewd negotiator, and defiant ruler. God allowed him to be a 'judge' of Israel despite the tenuous relationship Jephthah had with Him. Two chapters of the book of Judges are devoted to Jephthah's exploits, yet his reign lasted only six years and then he "*died and was buried in his city in Gilead.*"

God obviously wants us to learn something from Jephthah's life— but what? Could it be that God uses imperfect people to achieve His ends? Could it be that He puts us where we're needed, when we're needed? Could it be that He wants a relationship with us, no matter how tenuous at times? Could it be that He loves us even when our egos get in the way?

Or, could it be that we should never try to negotiate with God— never think that we have something to offer that He doesn't already have. Perhaps God is showing us the incremental steps to destruction that a nation risks when not putting Him first.

Or, maybe it's as simple as teaching us that God can use us in ways we can't even fathom with our limited understanding. As Isaiah reminded us long ago:

"*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord*" (Isaiah 55:8).

WHAT HAS JEPHTHAH'S LIFE TAUGHT YOU?

WHAT HAS YOUR LIFE TAUGHT OTHERS?

WHAT DO YOU WANT YOUR LIFE TO TEACH OTHERS?

Judges 12:8-10-"*After him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel. He had thirty sons, and thirty daughters he gave in marriage outside his clan, and thirty daughters he brought in from outside for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years.*

***Then Ibzan died and was buried at Bethlehem.*"**

Next are listed three more "minor" judges. Again, they are considered "minor" not because they were without merit, but because so little is known about them. The first of the three was "*Ibzan of Bethlehem*" who had "*thirty sons and thirty daughters.*"

There are two Bethlehems mentioned in the Bible— one in the tribe of Zebulun (Joshua 19:15) and another better known in the tribe of Judah, the city of Jesse, David, and the Messiah. "But as Bethlehem of the tribe of Judah is generally called 'Bethlehem of Judah', or 'Bethlehem-Ephratah,' and as Elon and Abdon (the next two "minor" judges) were 'judges' in north-east Israel, it is perhaps more probable that Bethlehem of Zebulun is meant" (*Bible Hub*, *Pulpit Commentary*).

Regardless, Ibzan was obviously a shrewd leader as he gave his "*thirty daughters in marriage outside his clan"* and brought in "*thirty daughters from outside for his sons*" to expand and consolidate his power. He judged Israel seven years, died, and was buried at Bethlehem.

"Families consolidate power by strategically utilizing their collective resources, including wealth, social connections, education, and strategic marriage alliances, to maintain influence within a community or society, often passing on these advantages to future generations through inheritance and family networks — effectively creating a power structure within the family unit itself…

Key strategies families use to consolidate power:

Strategic Marriage Alliances:
Marrying into families with significant social or economic standing to expand their network and influence…

Inheritance Practices:
Passing down wealth, property, and key positions within a family business to chosen heirs, maintaining control across generations…

Education and Skill Development:
Prioritizing education and professional training for family members to enhance their capabilities and opportunities…

Family Business Networks:
Establishing and controlling businesses within the family, allowing for concentrated wealth and decision-making power…

Political Participation:
Actively engaging in politics, using family connections to influence policy and gain positions of power…

Social Networking:
Leveraging existing social connections to build alliances and exert influence within a community" (*Google AI Overview*)

WHAT IS POWER?

HAVE YOU EVER USED FAMILY CONNECTIONS FOR YOUR BENEFIT? HOW? WHY?

HAVE YOU HELPED FAMILY MEMBERS IN THEIR PURSUITS?

Judges 12:11-12-*"After him Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel, and he judged Israel ten years*
Then Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried at Aijalon in the land of Zebulun."

Literally nothing in known of this next 'judge' other than he was of the tribe of Zebulun and he 'judged' Israel for the next ten years. How he 'judged' is apparently irrelevant to the story of the book of Judges. Elon eventually died and was buried in his homeland at Aijalon.

Perhaps it is as Mathew Henry summarizes about these verses, “The happiest life of individuals, and the happiest state of society, is that which affords the fewest remarkable events. To live in credit and quiet, to be peacefully useful to those around us, to possess a clear conscience; but, above all, and without which nothing can avail, to enjoy communion with God our Savior while we live, and to die at peace with God and man, form the substance of all that a wise man can desire” (*Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary*).

DO YOU LIVE A LIFE OF CREDIT, QUIETNESS, AND PEACE?

DO YOU HAVE A CLEAR CONSCIENCE?

DO YOU COMMUNE DAILY WITH GOD?

Judges 12:13-15-*“After him Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel. 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."

The next “minor” judge was “*Abdon the son of Hillel.”* He was from the town of Pirathon located in the land of Ephraim— the tribe Jephthah had conquered in a civil war just a few years prior. Apparently the tribe of Ephraim had risen from the ashes of defeat as their leader *“had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy donkeys”*— a sign of wealth and prestige.

He ‘judged’ Israel for eight years before he died and “*was buried at Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites.”* (The Amalekites were the previous inhabitants of the mountain region where he was buried).

“The 25 years, apparently consecutive, occupied by the judgeship of Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon, seem to have been very uneventful and prosperous, since the only record of them, preserved in the annals of their country, relates to the flourishing families and peaceful magnificence of two of the number” (*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*).

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Judges 13:1-*"And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, so the Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years."*

The book of Judges now shifts geographically. "*The people of Israel <u>again</u> did what was evil in the sight of the Lord,"* but this time the Israelites would be oppressed by a nation on the west side of the Promised Land— the Philistines. After twenty-five years of relative peace, "*the Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years."* Of interest, no cry for redemption is recorded— the Israelites apparently either accepted the Philistines as their overlords or didn't even desire relief because they were so assimilated into the Philistine culture.

The Philistines were of the lineage of **Ham**, one of **Noah's** three sons…

Gen 10:6,13,14-*"The **sons of Ham**: Cush, **Egypt**, Put, and Canaan… **Egypt** fathered Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, Pathrusim, **<u>Casluhim</u>** (**<u>from whom the Philistines came</u>**), <u>and Caphtorim</u>."*

Archaeologically, the first records of the Philistines are inscriptions and reliefs in the mortuary temple of the Egyptian pharaoh Ramses III. They were described as one of the "**Sea Peoples**" who invaded Egypt. The Philistines eventually settled on the Mediterranean coastal plain from what is modern day **Tel Aviv** southward to **Gaza**.

Their territory contained **five cities— Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath**, and **Ekron**. It was known as "**Philistia"** (Land of the Philistines) and later called "**Palestine"** by the Greeks.

Philistia was situated on the **Via Maris Trade Route** (the "Way of the Sea") — one of three major trade routes connecting the Nile Delta with Canaan, Syria, and Asia. Because of this strategic location, the Philistines dominated world trade and greatly influenced other nations.

When **Moses** led the people out of Egypt, God purposefully had them avoid this territory…

Ex 13:17-18-"*When Pharaoh let the people go, **<u>God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines</u>**, although that was near. For God said, "Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt." **But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea**. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle."*

The Philistine's highly-developed weapons were a great threat to the Israelites— their **iron** weapons were superior to the **bronze** used by the Israelites. Conflict over territory, coupled with their religious and cultural differences, led to many battles between the Israelites and Philistines over many years.

Though the Philistine religion was polytheistic, their main 'god' was **Dagon.** His mistress, **Ashtoreth,** was the 'goddess' of war and fertility. Philistines also worshiped **Baal-Zebul,** thought to be **Dagon's son**.

WHERE WOULD PHILISTIA BE IN TODAY'S GEOGRAPHY?

WHY ARE TRADE ROUTES IMPORTANT TO NATIONS?

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN IRON AND BRONZE WEAPONRY?

Judges 13:2–3-*"There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. And his wife was barren and had no children. And the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son."*

The narrative next describes two individuals— Manoah, of the tribe of Dan, and his wife. The Danites were originally allocated land just north of the Philistines along the Mediterranean coastline. Often depicted by scholars as a relatively weak tribe, the Danites later moved to the far north of the Promised Land when they could not secure their territory from surrounding enemies.

Manoah's wife is unnamed but we're told she "*was barren and had no children."* How long this couple was childless is not indicated, but it's assumed that they no longer held out hope.

"The Law promised an obedient people that no woman among them would be barren or miscarry (Ex 23:26; Deut 7:14), so to be barren was often, but not always, seen as a curse from God (Gen 20:18; 1 Sam 1:5). God was praised for providing children for the barren (Ps 113:9)." (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary- Judges"*).

Fortunately for this unnamed woman, her childlessness had not gone unnoticed by God— she would "*conceive and bear a son."*

WHY WAS BEING BARREN CONSIDERED A CURSE?

WHY IS BEING BARREN TODAY OFTEN CONSIDERED HEARTBREAKING?

WHY DID/ DO YOU WANT CHILDREN?

Judges 13:4-5-*"Therefore be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines."*

The "*angel of the Lord*" gives two instruction to the woman— the first concerning her own lifestyle and a second concerning the child's. She was told to watch her diet carefully and abstain from wine and strong drink— obviously good advise even today for pregnant women. Next she was instructed that her child would be "a *Nazirite to God from the womb."* Most Nazirite vows were a voluntary decision by a person who desired to yield themselves completely to God. This child would not be given a choice.

"The Hebrew word '*nazir*,' simply means 'to be separated' or 'consecrated'…. There were specific guidelines and restrictions involved with the Nazirite vow. Three guidelines are given to the Nazirite. Numbers 6:3-7 tells us that he/she was to abstain from wine or any fermented drink, nor was the Nazirite to drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins, not even the seeds or skins…

Next, the Nazirite was not to cut his hair for the length of the vow…

Last, he was not to go near a dead body, because that would make him ceremonially unclean. Even if a member of his immediate family died, he was not to go near the corpse" (Gotquestions.org. "*What is the Nazirite/ Nazarite Vow?"*).

This child was consecrated to be a Nazirite from conception because God would allow him to "*begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines."* The people may not have requested a deliverer, but God would send him to get the ball rolling. He wouldn't end the process, but he would begin it once he attained adulthood.

WHO ELSE IN THE BIBLE WAS PRESENTED AS A NAZIRITE AT BIRTH?

WHAT WAS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BEING A NAZIRITE?

HOW DO YOU YIELD COMPLETELY TO GOD?

Judges 13:6-7-*"Then the woman came and told her husband, "A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. I did not ask him where he was from, and he did not tell me his name, but he said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. So then drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'"*

The woman ran home to tell her husband the good news. She described the messenger as (1) "*a man of God*" having (2) "*the appearance of the angel of the Lord*" who was (3) "*very awesome.*" She hadn't asked "*where he was from"* and "*he did not tell his name,*" but she obviously knew it was a divine encounter. After recounting the conversation to her husband she added that "*the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death."*

Most Nazirine vows were not only voluntary, but also temporary, prescribed for a finite amount of time. This child was to live up to the vow from conception until death— a tall order indeed and one that will have severe consequences later in the narrative.

Today, most Christians don't take a Nazirine vow to yield themselves completely to God, but we are called to be separate from the world— 'holy.' Some believe this means we are to hide away from the world and encircle ourselves only with other believers. But that's not what Biblical separation means— being 'holy' is simply an individual commitment to a godly standard of behavior.

"Biblical separation does not require Christians to have no contact with unbelievers. Like Jesus, we should befriend the sinner without partaking of the sin (Luke 7:34). Paul expresses a balanced view of separatism:

> "*I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.*" (1 Cor 5:9-10)…

In other words, we are in the world, but not of it" (*Gotquestions.org, "What Is Biblical Separation?*").

WHAT IS A VOW?

WHAT VOW DID YOU MAKE AT YOUR CHILD'S BIRTH?

WHAT LIFELONG VOWS HAVE YOU MADE?

Judges 13:8-11-*"Then Manoah prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, please let the man of God whom you sent come again to us and teach us what we are to do with the child who will be born."*

And God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman as she sat 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 to me the other day has appeared to me.

And Manoah arose and went after his wife and came to the man and said to him, "Are you the man who spoke to this woman?" And he said, "I am."

Whether he initially believed his wife about her encounter or not, God listened to him when he prayed "*let the man of God whom you sent come again to us and teach us what we are to do with the child who will be born."* If the story was true, Manoah knew they would obviously need some divine help raising this child!

Showing that God has a sense of humor, "*the angel of the Lord*" returned as requested, but once again appeared only to the woman— leaving her husband out of the loop. But she "*ran quickly and told her husband"* that the messenger had reappeared as he had asked "a*nd Manoah arose and went after his wife"* to meet with him in person. He wanted to hear the message 'first hand' instead of merely 'second hand' through his wife.

Today, we gain Scriptural knowledge either 'first hand' or 'second hand.' 'First-hand' knowledge comes from direct engagement with the Scriptures and seeking a personal understanding of God's word. 'Second-hand' knowledge relies on interpretations, teachings, and opinions from others— potentially lacking the same depth of personal experience. While both are valuable, we should always strive to move beyond knowledge about God to experiencing Him personally.

WHY IS 'FIRST HAND' BETTER THAN 'SECOND HAND' KNOWLEDGE?

WHICH DO YOU RELY ON MORE? WHY?

WHY IS 'FIRST HAND' BETTER THAN 'SECOND HAND' BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE?

WHICH DO YOU RELY ON MORE?

Judges 13:12-14-*"And Manoah said, "Now when your words come true, what is to be the child's manner of life, and what is his mission?" And the angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful. She may not eat of anything that comes from the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, or eat any unclean thing. All that I commanded her let her observe."*

Apparently accepting that the divine messenger's words would come to pass, Manoah now asks him two questions— (1) "*what is to be the child's manner of life"* and (2) "*what is his mission?"* If he had listened to his wife, He already had the answer to his first question— the child was to be raised as a Nazirine. But his second question was left unanswered. "Though the angel told the woman at first, that he should '*begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines*', she says nothing of it to her husband, nor does the angel repeat it" (*Bible Hub Commentaries, Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*).

Instead of answering Manoah regarding the child's mission, the messenger only repeats his instructions to Manoah's wife. "*She may not eat of anything that comes from the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, or eat any unclean thing."*

"From this conversation with the heavenly visitor Manoah has learned nothing new, but he has been assured that his wife's report in vv. 6-7 was not the delusion of a woman frustrated over her barren condition. He may indeed look forward to the birth of a special child and share with his wife the burden of preparing him for divine service" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

We sometimes ask God questions He doesn't answer— at least not immediately. Perhaps it's better not to know the answer. Our perspective is limited, we can't comprehend God's entire purpose for our lives. He could let us in on His plans, but sometimes He just lets us travel the highway of life to enjoy the scenery. We simply need to follow His traffic signs along the way.

WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE FOR GOD?

HOW MANY QUESTIONS HAS HE ALREADY ANSWERED?

ARE THERE SOME QUESTIONS YOU'RE GLAD HE HASN'T ANSWERED YET?

ARE YOU OBEYING HIS TRAFFIC SIGNS?

Judges 13:15-18-*"Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, "Please let us detain you and prepare a young goat for you." And the angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "If you detain me, I will not eat of 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.)*

And Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, "What is your name, so that, when your words come true, we may honor you?" And the angel of the Lord said to him, "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?"

Manoah believes the messenger to be an extraordinary figure (perhaps even a prophet,) but still only a man. Manoah invites the messenger to stay for a meal, but he was about to get a big surprise when this "*angel of the Lord"* instead suggests that Monoah "*prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the Lord"* indicating that this was a divine encounter from God.

Still unaware of who he was speaking with, Manoah asks the messenger his name so that when his words come true they could honor him. But, "*the angel of the Lord said to him, 'Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?'"* The NIV translates "*wonderful*" as "*beyond understanding'* indicating that this was no ordinary messenger.

"The mysterious answer shows that God will not reveal Himself completely. Manoah cannot have access to the inner reality of God represented by his name. That name is '*miraculous'* ('*wonderful'— 'beyond understanding'*) (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary- Judges"*).

There are almost one-thousand names listed for God in the Bible. No, He's not a charlatan hiding behind false identities. They are titles of honor— God is a really, really, really big deal— beyond understanding!

HOW MANY NAMES OF GOD CAN YOU LIST?

WHAT DO YOU CALL HIM?

WHY?

Judges 13:19-20-*"So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it on the rock to the Lord, to the one who works wonders, and Manoah and his wife were watching. And when the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the Lord went up in the flame of the altar. Now Manoah and his wife were watching, and they fell on their faces to the ground."*

It was the messenger's disappearance rather than his initial appearance that caused Manoah to understand what was happening— they were in the presence of the "*angel of the Lord.*" Many scholars recognize this as the reincarnate Christ. As he and his wife watched him go up to heaven within the flame they both "*fell on their faces to the ground."*

The Hebrew verb often translated as "worship," means to prostrate one's body upon the ground with the arms and legs stretched out. It is the most humble form of submission that can be physically demonstrated by the body.

"In the human realm, being face-down is the ultimate act of vulnerability and danger. When you are face-down, you cannot fight or even defend yourself. When you are face-down on the ground there is no escaping…

But being face-down before God is quite another matter. Being face down before God is the most secure place you'll ever be. It's impossible to trip or fall when you are face down before God" (Matt Tullos, "*Can We Go Back to the Way Worship Used to Be? Facedown?"*).

DO YOU WORSHIP 'FACE DOWN'? HOW? WHY?

DO YOU ADMIT YOUR VULNERABILITY WHEN YOU WORSHIP? HOW? WHY?

WHY IS IT IMPOSSIBLE TO TRIP OR FALL WHEN YOU'RE' FACE DOWN' BEFORE GOD?

Judges 13:21-23-*"The angel of the Lord appeared no more to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the Lord.*

And Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God." But his wife said to him, "If the Lord had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering at our hands, or shown us all these things, or now announced to us such things as these."

Finally recognizing that they had been in the presence of the Lord, Manoah feared for their lives. He recalled Moses' encounter with God at Mount Sinai:

"*But," He said, "you cannot see My face, for man shall not see me and live."* (Ex 33:20).

Fortunately, Manoah's wife had more insight and calmly said, "*"If the Lord had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering at our hands, or shown us all these things, or now announced to us such things as these."* She understood that God would use them to raise their child who would accomplish His will— it was all part of His plan.

The famous line of Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem '*The Charge of the Light Brigade*' personifies the humble soldier marching unquestionably to war—

"Ours is not to reason why, ours is but to do and die."

At one time or another, every Christian has asked the question, "What is God's plan for my life." But as a wise preacher once said, maybe it's none of our business! We don't need to know God's plan, we just need to understand He always has one. Ours is not to reason why, ours is simply to follow His commands.

HAVE YOU EVER ASKED WHAT IS GOD'S PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE?

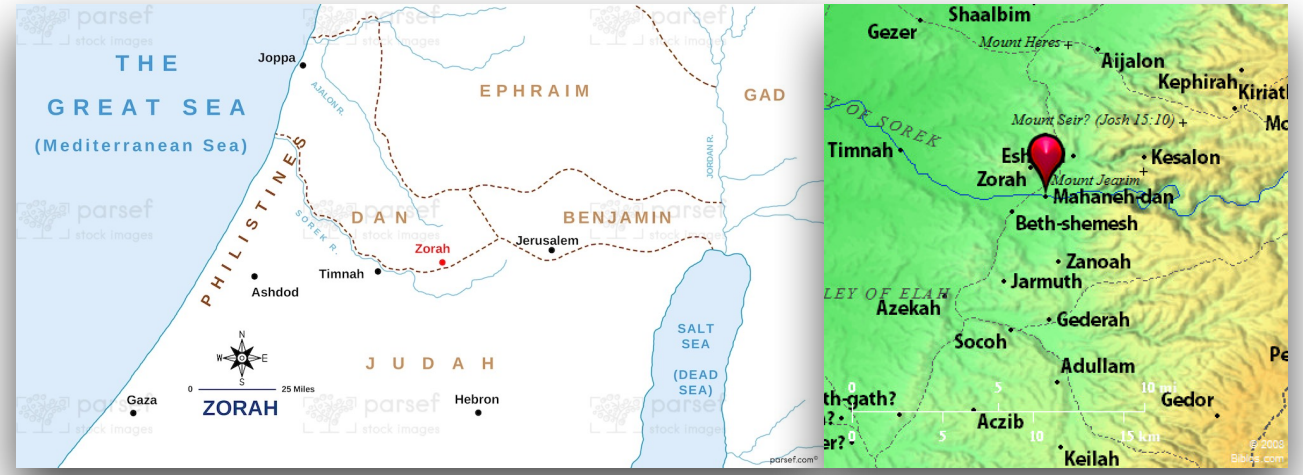
WHERE DID YOU SEEK THE ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION?

WHERE SHOULD YOU SEEK THE ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION?

IS IT REALLY ANY OF YOUR BUSINESS TO KNOW GOD'S PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE?

Judges 13:24-25-*"And the woman bore a son and called his name Samson. And the young man grew, and the Lord blessed him. And the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol."*

It's taken twenty-four verses to learn the child name— "*Samson.*" His name is one of the most well know in the Old Testament, not because of his righteousness, but because of his lack of it. Yet despite his shortcomings, God will use him to become another 'judge' of Israel who will begin to lead them from their oppression.



Raised in Dan next to lands of Judah and the Philistines, Samson will have his feet firmly planted in the apostasy of Judah and idolatry of the Philistines. God has a plan for his life, but that path will be be circuitous indeed!

WHERE HAS GOD PLANTED YOU?

WHY DO YOU BELIEVE HE PLANTED YOU THERE?

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WHERE GOD HAS PLANTED YOU?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Judges 14:1-2-*"Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines. Then he came up and told his father and mother, "I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah. Now get her for me as my wife."*

Sampson, now a grown man looking for a wife, travels three miles to the city of Timnah. It's a town that originally belonged to the tribe of Judah and was later transferred to the tribe of Dan. But it's now in the hands of the Philistines (Joshua 15:57). There Samson encounters "*one of the daughters of the Philistines"* and returns to his hometown of Zorah to ask his parents to arrange a marriage to her.

Samson obviously believed in 'love at first sight.' But what does that actually mean today for a Christian? Is it even Biblical?

"If (by 'love at first sight') you mean you are very attracted to someone and would really like to get to know him or her, then what's the harm? But if you think your first impression of someone which is based on attraction is actually a form of true Christian love which God would want to be the foundation of a godly marriage, then you are deceiving yourself….

You can't love someone in a deep way at first sight because you know nothing but superficial information about this person. Superficial reasons for love produce a superficial type of love. If you only know someone superficially, your relationship can't be anything but superficial and shallow. To really love someone, your feelings and commitment towards that person must be rooted in deeper reasons than your physical attraction or surface level knowledge of him or her…

Physical attraction and 'love at first sight' are not bad as long as they are kept in a healthy context. God made physical attraction. It's how we use this gift that will determine if it is causing good or bad in our lives…

The Bible doesn't say anything directly about the actual idea of 'love at first sight.' However, when we look at the whole of Scripture and consider what the Bible says about love, we can see that a physical attraction and a superficial 'love' based in surface level information is not anything like a Christ-centered love which is the true foundation for a healthy, godly marriage" (Mark Ballenger, *"What Does the Bible Say About "Love at First Sight"?*).

WHAT IS 'LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT'?

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO YOUR SPOUSE?

WHAT IS BIBLICAL LOVE?

Judges 14:3-*"But his father and mother said to him, "Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes.""*

Samson's parents object to his choice of a potential wife, but instead of refusing his request outright, they simply appeal to him to find a wife from his own people. Biblical law forbade marriages to members of foreign pagan nations (Ex 34:16; Deut 7:1-3), but this doesn't seem to be their primary concern.

"They do not say, 'Intermarriage with non-Israelites is forbidden by the Lord. Nor do they say, 'The Lord has called you to special Nazirite status within Israel.' They also do not say, 'The Lord's agenda is for you to deliver us from the Philistine oppression, not to marry them.' …

All this remains unsaid. To Samson's parents, his proposition is simply a cultural and ethnic issue" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

They were worried that Samson was wanting to marry a Philistine whose culture wasn't even sophisticated enough to circumcise their sons. (The Hebrews were just one of many Semitic peoples who practiced circumcision). Despite living under Philistine rule, they considered the Philistines to be at the bottom rung of society. Their complaint was less about God's law or Samson's mission, and more about disdain for the Philistine people in general.

Despite his parents wishes, "*Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes."* He's insensitive and disrespectful to his parents and disobedient to the Lord. It's a shame that the book of Proverbs came too late to help him wisely choose a wife. But, as we'll soon see, God had His reasons.

"An excellent wife who can find?
She is far more precious than jewels.

The heart of her husband trusts in her,
and he will have no lack of gain.

She does him good, and not harm,
all the days of her life.

She seeks wool and flax,
and works with willing hands.

She is like the ships of the merchant;
she brings her food from afar.

She rises while it is yet night
and provides food for her household
and portions for her maidens.

She considers a field and buys it;
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.

She dresses herself with strength
and makes her arms strong.

She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.
Her lamp does not go out at night.

She puts her hands to the distaff,
and her hands hold the spindle.

She opens her hand to the poor
and reaches out her hands to the needy.

She is not afraid of snow for her household,
for all her household are clothed in scarlet.

She makes bed coverings for herself;
her clothing is fine linen and purple.

Her husband is known in the gates
when he sits among the elders of the land.

She makes linen garments and sells them;
she delivers sashes to the merchant.

Strength and dignity are her clothing,
and she laughs at the time to come.

She opens her mouth with wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

She looks well to the ways of her household
and does not eat the bread of idleness.

Her children rise up and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:

"Many women have done excellently,
but you surpass them all."

Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

Give her of the fruit of her hands,
and let her works praise her in the gates" (Prov 31:10-31).

HOW DID YOU CHOSE YOUR SPOUSE?

WHOSE COUNSEL DID YOU SEEK PRIOR TO MARRIAGE?

HAVE YOU FOUND AN EXCELLENT WIFE?

Judges 14:4-*"His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel."*

"This marriage arises out of and reflects Israel's willingness to coexist peacefully with the Philistines. But *Yahweh* is determined to shatter the status quo. Samson is His tool chosen to rile up the Philistines, and this woman offers the opportunity to make it happen…

Samson's sense of calling may have been eclipsed in the minds of the man and his parents, but with God it had not…

The proverbial monkey wrench must be thrown into this comfortable relationship. If the Israelites do not have the heart to take action against the Philistines, God will cause the Philistines to take action against them" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

"*Yahweh* is underway in the world to free His people from Philistine tyranny, though not a soul in the story knows it and His chosen instrument looks very much like an oversexed buffoon" (J.A. Wharton, *"The Secret Of Yahweh: Story and Affirmation in Judges"*).

"God works in ways that are often deemed 'mysterious'—that is to say, God's methods often leave people totally bewildered…. The processes God uses, the interplay of human freedom and God's sovereignty, and God's ultimate summations are far beyond what the limited human mind can understand…

The Bible and the testimonies of Christians down through the ages are brimming with true stories of how God turned situation after situation, problem after problem, life after life, completely upside down—and He often does it in the most unexpected, astonishing, and inexplicable ways…

God '*declares the end from the beginning'* (Isaiah 46:10–11), and we can be sure every event in the life of a believer serves God's ultimate plan (Isaiah 14:24; Romans 8:28). To our minds, the way God weaves remarkable events in and through our lives may seem illogical and beyond our understanding…

However, we walk by faith not by sight (2 Cor 5:7). Christians know that God's thoughts are above our own thoughts and God's ways are higher than ours, '*as the heavens are higher than the earth*'" (Isaiah 55:8–9). (*Got Questions.org, "What does it mean that God works in mysterious ways?"*).

WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT GOD WORKS IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS?

HOW HAS GOD WORKED IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS IN YOUR LIFE?

WHAT QUESTIONS DID YOU HAVE AT THE TIME?

WHAT ANSWERS DID YOU HAVE LATER?

Judges 14:5-7-*"Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah, and they came to the vineyards of Timnah.*

And behold, a young lion came toward him roaring. Then the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done.

Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she was right in Samson's eyes."

With only half-hearted resistance, Samson's parents agree to the marriage and make their way to Timnah to make arrangements with the future bride's parents. Along the way, Samson separates from his parents and encounters a young lion that "*came toward him roaring."*

For the second time in the narrative (the first being his conception) the Spirit of the Lord "*rushed upon him*" and with "*nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat"*— a first look at his super-human strength. Of note is that Samson himself gives no credit to God— he seems oblivious to God's intervention. This attack ultimately leads to a chain of events that carries the story of Samson forward.

Failing to tell his parents about the encounter, Samson rejoins his parents and proceeds to Timnah where he "*talks with the woman*" he desires and confirms once again that she is "*right*" in his eyes.

"The word '*strength'* and its derivatives are mentioned over 360 times in the Bible, applying to both natural and supernatural strength. The Greek word '*katei'* means "power, strength, might." In the Bible, strength is often linked to God's power…

The Bible places an emphasis on God's strength in our salvation. Man can in no way save himself. Only God can save. Paul makes this abundantly clear: "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast"* (Eph2:8–9)…

These two verses are the most forceful summary of the dynamics of salvation found anywhere in the Bible. They help us to understand the contrast between man's total helplessness and God's insuperable strength" (*GotQuestions.org, "What does the Bible say about strength?"*).

WHAT IS STRENGTH?

DO YOU RELY ON YOUR OWN STRENGTH? HOW? WHY?

DO YOU RELY ON GOD'S STRENGTH? HOW? WHY?

Judges 14:8-9-*"After some days he returned to take her. And he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and behold, there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey. He scraped it out into his hands and went on, eating as he went.*

And he came to his father and mother and gave some to them, and they ate. But he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey from the carcass of the lion."

"*After some days*" Samson again travels to Tamnah to begin the marriage ceremony— usually a week long feast prior to the marriage being consummated. Along the way he comes upon the carcass of the lion, but instead of it containing insects and maggots as would be expected, "*behold, there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey."* Despite his Nazirite vow that prohibited him from coming into contact with anything dead, he scrapes the honey from the dead animal and "*went on, eating as he went."*

But his defiance doesn't end there— he also gives some of the honey to his parents who eat it, unaware that "*he had scraped the honey from the carcass of the lion."* Samson obviously doesn't care that this makes them ceremonial "unclean" according to Levitical Law (Lev 11:24), requiring ceremonial cleansing. His private transgressions affect his parents.

"There is a principle that follows the pattern laid down at the creation. Everything created has a seed from which it propagates itself after its "kind" (Gen 1:11, 21, 25). In other words, you do not plant corn and expect to harvest beets. You cannot "plant" sin, even in private, and not expect to reap a harvest of consequences. And consequences have a way of spilling out over everyone and anyone that comes into contact with us because of another principle called "association." This means that those around you can be blessed or hurt by association with you and the choices and actions you make, both privately and publicly" (*Got Questions.org, "How does my personal, private sin affect others?"*).

WHY / HOW DO ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES?

WHY/ HOW DO YOUR ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES?

WHY / HOW HAVE YOUR SINS AFFECTED THOSE YOU LOVE?

Judges 14:10-11-*"His father went down to the woman, and Samson prepared a feast there, for so the young men used to do. As soon as the people saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him."*

"Contrary to the practice of many other cultures in which the bride's father would pay the groom's family a dowry, in Jewish culture the groom's father paid a bride price, or *mohar*, to the bride's family in order to negotiate the betrothal and, in essence, "purchase" the bride. The groom would also give a gift to the bride called a *mattan*, which became a part of the property the bride would bring into the marriage…

These gifts were not always monetary; they may have been property or even services provided to the bride's family. A good father was expected to share the *mohar* with his daughter or give it over to her entirely…

A Jewish betrothal was an important part of the marriage process and was as binding as marriage itself. Those initiating the betrothal and witnesses to the event would likely sign a marriage contract called a

ketubah. Therefore, if one or both parties wished to end the betrothal, they would be required to get a divorce" (*Got Questions.org, "What were common marriage customs in Bible times?"*).

Hence, the couple was referred to as 'man and wife' even before the marriage was consummated.

It was a time-honored tradition that a groom could not be alone during the wedding preparation— he needed male 'companions.' Seeing that the marriage celebration was about to begin, the Philistines send "*thirty companions"* to be with Samson.

"The men and women were probably entertained in separate apartments—the bride with her female relatives at her parents' house and Samson in some place obtained for the occasion. A large number of "*paranymphs*", or "*friends of the bridegroom,*" furnished, no doubt, by the bride's family, attended his party— ostensibly to honor the nuptials, but really as spies on his proceedings" (*Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*").

HOW LONG WERE YOU ENGAGED PRIOR TO YOUR WEDDING?

DID YOUR PARENTS PARTICIPATE IN THE PLANNING OF YOUR WEDDING?

WHAT WAS YOUR MARRIAGE CELEBRATION LIKE?

Judges 14:12-13-*"And Samson said to them, "Let me now put a riddle to you. If you can tell me what it is, within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes, but if you cannot tell me what it is, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes." And they said to him, "Put your riddle, that we may hear it."*

Samson decides to present his unknown Philistine "*companions*" with a contest. If they could solve his riddle, he would present them with "*thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes"*— a wardrobe worth a small fortune. But if they couldn't solve it, they would owe him the same. The*"companions*" accept the bet and say to Samson, "*Put your riddle, that we may hear it."*

Lee Trevino was famous for his one-liners on the golf course. He once said, "If you're caught on a golf course during a storm and are afraid of lightning, hold up a 1-iron— not even God can hit a 1-iron." His theology may have been a little off, but his point is well taken. He also said, "Pressure is when you play for five dollars a hole with only two in your pocket"— he understood a gambler's mindset.

Whether either Samson or his Philistine "companions' could afford to lose the bet they make is not stated, but the pressure will cause them both to do some pretty horrendous things. "What happens in Vegas, does not stay in Vegas."

DO YOU GAMBLE? WHY? WHY NOT?

DOES THE BIBLE PROHIBIT GAMBLING?'

WHAT ARE THE DANGERS OF GAMBLING?

Judges 14:14-*"And he said to them,*

'Out of the eater came something to eat.
Out of the strong came something sweet.'

And in three days they could not solve the riddle."

"Riddles were a type of word puzzle widely used in ancient times, both for entertainment and as a test of wisdom. Riddles allowed the speaker to obscure valuable information from the undeserving while simultaneously disclosing a vital truth to worthy listeners…

Typically, the language of a riddle functioned on two levels: it conveyed a straightforward meaning and a symbolic or allegorical point that was understood only by discerning individuals. Samson's riddle was the amusement type often used at weddings, banquets, feasts, and intellectual gatherings of the ancient world. (*Got Questions.org, "What are some of the riddles in the Bible?"*).

However, Samson's riddle was unfair—he knew that without context, solving it would be impossible. And sure enough, just three days into the bet, his Philistine 'companions' began to sweat as they had not yet solved it.

"The riddle, cloaked in mystery and requiring interpretation, appropriately accompanies the wedding situation …

— in which groups come together who are suspicious of one another, …

— in which husband and wife are barely acquainted, and…

— in which a major rite of passage is about to take place…

The exogamous match (marriage outside one's social group, tribe, or clan) between Samson and the Timnite is fraught with distrust, while the theme of secrecy runs throughout the tales of Samson" (S. Niditch, *"Folklore and the Hebrew Bible," "Samson As Culture Hero, Trickster, and Bandit"*).

Jesus often spoke in riddles called parables. They were meant to either elucidate His Truth for those who had eyes to see and ears to hear, or hide it from those who refused to use their senses.

"Jesus's language was filled with comparisons (John 5:21), metaphors (Matthew 5:29a; 13:42), personifications (Luke 19:41-44), ironies (Matt 7:3; Luke 13:32-33), insults (Matt23:33), sarcasm (Matt 23:27), and hyperbole (Matt 11:11, 23), often combining multiple figures of speech…

His discourse also contained even more confusing figures of speech, such as the antiphrasis (irony) (Mark 14:41; Luke 8:10), the typology (John 3:14; 6:57), the dramatic metaphor (Matthew 26:26-28), the complex or paradoxical analogy (Mark 2:25-26; John 10:34-36, cf. Psalm 82), and the mythological image (Mark 9:43; 10:28; Luke 12:5; Luke 16:23)…

Usually, they are very superficially understood or even completely misunderstood by literalists" (Florin Lăiu, *St.Network, Why Did Jesus Speak In Riddles?)*.

WHAT IS A RIDDLE?

WHAT IS A PARABLE?

WHY DID JESUS OFTEN USE PARABLES?

Judges 14:15-*"On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, 'Entice your husband to tell us what the riddle is, lest we burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us here to impoverish us?'"*

Frantic that they would not solve the riddle in time, the '*companions*' cheat and threaten the bride. They accuse her of being in on a plot to take away their possessions. If she couldn't "*entice*" her future husband to give her the answer to the riddle they would burn her family' house to the ground— with her in it! They feared for their futures— losing the bet would "*impoverish*" them.

"Someone may start gambling for fun and have some early wins. Then they keep playing in the hope they'll win again and experience the same good feelings. However, when they lose, particularly big losses, the cycle of compulsive gambling can begin…

Generally, there are four main reasons why people gamble…

1. **For social reasons** – This may be because it's what a group of friends do when they get together, or because it makes a social gathering more enjoyable…

2. **For financial reasons** – to win money, because someone enjoys thinking about what they would do if they won a jackpot, or because winning would change someone's lifestyle…

3. **For entertainment reasons** – because they like the feeling, to get that rush or "high", or because it makes them feel good…

4. **For coping reasons** – for someone to forget their worries, because they feel more self-confident, or because it helps when they are feeling nervous or depressed" (*Gambler's Help, Gamblershelp.com, "Why Do People Gamble?*")…

"The Bible warns us against the compulsion to strike it rich. As 1 Timothy 6:9-10 says, …

> *"But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs."* …

Note that, according to this passage, the compulsion to strike it rich often leads to both spiritual and physical destruction (Daniel McCoy, *Renew.org. ,"Is Gambling a Sin? An Honest Exploration from a Christian Perspective"*).

WHAT IS GAMBLING ADDICTION?

WHY IS THE LOVE OF MONEY THE ROOT OF ALL KINDS OF EVIL?

HOW DOES GAMBLING MAKE SOME PEOPLE JUST DOWNRIGHT STUPID?

Judges 14:16-17-*"And Samson's wife wept over him and said, "You only hate me; you do not love me. You have put a riddle to my people, and you have not told me what it is." And he said to her, "Behold, I have not told my father nor my mother, and shall I tell you?" She wept before him the seven days that their feast lasted, and on the seventh day he told her, because she pressed him hard.*

Then she told the riddle to her people."

The first time in the narrative that Samson's future wife speaks it's to nag him for the answer to the riddle. Perhaps her loyalty is divided between her old and new life. But so is Samson's— "*Behold, I have not told my father nor my mother, and shall I tell you?"*

Regardless, instead of just telling Samson that her life is threatened, she uses her feminine charms and tears to "*press him hard*" for the answer. After seven long days of constant nagging Samson relents, tells her the answer to the riddle, and "*then she tells the riddle to her people."*

"*Nagging*" is how we describe a persistent source of annoyance or distraction… When applied to descriptions of people, *nagging* means "badgering, constant scolding, or pressuring…

The book of Proverbs has a lot to say about living with a nagging wife (e.g., Prov 19:13; 21:19). Proverbs 25:24 says, *"Better to live on the corner of a roof than to share a house with a nagging wife.*" And 27:15 says, *"An endless dripping on a rainy day and a nagging wife are alike."*...

One reason nagging is often associated with wives has to do with the way men and women are wired. Women tend to be more verbal than men and solve problems, resolve conflict, and brainstorm solutions by talking about them. Men are often less verbal and more task-oriented and do not respond well to female attempts to instruct them…

When their wives ask for a chore to be done, husbands sometimes hear that as bossiness or attempts at control, so they either do not respond or purpose to do the project in their own time. The wife, being verbal, mentions that lapse again and again, and the stage is set for a nagging/resisting relationship.

Nagging can become a habit before we realize it, but both the nag and the resister have some responsibility in changing that dynamic….

Spouses can break a cycle of nagging by recognizing what isn't working and establishing better communication patterns. We are to watch our words and speak "*only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen"* (Eph 4:29)…

Nagging is not helpful, it does not build up, and it provides no benefit to the hearers"(*Gotquestions.org, "What Does The Bible Say About Nagging?*").

WHAT IS NAGGING?

HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO NAGGING?

HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO FEMININE CHARMS AND TEARS?

Judges 14:18-*"And the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down,*

"What is sweeter than honey?
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."

With the answer to the riddle in hand, Samson's Philistine 'companions' mock Samson by answering with a riddle of their own. It was obvious to Samson that his future "wife" had betrayed him— a trust had been broken.

"Marriage festival becomes marriage failure. Bonds of trust and allegiance are obviously broken. The "*right one in my eyes*" becomes "*my young cow*" with whom Samson's 'companions' have been plowing. Whatever love was there had vanished, ruined by greed, self-interest, and an amusing but catastrophic word game played prior to the wedding" (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary- Judges"*).

'*Trust*"'is defined as assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something (Meriam Webster Dictionary).

"In the Old Testament the words for '*trust'* was a Hebrew word that meant a '*rope'* …

Building trust is very much like making a rope. A rope is made by intertwining many strands together. The more strands, the stronger the rope. The better quality strands, the stronger and more dependable the rope…

Trust between two people is built in the same way. Each person shares a part of their life with the other. The more they share, the stronger the tie of trust. The deeper their service, their intimacy, their sacrifice the more dependable the relationship is to withstand wear and tear through usage. A well made rope can be used over and over, a well-made relationship is able to go through many trials…

Destroying a Rope is like Breaking Trust. Destroying trust works very much like destroying a rope, you do it by cutting one strand at a time. This is how we destroy trust with each other, one lie at a time, one unkindness at a time, one harsh word at a time. Eventually all the ties that hold people together are severed. Not in one climatic moment but over a period of months or years, one little cut at a time" (Mike Mazzalongo, *Bibletalk.tv, "Trust Is Like A Rope?*)

DO YOU TRUST YOUR SPOUSE? HOW? WHY?

DOES YOUR SPOUSE TRUST YOU? HOW? WHY?

ARE YOU TRUST-WORTHY? HOW? WHY?

Judges 14:19-*"And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon and struck down thirty men of the town and took their spoil and gave the garments to those who had told the riddle. In hot anger he went back to his father's house."*

Samson, betrayed by his wife-to-be, travels twenty miles to the coastal Philistine city of "*Ashkelon*" and kills thirty random "*men of the town*" to pay off his bet. He cares more about their clothes than their lives. He returns to Timnah and presents his Philistine '*companions'* with the thirty tunics as promised. Then, in "*hot anger,*" Samson returns to his father's house in Zorah.

The "*Spirit of the Lord*" rushes upon Samson but his actions are certainly not self-defense. What he does here is an act of aggression and violence.

"This raises the question which lingers over Samson's entire life: why does the Spirit of the Lord empower Samson at all, let alone in moments such as this? The answer comes earlier, when explaining why God allowed Samson to pursue his marriage to a Philistine bride (Judges 14:4).

God's overall plan for Samson is to disrupt the Philistines' comfortable control over Israel (Judges 13:1, 5). After forty years, Israel has grown complacent in captivity. They seem resigned to living under the rule of the Philistines. Unlike previous times, Israel has not called out for rescue from their condition (Judges 2:16–19). Samson's willingness to marry a pagan, idol-worshipping Philistine and his parents' weak resistance are evidence of this lack of conviction…

Samson's sins are just that—sins—and he will suffer for them throughout his life. And yet, the Lord intends to use Samson's lack of character and self-control to ignite a spark of resistance within Israel" (*bibleref.com*).

"Samson's very human, selfish response to Philistine trickery becomes a weapon of war in *Yahweh's* hand" (Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., "*Identity Crisis: Assessing Samson's Birth and Career "*).

IS GOD EVIL?

CAN GOD USE EVIL FOR HIS GOOD? HOW? WHY?

HOW HAS GOD USED BAD THINGS IN YOUR LIFE TO BRING ABOUT GOOD?

Judges 14:20-*"And Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man."*

Adding insult to injury (and without Samson's knowledge), the bride's father gives his daughter in marriage to Samson's assigned Philistine "*best man.*"

"Unaware of their roles in divine providence the characters are creating the very situation *Yahweh* had planned. At the end of this chapter (1) the work against the Philistines has begun, (2) Samson is back in his father's house, and (3) the adventure in mixed marriage has collapsed. The woman has betrayed her husband, the husband is calling his wife disparaging names, and the father-in-law has given his daughter to another man. What was planned as an inter-racial marriage has turned into war!" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

WHAT IS DIVINE PROVIDENCE?

HOW / WHY IS GOD ALWAYS IN CONTROL?

DOES IT GIVE YOU PEACE TO KNOW THAT GOD IS ALWAYS IN CONTROL? WHY?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Judges 15:1-2-*"After some days, at the time of wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife with a young goat. And he said, "I will go in to my wife in the chamber." But her father would not allow him to go in. And her father said, "I really thought that you utterly hated her, so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please take her instead."*

"After some days" Samson's "*hot rage*" (14:19) dissipates and he returns to Timnah to finally consummate the marriage to his "*wife*." He brings with him a "*young goat,*" a usual token of civility, but probably here more of reconciliation.

But her father now has less affection for Samson than Samson's parents originally had for his Philistine daughter. The apparent abandonment by Samson leaves the father's daughter in a state of dishonor and he interprets Samson's angry departure as a 'divorce.'

"*Her father would not allow him to go in***"** to his daughter as he had already given her to Samson's "*best man*" as a wife when Samson left town (14:20). The fact that he was one of the thirty Philistine men with whom Samson had made a wager just adds insult to injury.

But the bride's father now finds himself in a predicament and starts to second guess himself— had he acted too hastily? Trying to rectify the situation, he offers his younger daughter as a substitute for Samson. He even insults his older daughter by saying to Samson, "*Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please take her instead."*

We sometimes find ourselves in predicaments that seen insurmountable and try to escape by making ungodly decisions. Here are ten ideas that might serve us better.

"What To Do In Times Of Trouble"

(Lola Olanrewaju, *sermoncentral.com, "How Do You Handle Problems?"*)

1. Keep calm and take things easy…
2. Pray and seek God's guidance…
3. Search the Scripture to see how related problems were solved…
4. Ask for God's wisdom…
5. List out all the possible way to solve the problem…
6. Do not blame yourself or anyone else for your problem…
7. Do not take your anger out on anyone else…
8. Follow God's lead and direction.…
9. Rejoice and praise God…
10. Do not rush into making a quick decision or judgement."

HAVE YOU FOUND YOURSELF IN A PREDICAMENT YOU THOUGHT INSURMOUNTABLE?

HOW DID YOU HANDLE IT?

HOW SHOULD YOU HAVE HANDLED IT?

Judges 15:3-*"And Samson said to them, 'This time I shall be innocent in regard to the Philistines, when I do them harm.'"*

Samson does not accept the father's offer— He feels greatly wronged. Samson doesn't realize it, but he's about to fulfill *Yahweh's* design by rupturing the comfortable relationship that exists between the Israelites and Philistines. He may now understand that killing 30 Philistines to settle his bet may not have been justified, but "*this time*" he declares he *"shall be innocent in regard to the Philistines, when I do them harm."* In his eyes, they deserve the havoc he's about to unleash— they've sinned against him.

What do we justly deserve for our wrongful actions? After all, we all sin against God.

"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," (Rom 3:23)

And our Bible tell us we're accountable for our sins:

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."(2 Cor 5:10)

And our justly deserved punishment is quite severe:

"The wages of sin is death…" (Rom 6:23)

BUT FORTUNATELY

God offers "***justification***" for our transgressions:

"*Justification* is the instantaneous legal act of God in which He…

(1) Thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ's righteousness as belonging to us…

AND

(2) Declares us to be righteous in His sight" (Wayne Grudem, *"Systematic Theology"*)

This is offered not because of any works or merit of our own, but only by belief in Jesus. Justification comes only by God's "*grace*" ("*unmerited favor*"):

"*For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."* (Rom 3:20)

*"or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"(*Rom 3:23-24)

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."(Eph 2:8-9)

BUT

This legal declaration of *Justification* does not change man's internal nature or character

WE STILL SIN !

BUT FORTUNATELY

God No Longer Sees Us As Sinners

AND

We Have No Penalty To Pay Personally For Our Sins
(Past, Present, Future)

Rom 8:1-*"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"*

Rom 4:6-8-*"just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works, "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin."*

WHAT DO YOU DESERVE FOR YOUR SINS?

WHAT IS JUSTIFICATION?

ARE YOU APPRECIATIVE FOR THE SUFFERING JESUS WENT THROUGH FOR YOUR SINS?

Judges 15:4-5-*"So Samson went and caught 300 foxes and took torches. And he turned them tail to tail and put a torch between each pair of tails. And when he had set fire to the torches, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines and set fire to the stacked grain and the standing grain, as well as the olive orchards."*

Samson unleashes his havoc on the Philistines. He collects 300 foxes, ties torches to their tails, and frees them to set fire to the Philistine grain and olive orchards— their dietary staples. His actions may ultimately do God's will, but that's not on Samson's mind at the moment— he just wants revenge.

"Samson's actions are all guerrilla tactics. All his achievements are personal and are provoked by his own (mis)behavior. Unlike other deliverers, he never seeks to rid Israel of foreign oppressors, and he never calls out the Israelites troops. Samson is a man with a higher calling than any other deliverer in the book, but he spends his whole life doing his own thing" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

In the 1960s, "doing one's own thing" became a popular mantra, particularly within the counterculture movement, symbolizing a rejection of societal norms and a desire for individual freedom and self-expression. Today 'doing one's own thing' means living, acting, or behaving in a way that suits us, regardless of convention or the opinions of others, and focusing only on our own desires and goals.

But 'doing our own thing" is the anthesis of Biblical teaching and often gets us in a heap of trouble. We could save ourselves a lot of pain if we'd simply pause long enough to seek God's direction instead. As the old proverb says,

> *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths"* (Prov 3:5-6)

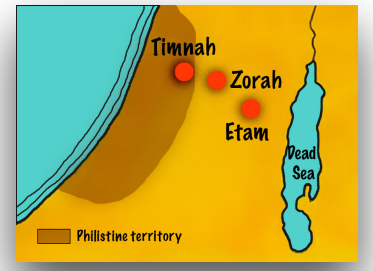
WHAT DOES "DOING YOUR OWN THING" MEAN?

DO YOU 'DO YOUR OWN THING'? HOW? WHY?

WHAT IS THE USUAL RESULT OF 'DOING YOUR OWN THING'?

Judges 15:6-8-*"Then the Philistines said, "Who has done this?" And they said, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion." And the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire. And Samson said to them, "If this is what you do, I swear I will be avenged on you, and after that I will quit." And he struck them hip and thigh with a great blow, and he went down and stayed in the cleft of the rock of Etam."*

The Philistines conduct an investigation to determine why their crops had been destroyed. Remarkably, they find Samson's actions to be understandable since his bride had been given to another man. Blaming the father of the bride instead of Samson, they set fire to the bride and her father thinking this would be the end of the problem.



But, instead of Samson feeling relieved by his vindication, he only sees his loss— a wife who admittedly betrayed him, but was still his 'possession.' He swears revenge on the Philistines and strikes them "*hip and thigh with a great blow*" — an idiom expressing a merciless slaughter.

Samson then retreats southeast to the *"rock of Etam*" in Judah. There he hides from his Philistine pursuers in a "*cleft of the rock.*"

Fear often causes us to hide. The book of Revelation describes a future when people of all ranks and classes will hide in caves and among rocks, and call out to the mountains and rocks to fall on them to hide them from the face of "*Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.*":

> *"Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"* (Rev 6:15-17)

WHAT DO YOU FEAR?

WHERE DO YOU HIDE WHEN YOU'RE AFRAID?

WHERE DO YOU TRY TO HIDE FROM GOD?

Judges 15:9-11-*"Then the Philistines came up and encamped in Judah and made a raid on Lehi. And the men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" They said, "We have come up to bind Samson, to do to him as he did to us." 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 have I done to them."*

The Philistines follow Samson into the lands of Judah and launch a raid on the city of Lehi. Surprised by this hostility, "*the men of Judah say, "Why have you come up against us?"* The Philistines explain that they came to capture Samson. But, instead of protecting Samson, the Judahites take 3,000 men and confront Samson saying, *"Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us?"*

"The Judahites would rather deliver their countryman into the hands of their enemy and live under that enemy's domination than fulfill the mandate *Yahweh* had given them to occupy the land and drive out the enemy…

The Judahites are willing not only to substitute the rule of the Philistines for the rule of *Yahweh*, but also to sacrifice the divinely appointed leader to preserve the status quo…

Samson's flight to Judah has escalated his personal feud with the Philistines into an international crisis—which is precisely what God wants" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

Judah picks a side, and it isn't Samson's or God's — they choose poorly. They choose the idolatry of Philistine rule over God's mandate.

In the famous old movie, Indiana Jones and his arch rival searched for the Lost Ark of the Covenant. In their quest, they were finally forced to make a choice. They could choose the 'right' chalice from the altar or the 'wrong' one— it was a life or death decision. His competitor chose 'poorly' and disintegrated into a flame of ash. With sweat dripping down his brow, Indy approached the altar and chose 'wisely.'

Every individual has to make the same decision about worshiping God. We all worship someone or something— either God or the idols of false gods. What we occupy our minds with the most is what we value the most and eventually worship.

While it is wrong for men to seek worship for themselves, it's not wrong for God because He deserves glory as Creator of the universe. He's not robbing glory from anyone else because there's no one who deserves worship more than Him.

An idol is something or someone that becomes more important to us than God. Fame, fortune, power, work, comfort, and sex are often prime idols in our lives. Sometimes we even worship ourselves and place our own accomplishments above God's.

Fame and fortune are fleeting. Your NFL, NHL, NBA, or MLS team will eventually lose. Your golf scorecard will yearn for an eraser. The nice house you labor to afford will someday rot. The car you proudly drive will rust and end up in the junk yard. Even the family and friends you revere today will tomorrow let you down. Unlike these idols, God will never lose, be erased, rot, rust, or abandon you.

Christians worship together in appreciation of Jesus' sacrifice and to experience His presence in our lives. Quit chasing idols and worship the only one worthy of worship.

DO YOU SOMETIMES CHOOSE POORLY?

HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU CHOSEN IDOLATRY OVER GOD? HOW? WHY?

HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU WORSHIPPED YOURSELF? HOW? WHY?

Judges 15:12-13-*"And they said to him, "We have come down to bind you, that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines." And Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not attack me yourselves." They said to him, "No; we will only bind you and give you into their hands. We will surely not kill you." So they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock."*

The Judahites didn't want to harm Samson, they just wanted him gone— out of sight, out of mind. They agree to bind Samson with strong rope and hand him over unharmed to the Philistines. What the Philistines did with him after that was their business. The sooner they handed him over, the sooner they could get on with their pagan-infested lives. And so "*they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock."* They 'kicked the can down the road.'

*"*Many Americans of a certain age grew up playing yard games that required no equipment at all. For the game of 'Kick the Can,' all you needed was an old can, one player to be 'It,' and a bunch of other players to hide. 'It's' job was to guard the can while trying to find the others; anyone who was found would be escorted to a holding area. But if a hider could kick the can before getting tagged by 'It,' everyone went free. The game may have had its heyday in the Great Depression; by the early 1960s it had all but vanished (though its core elements live on in several other backyard games)…

Then around the mid-1980s a new phrase began to be heard in the U.S. Congress. To "kick the can down the road" became, in the rhetoric of some lawmakers, a colorful and mildly critical new way of referring to putting off work on an issue for a later date" (*Merriam Webster, "Kicking It with 'Kick the Can Down the Road'"*).

The tribe of Judah may have 'kicked the can down the road,' but their pagan way will catch up to them later in the book and bite them on the backside. God always win!

WHAT HAVE YOU KICKED DOWN THE ROAD? WHY? HOW?

WHAT ARE YOU KICKING DOWN THE ROAD NOW? WHY? HOW?

WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO PICK UP THAT CAN?

Judges 15:14-17-*"When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him. Then the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and the ropes that were on his arms became as flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands. And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, and put out his hand and took it, and with it he struck 1,000 men.*

And Samson said,

"With the jawbone of a donkey,
heaps upon heaps,
with the jawbone of a donkey
have I struck down a thousand men."

As soon as he had finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone out of his hand. And that place was called Ramath-lehi."

As the Judahites (with Samson in tow) approach the Philistines encamped in the city of Lehi, the Philistines come forth to meet them. But then something miraculous happens— the "*Spirit of the Lord*" once again rushes upon Samson and his ropes become "*as flax that has caught fire,*" melting in his hands. Disregarding his Nazirite vow not to touch anything dead, Samson then picks up the "*fresh jawbone*" of a recently deceased donkey and strikes down "*1,000 men."*

"Fierce as a lion, as socially marginal as a jackal, this animalistic portrait of Samson in Judges 14-15 is capped off when he happens upon and wields the most improbable of weapons, the jawbone of an ass" (Gregory Mobley, "*Empty Men— The Heroic Tradition of Ancient Israel"*).

He then boastfully declares victory without so much as a nod to God and re-names the place "*Ramath-lehi,"* (*Jawbone Heights*).

"At least he is taking the first steps toward beginning to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines. A thousand enemy soldiers is not a bad beginning… (But) here is individualistic leadership in Israel ignoring promises to God and giving all the credit for victory to self… Such leadership should not be surprised when every citizen of the nation does what is right in his or her own eyes" (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary- Judges"*).

Boasting is defined as "a statement expressing excessive pride in oneself" *(Merriam Webster Dictionary)*. It's speaking too proudly or happily about what we've done. The Bible warns us clearly against boasting about our accomplishments:

> *"As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil"* (James 4:16)

Instead, we should "boast" like the apostle Paul, giving God the credit He deserves:

> *"If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness"* (2 Cor 11:30)

> *"So that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."* (1 Cor 1:31)

ARE YOU BOASTFUL? WHY? HOW?

WHAT CREDIT DO YOU THINK YOU DESERVE? WHY?

DO YOU GIVE GOD THE CREDIT HE DESERVES? WHY? HOW?

Judges 15:18-19-*"And he was very thirsty, and he called upon the Lord and said, "You have granted this great salvation by the hand of your servant, and shall I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?" And God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi, and water came out from it. And when he drank, his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore the name of it was called En-hakkore; it is at Lehi to this day."*

Thirsty after the exertion of killing 1,000 men, Samson does something for the very first time in the narrative— he calls "*upon the Lord.*" But "his prayer is as narcissistic as his manner of life. Far from displaying any concern for the glory of God, his intention in this prayer is purely personal— to avert his own death and to avoid capture by the Philistines" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

"In the moment of tragedy, he knows to whom to turn for help. At least a bit of faith in and respect for God lies buried in his troubled breast" (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary- Judges"*).

God answers Samson's prayer and brings forth water from "*the hollow place that is at Lehi… And when he drank, his spirit returned, and he revived."* He names the place "*En-hakkore*" ("*spring of the one who calls"*) — the name that continued until the time of the writing of the book of Judges.

"Imagine having a friend who only checks up on you when he's in dire need of your help or needs something from you, wouldn't it be best to just cut him off entirely? This is how some of us treat God. We only go to Him whenever we're in trouble or are in need of something. Imagine if He cut us off for just calling on Him only when we need Him, how would we feel? I'm thankful that God doesn't think the way we humans think…

Prayer is a means of communication to God and as believers, we ought to talk to God daily. If we have no trouble conversing with people, talking to God through prayer shouldn't be difficult. When talking to close friends, we usually ask about their day, their health, things you have in common, etc., and this is the way God wants us to talk to Him…

Our prayers don't necessarily have to be impressive or smooth-spoken, it should just be coming from a sincere heart. When praying, you shouldn't care if you have the right words or not, because God knows what's in your heart, even before you speak. The more you talk to a person, the more the relationship with that person grows. So it is with God, the more you talk to Him, the more you know Him. Prayer is a personal thing, not a show for all to see…

Prayer is one of the most potent weapons available to believers to live a life of peace and joy in this troubled world" (*bowtie-on-joe.com, "If The Only Time You Pray Is When You're In Trouble; You're In Trouble!*").

DO YOU PRAY WHEN YOU'RE IN TROUBLE? WHY?

DO YOU ONLY PRAY WHEN YOU'RE IN TROUBLE? WHY

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Judges 15:20-*"And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years."*

Samson "judges" a nation that is still under Philistine rule, and the text does not say Israel has rest for the next twenty years. Samson is a deliverer who does not fully deliver— he only begins the process.

"Samson's story is filled with irony. No other deliverer in the Book of Judges matches his potential. Called prenatally by *Yahweh*, stirred as a youth by the *Spirit of Yahweh*, empowered with extraordinary gifts by *Yahweh*, and granted exceptional opportunities for heroism by *Yahweh,* the narrator devotes more attention to Samson than any other deliverer. Despite all these advantages and this special attention, Samson accomplishes less on behalf of his people than any of his predecessors…

Though Samson is impressive as an individual, he turns out to be anything but a military hero. He never leads Israel in battle; he never engages the Philistines in in martial combat; he never experiences a military victory. All his accomplishments are personal; all his victories are private" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

But the story of Samson is not yet finished— it gets worse. Stay tuned.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH THE ATTRIBUTES GOD'S GIVEN YOU?

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR YOUR CHURCH WITH THE ATTRIBUTES GOD'S GIVEN YOU?

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR YOUR NATION WITH THE ATTRIBUTES GOD'S GIVEN YOU?

THE GREAT SEA
(Mediterranean Sea)
OTHNIEL
DEBORAH
GIDEON
JEPHTHAH
EHUD
SAMSON
Sidon
MT. LEBANON
Damascus
PHOENICIA
MT. HERMON
Tyre
DAN
Laish (Dan)
BASHAN
En-hazor
Kedesh
ASHER
WATERS OF MEROM
MANASSEH
Abdon
NAPHTALI
Hazor
Karnaim
Accho
Cabul
Chinnereth
SEA OF CHINNERETH
Ashtaroth
Aphek
Madon
Aphek
Golah
Rimmon
Jabneel
Harosheth
ZEBULUN
YARMUK R.
KISHON R.
Edrei
Dor
Endor
ISSACHAR
Jezreel
Megiddo
Raooth-gilead
Taanach
Beth-shan
Pella
PLAIN OF SHARON
JORDAN R.
Jabesh-gilead
Dothan
MANASSEH
Mahanaim
Tirzah
GAD
Shechem
Penuel
JABBOK R.
Shiloh
Joppa
DAN
EPHRAIM
Jazer
Naarath
Lod
Bethel
Rabbath-ammon
Gibeon
Gezer
BENJAMIN
Jericho
Jerusalem
Heshbon
AMMON
MT.NEBO
Ashdod
Bethlehem
Medeba
Ashkelon
Beth-Shemesh
Jahaz
Makkedah
Gath
SALT SEA
REUBEN
Lachish
Eglon
Hebron
Dibon
Aroer
Gaza
En-gedi
(DEAD SEA)
Debir
Gerar
JUDAH
ARNON R.
Arad
Ar
Beersheba
Raphia
Hormah
Kir-moab
MOAB
SIMEON
Rehoboth
ZERED R.
WILDERNESS OF ZIN
EDOM
0
25 Miles
The 12 Tribes
and the Book of Judges
Bible History Online
© GEOGRAPHY.BIBLE-HISTORY.COM
NOT LICENSED

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Judges 16:1-"*Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a prostitute, and he went in to her.*"

The previous chapter ended by stating Samson "*judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.*" This chapter begins with a glimpse of how he 'judged' his occupied nation. Instead of having passion for God, Samson has lust for a prostitute. His Nazirite vow means nothing.

As a 'judge' he was supposed to lead Israel out of Philistine oppression, but instead, Samson's twenty years of 'judging' has brought only further cultural assimilation and prostitution to foreign 'gods' (and apparently, foreign women). What is right in his distorted eyes is a far cry from God's perfect vision for His people. "A key parallel between Samson and Israel is the repeated and almost compulsive involvement of each with things foreign and forbidden" (Gregory Wong, "*Compositional Strategy of the Book of Judges: An Inductive, Rhetorical Study*").

"Samson's liaison with the prostitute signifies Israel's lusting after other gods for the sake of personal gratification and self-centered desires" (Dennis Olson, "*Judges*"- in *"New Interpreter's Bible*").

"Prostitution is often referred to as the 'oldest profession.' Indeed, it has always been a common way for women to make money, even in Bible times. The Bible tells us that prostitution is immoral. Proverbs 23:27-28 says, "*For a prostitute is a deep pit and a wayward wife is a narrow well. Like a bandit she lies in wait, and multiplies the unfaithful among men.*"

God forbids involvement with prostitutes because He knows such involvement is detrimental to both men and women. "*For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, And her mouth is smoother than oil; But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, Her steps lay hold of hell*" (Proverbs 5:3-5 NKJV).

Prostitution not only destroys marriages, families, and lives, but it destroys the spirit and soul in a way that leads to physical and spiritual death. God's desire is that we stay pure and use our bodies as tools for His use and glory (Rom 6:13). 1 Cor 6:13 says, "*The body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body*" (*Gotquestions.org. "What does the Bible say about prostitution?"*).

WHAT IS PROSTITUTION?

WHY IS PROSTITUTION PROHIBITED?

WHO GETS HURT BY PROSTITUTION?

Judges 16:2-3-"*The Gazites were told, 'Samson has come here.' And they surrounded the place and set an ambush for him all night at the gate of the city. They kept quiet all night, saying, 'Let us wait till the light of the morning; then we will kill him.' But Samson lay till midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts, and pulled them up, bar and all, and put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron.*"

As Samson lies with the unnamed prostitute in the southern most Philistine city of Gaza (along the Mediterranean coast), the Gazites surround the place. They *"set an ambush for him all night at the gate of the city"* with the hope of killing him at "*the light of the morning.*"

But Samson arrises at midnight and secretly makes his way past the guards to the city gates. There he uses his super-human strength to rip out gate (posts, bar, and all) and carries them on his shoulders thirty-seven miles to Hebron situated in the southern Judaean Hills.

Despite this miraculous feat, Samson not once acknowledges God's intervention in his slipping past the guards, tearing apart an impregnable gate, or even climbing 3050 feet of mountainous elevation change with such a heavy load.

"Once again Samson confronts the enemy and does nothing except preserve his own life. He does nothing to help his nation gain freedom from the oppressing Philistines. Rather he shows off his own strength for purposes of his own ego" (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary- Judges"*).

An inflated 'ego' is defined as an overvalued sense of one's worth to society. But there is an even simpler definition of 'ego'— "Edging God Out." It's our attempt to subjugate God in favor of elevating our own accomplishments, not recognizing that all we have and all we are comes from God in the first place.

Our Bible warns us against exalting ourselves above others.

"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted"
(Luke 14:11)

"Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves."
(Phil 2:3)

WHAT IS EGO?

HOW BIG IS YOUR EGO?

DO YOU EVER TRY TO 'EDGE GOD OUT'? WHY? HOW?

Judges 16:4-*"After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah."*

After the interlude with the prostitute, Samson is now in the "*Valley of Sorek*" (valley of "*red grapes*") which is located on the border between Philistia and the territory of the tribe of Dan. This is ironic since Samson's Nazirite vow prohibits drinking wine or even partaking of grapes.

Here he falls in love with a woman named "*Delilah"*— the first woman actually named in the narrative. But Samson loves the wrong woman. Her nationality is unknown, but she will be portrayed simply as a woman interested in making money.

"She is no would-be wife, not necessarily a harlot, but the sort of dangerous, traitorous woman about whom proverbial wisdom warns, one who underscores the impossibility of alliances with godless foreigners" (Susan Niditch, *"Judges- A Commentary"*).

God's perspective of love is much different from Samson's infatuation with Delilah:

> *"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres."* (1 Cor13:4)

WHAT IS LOVE?

WHAT IS INFATUATION?

WHAT'S THE DANGER OF MISTAKING INFATUATION FOR LOVE?

Judges 16:5-*"And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, 'Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humble him. And we will each give you 1,100 pieces of silver.'"*

Apparently knowing Delilah would be receptive, the five Philistine leaders approach her with a business proposition. They would each give her 1,100 pieces of silver if she could seduce Samson allowing him to be overpowered and bound— an absurd amount of money equivalent to hundreds of thousands to as much as millions of dollars in today's economy (1 shekel [one piece of silver in Biblical Hebrew] = 2.96 denarius [in Biblical Roman times] = one day of labor). Obviously, Samson, the man who has been "judging" the sub-culture of Israel under Philistine rule for the last twenty years, has quite a bounty on his head. All Delilah has to do is discover "*where his great strength lies."*

"In Proverbs 5-7, Solomon writes to his son to give him advice when it comes to sexual morality. This advice is from God, and it applies to young men of Solomon's time and of our time. All men are vulnerable to being seduced into immorality, and over the course of time, many have fallen for the trap of sexual immorality and adultery…

As Proverbs 7:26 says, speaking of the adulteress/prostitute, "*For many are the victims she has cast down, and numerous are all her slain.*" Men need to be wary of the seductress because this type of woman knows exactly how to work the way God has designed the male sexual appetite…

Proverbs 5:8 says, "*Keep your way far from her and do not go near the door of her house.*" Men need to stay as far away from dangerous places as possible, and this starts by controlling their own minds…

Proverbs 6:25 says, "*Do not desire her beauty in your heart, nor let her capture you with her eyelids.*" It is one thing to see a beautiful woman, and it is another altogether to desire her beauty. The indulgence of a thought, mental picture, or flirtation is what gets many men in trouble. Men who play with fire will get burned (Proverbs 6:27)" (*relevantbibleteaching.com*).

WHAT IS SEDUCTION?

HAVE YOU EVER SUCCUMBED TO SEDUCTION?

IS SEDUCTION ALWAYS JUST SEXUAL?

Judges 16:6-9-"*So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you."*

Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried, and she bound him with them.

Now she had men lying in ambush in an inner chamber. And she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he snapped the bowstrings, as a thread of flax snaps when it touches the fire. So the secret of his strength was not known."

Accepting the Philistine rulers' proposition, Delilah begins to question Samson to determine the origin of his strength. Samson toys with her and flirtatiously answers— "*If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.*" Bowstrings were made from ligaments and intestines of dead animals. An undried bowstring came straight from a carcass— something Samson was prohibited to touch due to his Nazirite vow (though that certainly hadn't stopped him in the past).

Delilah has the bowstrings brought to her by the Philistines and she binds Samson. She then cries out to Samson feigning surprise, "*The Philistines are upon you, Samson!*" But Samson snaps the string as easily "*as a thread of flax snaps when it touches the fire*"— his secret is safe.

A paper published in "The Archives of Sexual Behavior" found both men and women experiencing strong sexual arousal may have lower inhibitions and experience impaired decision-making. Being sexually aroused, especially in situations involving potential risk, can lead to individuals making choices that they might not otherwise make, such as skipping safety precautions or failing to consider the long-term consequences. In other words, as Samson proves, sex can make people stupid!

WHY / HOW DOES SEXUAL AROUSAL MAKE PEOPLE STUPID?

HAS SEX EVER MADE YOU STUPID?

WHAT ARE THE SHORT AND LONG TERM RAMIFICATIONS OF SEX?

Judges 16:10-12-*"Then Delilah said to Samson, "Behold, you have mocked me and told me lies. Please tell me how you might be bound."*

And he said to her, "If they bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak and be like any other man."

So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And the men lying in ambush were in an inner chamber. But he snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread."

Continuing what Samson thought was only a flirtatious game, Delilah asks him again to tell her the secret of his strength. This time he answers, *"If they bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak and be like any other man."*

So she binds him again and once more cries out, *"The Philistines are upon you, Samson!"* And once again, Samson snaps the ropes off his arms "*like a thread.*"

Apparently Samson had not heard of the proverb. "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me." It means it's not your fault if you're tricked by someone, but if you trust them and they trick you again, it's on you. Again, sex makes Samson stupid!

HAVE YOU BEEN FOOLED ONCE? HOW? WHY?

HAVE YOU BEEN FOOLED TWICE? HOW? WHY?

SHAME ON YOU !

Judges 16:13-14-*"Then Delilah said to Samson, "Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me how you might be bound." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and fasten it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man."*

So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into the web. And she made them tight with the pin and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep and pulled away the pin, the loom, and the web."

Thinking 'third time's a charm,' Delilah tries again to discover the secret to Samson's strength. One would think Samson should have some idea of her betrayal by now— after all, he'd had previous experience with Timnah's shenanigans years before. But, his desire for Delilah clogs his brain and he continues with what he perceives as only a sexual dalliance. He slyly answers, *"If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and fasten it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man."*

"Infatuated with her and his own extraordinary talents, he is blinded to the reality she represents. In this man we witness a classic example of 'all brawn and no brain'" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

"*So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into the web. And she made them tight with the pin"* But once again, Samson pulls away the pin, the loom, and the web with his strength still intact. Delilah's plan is foiled again.

WHAT DOES 'THIRD TIME'S A CHARM' MEAN?

IS 'THIRD TIME' REALLY A CHARM?

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN 'ALL BRAWN AND NO BRAIN'? WHY? HOW?

Judges 16:15-17-*"And she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me where your great strength lies." And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death.*

And he told her all his heart, and said to her, "A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man."

Striking out three times in a row with seduction, Delilah decides to use another ploy—guilt. She asks Samson, *"How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me?* Day after day she "*presses him hard*" until "*his soul was vexed to death"* and he caves and spills "*all his heart.*" For the first time in the narrative, Samson acknowledges his Nazirite vow and tells Delilah his secret— "*If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man."*

'Guilt' is the feeling of deserving blame for an offense. The intense emotional state of 'guilt' often clouds judgment, making individuals more likely to make quick, impulsive decisions without fully considering the consequences. Sex made Samson stupid before— guilt now make him more so!

Some Christians feel guilt and shame for their past offenses; but the Christian life is all about taking the weight off our own shoulders and placing it on Christ.

"From the moment Adam and Eve broke God's law against eating the forbidden fruit, guilt entered human history (Gen 3). With that guilt came a feeling of being guilty. They knew they had violated a specific law. They were guilty, and they *felt* guilty…

But God demonstrated His plan to cover human guilt with the shedding of innocent blood (Gen 3:21; cf. Heb 9:22). What God did in the garden was a picture of what He would do thousands of years later to cover the guilt of everyone who trusts in His only begotten Son (John 1:12; 3:16–18; Rom 10:9–10)…

By hanging on to guilty feelings after we have been forgiven, we are being prideful. Humility gratefully accepts a pardon it can never earn and lives to demonstrate that gratefulness… False guilt can keep us from growing into the mature Christians God wants us to be…

God paid a high price so we could walk in freedom… Because of Christ, we can walk in the light and never again suffer under the burden of guilt" (*Gotquestions.org, "What Does The Bible Say About Guilt?"*).

Judges 16:18-19-*"When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up again, for he has told me all his heart." Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. She made him sleep on her knees. And she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him."*

With Samson finally telling her the secret to his strength, Delilah's job is almost complete. She summons the Philistine leaders and collects her bounty. Her only remaining task is to coax Samson into sleeping "*on her knees*" in probable post-coital slumber. She then calls a man to shave off Samson's seven locks and immediately begins to "*torment him." S*amson may have loved her, but his love was unrequited— Delilah has only used him to make herself wealthy. Samson loses both his lover and his strength with one quick snap of the shears.

Today, Delilah would be called a 'gold digger,' a woman who seeks a relationship for financial gain rather than for love or affection— a "man-eater." She remains by his side only as long as she receives her heart's desire from the relationship. Most people would frown on this behavior.

But, sometimes, even Christians can be gold diggers— 'spiritual' gold diggers. Do we want to get on God's good side just to avoid troubles without reaching for His heart? Do we want God for what He can give us or do we pursue Him because we truly love Him?

"The whole transaction of religious conversion has been made mechanical and spiritless… Christ may be 'received' without creating any special love for Him in the soul of the receiver. The man is 'saved' but he is not hungry and thirsty after God" (A.W. Tozer, *"The Pursuit of God"*).

"Whatever we are hungry and thirsty for is what we will seek to satisfy that hunger and thirst. If we are hungry for God, then we will seek after Him and His righteousness, His salvation, and His wisdom. If we seek satisfaction only in earthly things, then we will be happy when we feel full and sad when we don't - and we won't realize that we are missing true fulfillment and contentment… There is a hunger and thirst deep inside every person that can only be satisfied by the Lord, Himself" *(revival.com., "Hunger and Thirst After God").*

WHAT IS A GOLD DIGGER?

WHAT IS A 'SPIRITUAL" GOLD DIGGER?

DO YOU TRULY HUNGER AND THIRST FOR GOD? WHY?

Judges 16:20-22-*"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 left him. And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison. But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved."*

Awakened from his slumber by Delilah's shout, Samson says *"I will go out as at other times and shake myself free."* But this time, he's ignored his Nazirite vow one too many times and the Lord leaves him to fend for himself. His super-human strength has vanished— Samson is shocked. The Philistines seize him and gouge out his eyes. They then bind him in bronze shackles and take him back to a prison in Gaza to grind flour in the mill.

"The ironies in his life have 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 has 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 flour for others in prison" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

There's an old quote of unknown origin that applies to both Samson and us today:

"Sometimes you must hurt in order to know,

fall in order to grow,

lose in order to gain,

because most of life's greatest lessons are learned through the pain."

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM YOUR HURTS?

HOW HAVE YOU GROWN FROM YOUR STUMBLES?

WHAT HAVE YOU LOST IN ORDER TO GAIN?

HOW / WHY ARE LIFE'S GREATEST LESSONS OFTEN LEARNED THROUGH PAIN?

Judges 16:23-24-*"Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to rejoice, and they said, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand." And when the people saw him, they praised their god. For they said, "Our god has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has killed many of us."'*

Unlike Samson, the Philistines at least acknowledge their 'god'— Dagon. They call out, *"Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand."* Up to this point Samson has acted as though *Yahweh* has had nothing to do with anything in his life. But now, physically weakened, eyes gouged out, and emotionally decimated, Samson's perspective will soon change.

Samson doesn't realize this is more than just a battle of men. He can't see the spiritual warfare waging around him. He doesn't' understand that "*we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places"* (Eph 6:12).

This is God Almighty verses a false 'god'— the outcome is never in doubt. The Creator of the universe will always prevail over his created beings— men, women, or 'gods' like Dagon.

Samson is *Yahweh's* tool and, as promised to Samson's mother before he was even born, "*he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines"*(vs 13:5). The Philistines' 'god' can't hold a candle to the One True God who is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent.

WHAT IS SPIRITUAL WARFARE?

WHO / WHAT ARE FALSE 'gods'?

WHAT IS OUR ROLE IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE?

Judges 16:25-27*"And when their hearts were merry, they said, "Call Samson, that he may entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he entertained them. They made him stand between the pillars. And Samson said to the young man who held him by the 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. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about 3,000 men and women, who looked on while Samson entertained.

"*When their hearts were merry*" is a euphemism for 'drunker than a skunk.' With 3,000 inebriated 'worshipers' in Dagon's temple, the five Philistine lords call for Samson to be brought out of prison to "*entertain them."* They revel in Samson's misery as the once mighty warrior is led in "*by the hand*" of a mere young man who places him on full display between two pillars.

"*Schadenfreude* (pronounced 'shaa-duhn-froy-duh') is a German word that literally translates to 'harm-joy.' It describes the feeling of pleasure or satisfaction derived from learning about the troubles, failures, or humiliation of another person. The term combines two German words: '*Schaden'* meaning damage or harm, and '*Freude'* meaning joy…

While the word itself comes from German, the concept is universal across cultures. After all, who hasn't felt at least a tiny bit gleeful when hearing about the downfall of someone they dislike? *Schadenfreude* taps into some of our baser human instincts around competition, justice, and social comparison…

Social media has created more opportunities than ever to indulge in a bit of *schadenfreude*. Whether it's celebrities being 'canceled' or politicians caught in scandals, there's no shortage of public misfortunes to observe online. Some worry that social media amplifies our tendency toward *schadenfreude* by creating emotional distance and dehumanizing others. When interacting through screens, it becomes easier to feel detached from others' suffering and view it as entertainment…

We may feel guilty about experiencing *schadenfreude*, but that doesn't stop the emotion from arising" (Hannah Wehrle, *babble.com, "What Is Schadenfreude"*).

WHAT IS SCHADENFREUDE?

HAVE YOU EVER ENGAGED IN SCHADENFREUDE? WHY? HOW?

HOW CAN YOU AVOID IT?

Judges 16:28-*"Then Samson called to the Lord and said, "O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes."*

"It is only when Samson reaches the end of his rope and slams up against his dependence on God that he comes to some realization of his need for God" (Dennis T. Olson, "*Judges in New Interpreter's Bible"*). His motive for appealing to God is not religious. He doesn't even ask for God's help in delivering his nation. His motive is simple vengeance for his own "*two eyes"*— he wants payback.

"We have all been there, someone has wronged us and left us to deal with the hurt, the pain, and the collateral damage— potentially even long-lasting consequences. There may be a group of people at work or at school or even in the family that has a constant and persistent way of causing you harm…

What do we do when we are wronged? The world has a concept of an eye for an eye, that revenge is sweet. We are surrounded by all sorts of examples of human behavior that we see play itself out on the news, streaming entertainment, and in movie theaters. The popular and even correct thing in today's culture seems to be to hurt someone back who has hurt you…

Society says that revenge is normal and perfectly fair to do, but what does God say? … What does God mean by "*vengeance is mine*"? We must understand that despite how things might appear to our eyes and ears, God knows so much more about the circumstances you are in than you ever could or ever will…

When God says that vengeance is His, it means that He will handle it. He will handle ensuring that justice is served to the individual or individuals who are persecuting you. It means that He will repay the individual or individuals for the wrongs that have been done or are being done to you. <u>God will decide the appropriate response that is necessary for there to be justice</u>. ..

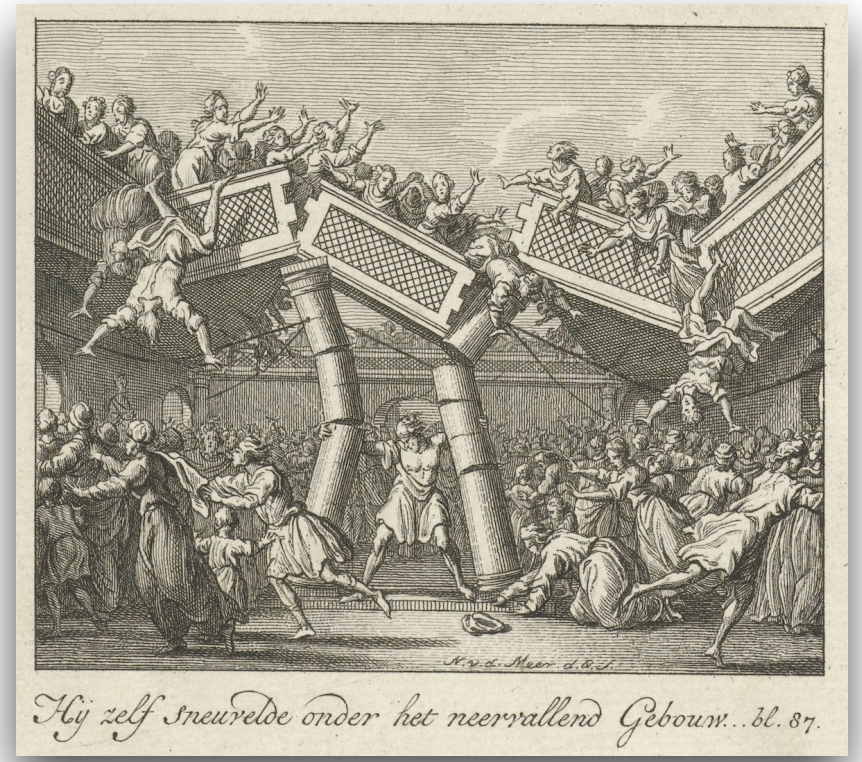
We should wait expectantly for God to come to our rescue… God will intervene in a way that He knows best for all parties involved — <u>even if the justice served is not immediately noticeable to you</u>" (*walkinginstepwithgod.org., "Vengeance Is Mine — Trusting God To Handle Wrongdoings"*).

WHAT IS VENGEANCE?

HAVE YOU EVER WANTED VENGEANCE? HOW? WHY?

WHY IS IT BEST TO WAIT ON GOD?

Judges 16:29-30-*"And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life."*



Samson, now with his hair fully grown back, grasps the pillars to which he has been led." *Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it"* killing thousands—"*more than those whom he had killed during his life."*

Samson lay dead under the rubble along with the five Philistine rulers. His final act as the last 'judge' of Israel was to "*<u>begin</u> to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines"*(vs 13:5). He didn't live to see the fruits of his sacrifice, but his Nazirite vow was fulfilled.

Sometimes we don't get to see the fruits of out labor. When witnessing about Christ, we often get frustrated at not seeing immediate results. But acceptance of the Gospel is not dependent on our specific efforts, but on God's own divine plan. His timing is not our timing. Our job in presenting the Gospel is only as his postman— we just need to make sure the message is delivered. God will handle the rest.

DO YOU GET FRUSTRATED WHEN YOU DON'T SEE THE FRUIT OF YOUR LABORS?

DO YOU GET FRUSTRATED WHEN YOU DON'T SEE THE RESULT OF YOUR DELIVERING THE GOSPEL MESSAGE?

WHY?

Judges 16:31-*"Then his brothers and all his family came down and took him and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had judged Israel twenty years."*

"His (Samson's) burial by his brothers in the tomb of Manoah, his father, serves as the final symbol of his integration into the society which he represents, but in which he has functioned so obstinately and independently" (J. C. Exum and J. W. Whedbee, *"Isaac, Samson, and Saul: Reflections on the Comic and Tragic Visions,"* in "*Beyond Form Criticism, Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism"*).

"The Samson story represents the last of a series of cycles of apostasy-oppression-appeal-deliverance, in each of which, according to the narrator's own scheme, the depravity of the nation sank to a new low…

Not only was this true of the nation in general, but it also applied to the men God raised up to to provide deliverance from the enemy…

This and the following chapters must be interpreted as depicting the darkest period in the history of the Judges" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture—Judges, Ruth"*).

WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF THE JUDGES'?

WHY / HOW DOES GOD USE IMPERFECT PEOPLE TO CARRY OUT HIS PERFECT PLANS?

WHY / HOW IS GOD USING YOU TO CARRY OUT HIS PLANS?

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Judges 17-1-*"There was a man of the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Micah."*

This chapter begins innocently enough claiming simply that there was a man named Micah who lived in "*the hill country of Ephraim."* Unfortunately, he is not an admirable man. In fact, there's not a single admirable person in the next two chapters.

"No one displays any devotion to *Yahweh*; no one demonstrates any concern for national well-being; no one behaves with any integrity. The Israelites have become as shameless in their religious expression and ethical conduct as they need to be to get their way" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

The last five chapters of the book of Judges are really an appendix describing just how far Israel has fallen under the influence of foreign 'gods' and assimilated into their pagan surroundings. They describe in two separate narratives (chapters 17-18; 19-21) the religious degeneration of Israel.

"Judges disappear in the final five chapters of the book of Judges. So does divine deliverance. Names of all types of leaders virtually disappear. Violence escalates. A tribe cedes its land and finds a new domicile in a northern territory Joshua did not a lot to any of the tribes. Another tribe sees some of its members commit a vile act violating all rules of hospitality, leading the first true gathering of all the tribes of Israel on the entire book. All Israel then fights together, but the enemy is a tribe of Israel!" (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary- Judges"*).

DOES OUR NATION TODAY DISPLAY ANY DEVOTION TO GOD? WHY? WHY NOT?

DOES OUR NATION TODAY DEMONSTRATE ANY CONCERN FOR NATIONAL WELL-BEING?

DOES OUR NATION TODAY BEHAVE WITH ANY INTEGRITY? WHY? WHY NOT?

Judges 17:2-3*"And he said to his mother, 'The 1,100 pieces of silver that were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse, and also spoke it in my ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it.' And his mother said, 'Blessed be my son by the Lord.'*

And he restored the 1,100 pieces of silver to his mother. And his mother said, "I dedicate the silver to the Lord from my hand for my son, to make a carved image and a metal image. Now therefore I will restore it to you."

Micah has a confession to make to his wealthy mother. He's stolen a great deal of money from her— 1,100 pieces of silver (the same amount each Philistine leader gave to Delilah in the previous chapter). He doesn't confess out of remorse, but out of fear because his mother has "*uttered a curse*" on the perpetrator— a solemn utterance intended to involve a supernatural power to inflict harm or punishment on someone wishing misfortune, evil, and doom.

Just before the Israelites were to enter the Promised Land, Moses gave them this last-minute instruction, "*See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse"* (Deut 11:26). Moses goes on to promise a '*blessing*' if the people listen to God's laws, and a '*curse*' if they ignore them.

The Israelites were instructed that upon entering the land, they were to remove all traces of idolatry, and not learn from the ways of the idol worshippers. '*Blessings'* were linked to obedience and a relationship with God, while '*curses*' would result from turning away from God and His commands.

Micah has broken the 5th and 8th commandments— *"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you."* and *"You shall not steal"* (Ex 20:12; 20:15). Regardless, his mother forgives him and flips the curse into a blessing saying, "*Blessed be my son by the Lord.*"

This seems like a noble act on her part, but she is not as admirable as she seems. She breaks a commandment also—*"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth."* (Ex 20:4). Both she and her son deserve God's "*curse*."

WHAT IS A CURSE?

WHAT IS A BLESSING?

WHAT CURSES AND BLESSINGS HAVE YOU RECEIVED?? WHY?

Judges 17:4-5-*"So when he restored the money to his mother, his mother took 200 pieces of silver and gave it to the silversmith, who made it into a carved image and a metal image. And it was in the house of Micah.*

And the man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and household gods, and ordained one of his sons, who became his priest."

Micah's mother takes 200 pieces of the stolen silver returned to her and promptly gives it to "*the silversmith, who made it into a carved image and a metal image"*— perhaps he was running a 'two-for-one special.'

A '*carved image'* ('*graven image*') was an idol carved out of stone, wood, or metal— it could be a statue of a person or animal, or a relief carving in a wall or pole. A '*metal image*' ('*molten image*') was made of metal poured into a cast. An ephod was a ceremonial garment worn by priests.

"The progression of idolatry in a pagan religion generally starts with the acknowledgement of a power that controls natural forces. The presence of the force is then thought to indwell an object, like a stone, or a place, like a mountain…

The next step is altering a naturally occurring object, like a standing stone, a deliberately planted tree, or a carved Asherah pole and asking the force to indwell it. When the idolatrous culture has had time to contemplate the personality of the god, they then make corresponding physical images—a statue that looks like a woman or a relief carving that looks like an animal..

The spiritual progression is similar. People start with wanting something (Eph 5:5; Col 3:5), often children or prosperity, or good crops. They observe the circumstances (which some acknowledge are God-ordained, and others think are independent) that lead to these things and begin to ascribe to the causal forces human characteristics—thus creating 'gods.' Places are set aside to commune with these false 'gods'…

For convenience sake, smaller items, thought to hold the power or the communication line of the 'gods, 'are brought into homes. Before long, the people are ensnared by the compulsion to give homage to a thing of their own definition instead of to the God of the universe" (*Gotquestions.org, "What Is A Molten Image?").*

Micah makes a shrine to *Yahweh* with the idols made by the silversmith and intersperses them with his other "*household gods.*" He breaks a third commandment— "*You shall have no other gods before Me*" (Ex 20:3). He's batting '300'— a baseball player might be proud, but God's not.

Additionally, Micah then self-"*ordains*" one of his sons as a "*priest*"— a role specifically given to certain members of the tribe of Levi. The Levitical priesthood began with Aaron (the older brother of Moses) and continued through his descendants. They alone served as the priests in Israel, ministering in the tabernacle, and functioning as mediators between man and God. The Levitical priests, and only the Levitical priests, were responsible for offering the sacrifices required by the Mosaic Law— not Micah's son!

HOW DOES IDOLATRY PROGRESS TODAY?

WHAT'S YOUR BATTING AVERAGE IN BREAKING GOD'S COMMANDMENTS?

WHAT'S YOUR BATTING AVERAGE IN FOLLOWING GOD'S COMMANDMENTS?

Judges 17:6-*"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."*

On first reading this verse one might come to the conclusion that the author is implying that if Israel had had a king then everyone would not have done "*what was right in their own eyes.*" But, history will prove this is not the case. The later monarchy of Israel was not just responsible for the apostasy that eventually led to the demise of the Northern and Southern kingdoms (8th and 6th centuries B.C.), but also earlier when Solomon's reign became the first royal sponsor of idolatry (970 to 931 BC).

The real meaning of this verse is that Israel didn't need kings to lead them into idolatry. The people were perfectly capable of doing that on their own— and did!

"The concept that rulers should inhibit evil or "evil ways" is a prevalent theme in many cultures and religious beliefs, particularly in the Old Testament. It suggests that leaders have a responsibility to uphold moral standards and discourage harmful behaviors within their societies…

The ideal of rulers inhibiting evil is often contrasted with the reality of human nature and the potential for corruption or abuse of power. Even rulers with good intentions can struggle to implement effective measures to prevent evil or harmful actions" (*Google AI Overview*).

WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN INHIBITING EVIL?

WHAT IS AN INDIVIDUAL'S ROLE IN INHIBITING EVIL?

HOW DO YOU INHIBIT YOUR OWN EVIL WAYS?

Judges 17:7-8-*"Now there was a young man of Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there. And the man departed from the town of Bethlehem in Judah to sojourn where he could find a place. And as he journeyed, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah."*

Micah's son wouldn't have to pretend to be a priest for much longer as a young Levitical priest aimlessly happens upon Micah's compound. The young Levite who had been temporarily "*sojourning*" in Bethlehem in Judah now finds himself in *"the hill county of Ephraim*" at Micah's gate. His name is not yet mentioned, but as will be seen later in the narrative, he has an interesting pedigree.

But for now, he's directionless. "He is a 'laid back' professional minister following the 'path of least resistance' and waiting for an opportunity to open up" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

"People often find themselves at a crossroads in pursuing their career calling, needing to know how to select the right path. Not knowing how to make wise career decisions can lead to poor career decisions by following 'the path of least resistance,' which is the path that is easiest. The 'path of least resistance' is tempting because it often requires the least risk and allows one to stay in one's comfort zone…

"In the quest to choose the right career path, the dichotomy between the 'path of least resistance' and thoughtful action is a choice that shapes our lives in profound ways. While our brains may naturally gravitate toward the easy route, biblical wisdom teaches us that God's plan often leads us away from our comfort zones and into purposeful, challenging work…

Remember that God's call for you is unique and may not always align with the easiest or most conventional paths. Embrace the challenges, trust in His guidance, and remain steadfast in your faith. In doing so, you will discover a fulfilling career and a deeper understanding of who you are and who God has called you to be" (*christiancareercenter.com, "Beyond The Path of Least Resistance: Pursuing Your True Career Calling"*).

WHAT IS THE PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE?

WHAT ARE THE DANGERS IN TAKING THE PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE?

HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU TAKEN THE PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE? WHY? HOW?

Judges 17:9-10-*"And Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?" And he said to him, "I am a Levite of Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to sojourn where I may find a place." And Micah said to him, "Stay with me, and be to me a father and a priest, and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year and a suit of clothes and your living." And the Levite went in."*

Micah cannot believe his good fortune as this actual Levitical priest just happens upon his doorstep He immediately offers this young man an opportunity to be his private "*priest*" and "*father*"— the latter a term of honor (similar to how Catholic priests are called 'father' as a sign of respect and because they act as spiritual leaders). The contract is quite lucrative— much better than the typical honorarium for traveling Levitical priests (Deut 18:1-5). He's offered "*ten pieces of silver a year and a suit of clothes"* and a free place to live. The aimless young Levite has just hit the jackpot! Or has he?

Notice *Yahweh* is never once consulted— it's a simple business contract that doesn't even lay out the young priest's full duties. Micah has constructed his own shrine (with multiple deities) and has even made an ephod and other religious garments; but his is a 'man-made religion.' He falsely believes that he'll now have automatic access to God. He'll once again "ordain" his own priest to be at his beck and call— this young Levite will be nothing more than his 'good luck charm.'

"Blinded by his own ambition to the heterodoxy of the situation, the young Levite cannot resist the heady offer of 'fatherhood' within the nation of Israel. The prospect of being looked to as a spiritual advisor and mentor of this rich man is intoxicating. No one in 'his right mind' would turn it down" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

"One of the most obvious reasons churches fail is based upon the failure of the leadership. Not all churches fail based on leaders alone, but in many cases, the problems that precipitated the ultimate downfall of a local church were due in some part to failure on behalf of the leadership. This is why it's essential for pastors to be mature men who walk with God and lead out of faithfulness to God and his Word…

The office of pastor is most often referenced in the Scriptures as *elder* (or *overseer*). In Paul's words to Timothy, he clearly specifies the need for maturity in the qualifications of an overseer by describing the candidate for elder in the local church…

> "*The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.*
>
> *He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?*
>
> *He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.*
>
> *Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil"* (1 Tim 3:1-7)…

If a pastor is lacking in maturity, the church will suffer. For instance, the immature pastor will not be able to properly protect the sheep from the attacks of spiritual predators who constantly seek to harm God's flock. The immature man lacks the necessary wisdom and is often not *sober minded* which is required (1 Tim. 3:2) for the office of elder…

The pastor must be a man who is mature in conduct and doctrine—one who possesses a life of maturity and the pursuit of God from the pages of Scripture. A pastor marked by immaturity will result in a church marked by immaturity. The woes of an immature pastor will hinder the progress of a local church and precipitate sinful patterns that lead the body of Christ into a spiritual downgrade" (Josh Buice, *"The Office of Pastor Necessitates Maturity"*).

WHAT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A PASTOR/ ELDER/ OVERSEER?

WHY/ HOW DOES THE POSITION REQUIRE MATURITY?'

WHAT ARE THE DANGERS OF IMMATURITY IN PASTORAL LEADERSHIP?

Judges 17:11-13-*"And the Levite was content to dwell with the man, and the young man became to him like one of his sons. And Micah ordained the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah. Then Micah said, "Now I know that the Lord will prosper me, because I have a Levite as priest."'*

The deal is done. The Levite allows himself to be "*ordained*" by Micah to become his personal "*priest.*" He'll live on Micah's property— just like one of his sons. Micah then says, *"Now I know that the Lord will prosper me, because I have a Levite as priest" …*

What Can Possibly Go Wrong?

HAVE YOU EVER FELT OVER-CONFIDENT IN A SITUATION? WHY? HOW?

HAVE YOU EVER FELT OVER-CONFIDENT IN YOUR ABILITIES? WHY? HOW?

WHAT WENT WRONG?

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Judges 18:1-*"In those days there was no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the people of Dan was seeking for itself an inheritance to dwell in, for until then no inheritance among the tribes of Israel had fallen to them."*

The tribe of Dan was originally allotted land by Joshua within the Promised Land:

> *"The seventh lot came out for the tribe of the people of Dan, according to their clans. And the territory of its inheritance included Zorah, Eshtaol, Ir-shemesh, Shaalabbin, Aijalon, Ithlah, Elon, Timnah, Ekron, Eltekeh, Gibbethon, Baalath, Jehud, Bene-berak, Gath-rimmon, and Me-jarkon and Rakkon with the territory over against Joppa"* (Joshua 19:40-46).

It consists of territory in the coastal region of Canaan, west of Jerusalem and extending to the Mediterranean Sea. The northeastern boundary borders Ephraim and the southeastern boundary borders Judah. Philistia is directly to its south.

Unfortunately, "*no inheritance among the tribes of Israel had fallen to them.*" The Danites' weak efforts to take the land allotted to them by Joshua has been ineffective— the Amorites have repulsed them and pushed them eastward into the hills.

Without suitable land to sustain the populace, the tribe of Dan is now forced to look for a new "*inheritance to dwell in.*"

Instead of confessing their sin of not believing God would lead them to victory over the Amorites, they decide to do "*what is right in their own eyes*" and look far northward for new lands.

After all, Joshua is dead and there is "*no king in Israel*" to stop them.

This chapter will paint the tribe of Dan as corrupt and unfaithful. Their human efforts will be without divine consultation or approval. They will ultimately obtain new land, but it will lead to further apostasy and later ruin and annihilation. Their new territory will become a centralized place of pagan worship.

HOW DID YOU END UP HERE?

DID YOU CONSULT GOD WHEN YOU MOVED HERE?

WHY DID GOD PLANT YOU HERE?

Judges 18:2-*"So the people of Dan sent five able men from the whole number of their tribe, from Zorah and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land and to explore it. And they said to them, "Go and explore the land." And they came to the hill country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there."*

Like the Israelites who first encountered the Promised Land in the Exodus, "*the people of Dan send five able men from the whole number of their tribe"* to "*spy out new land and explore it.*" The spies come from two cities, Zorah and Eshtaol— the same cities seen in the Samson narrative (Judges 13:2, 25; 16:31).

"The reference to only two cities suggests that the Danites as a tribe had not established firm and permanent residence in the region… These two cities near the western border of Benjamin would have been the first ones encountered when the Danites separated from the rest of the Israel and headed for their territory" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

On their journey, they come to Micah's house in the hill country of Ephraim and are offered food and lodging there.

"In English, the word '*hospitality,'* which comes from the root word '*hospital*,' originates from the Latin word '*hospes*,' meaning 'guest' or 'host.' Originally, this term referred to a place that provided accommodation, such as an inn or lodging for travelers. Over time, these establishments that welcomed guests began to offer medical treatment as well…

In Hebrew, while there's no exact word that directly matches the *New Testament* concept of "*hospitality*," the idea is conveyed through terms related to kindness toward strangers or sojourners" ("Fari Maghami, *"Embracing the Stranger: Hospitality in the Bible*").

In *Old Testament* times there were strict rules governing hospitality to strangers. The host was obliged to provide the traveler with food, water, and shelter; and the traveler was expected to accept what the host offered. To refuse such hospitality was an insult. On the other hand, a traveler would interpret a resident's failure to provide food and amenities as a hostile act.

WHAT IS HOSPITALITY?

WHAT DOES HOSPITALITY LOOK LIKE TODAY?

ARE YOU HOSPITABLE? HOW?

Judges 18:3-4-*"When they were by the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young Levite. And they turned aside and said to him, "Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? What is your business here?" And he said to them, "This is how Micah dealt with me: he has hired me, and I have become his priest."'*

Walking near the house, the Danites recognize a voice from their past— the young Levite. Surprised to find him here they pepper him with questions— *"Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? What is your business here?"*

He should reply that he was divinely led to Micah's house to teach them about God, but he doesn't invoke God's name at all. The young Levite simply states that he has become Micah's hired hand— his private 'priest.' He ignores God and gives Micah all the credit. His loyalty in not to *Yahweh.* He is a false teacher.

"The Bible makes it clear that false teaching is not just a problem of the past, but a present and ongoing danger. Jesus Himself warned, "*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves*" (Matthew 7:15). Similarly, the apostle Paul admonished the elders in Ephesus, saying, "*I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock*" (Acts 20:29). These warnings are not just historical; they were given for the benefit of the entire church, including us today…

In today's culture, there is an overwhelming flood of voices claiming to represent the Christian faith, but many of these voices preach a gospel that is diluted, distorted, or outright heretical. Prosperity theology, legalism, universalism, and New Age spirituality cloaked in Christian terminology are just a few examples of how the gospel is being confused and corrupted in our time. Without careful discernment and guidance, many believers can be easily led astray' (*monergism.com, "Modern Day False Teachers*").

WHO ARE FALSE TEACHERS?

HOW CAN YOU DISCERN A FALSE TEACHER?

WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT FALSE TEACHERS?

Judges 18:5-6-"*And they said to him, "Inquire of God, please, that we may know whether the journey on which we are setting out will succeed." And the priest said to them, "Go in peace. The journey on which you go is under the eye of the Lord."*

The Danite scouts can't believe their luck— they can now ask a 'genuine' Levitical priest to "*inquire of God*" as to the success of their journey. But, they refer to the deity only by the generic term "*Elohim*" instead of "*Yahweh,*" the covenant name of the God of Israel. Perhaps they're afraid of *Yahweh's* answer as they have not sought His divine advice before.

Regardless, the young Levite gives them a rather ambiguous answer, "*Go in peace. The journey on which you go is under the eye of the Lord."*

But what does this really mean? Is their mission favorable or unfavorable to God? Does it mean God will have their backs or will He just watch them fall on their faces?

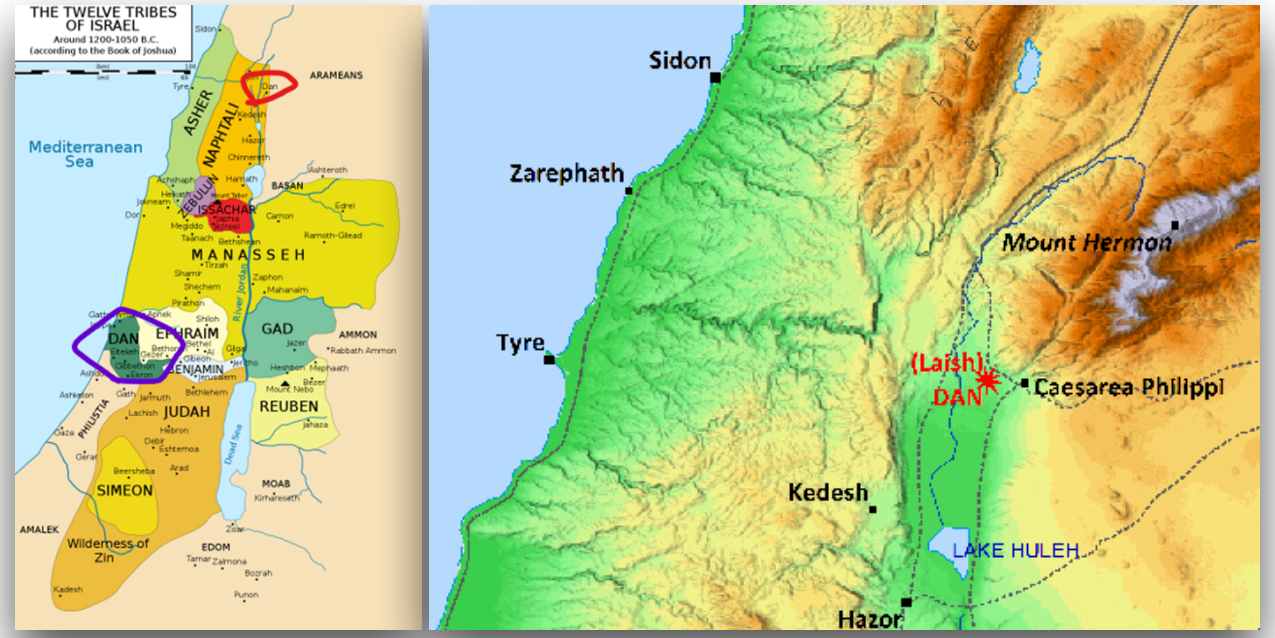
Additionally, "the reader is left to wonder whether this is indeed *Yahweh's* response to the inquiry of the spies, or whether it is fabricated by the priest" (E. Aydeet Mueller, "*The Micah Story: A Morality Tale in the Book of Judges*").

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO INQUIRY OF GOD?

WHAT / HOW SHOULD WE INQUIRE OF GOD?

HOW DO YOU HEAR GOD'S ANSWERS?

Judges 18:7-*"Then the five men departed and came to Laish and saw the people who were there, how they lived in security, after the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and unsuspecting, lacking nothing that is in the earth and possessing wealth, and how they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone."*



Whether God is with them or not, the five spies depart Micah's house and eventually arrive at Laish, in the northern Promised Land— an area that Joshua had failed to conquer. It's situated near the sources of the Jordan River in a fertile and well-watered area. They find the people "*quiet and unsuspecting, lacking nothing that is in the earth and possessing wealth."*

The people of Laish "*live in security, after the manner of the Sidonians."* Sidon and Tyre are Phoenician sister cities known for their opulence and wicked pagan practices. They practice a polytheistic religion that involves deities like Baal and Astarte. (Later, to a Jewish audience in Jesus' day, Sidon was synonymous with wickedness).

The spies discover that Laish is under Sidonian control, but it is isolated and located too far from Sidon for the Sidonians to come to their rescue if attacked. Laish will be easy pickings. They are vulnerable— the people of Laish should have invested more in their national security.

"National security comprises the measures taken by a state to protect its citizens and institutions against threats. These threats could be internal, like terrorism and espionage, and external, like military aggression from other states. Strong national security policies directly correlate to a country's economic stability, public safety, and international standing." (*zeropointusa.com, "National Security and Intelligence: What Are Their Significance in Today's World?"*).

The importance of national security is to ensure the protection of the nation's fundamental interests, including the security of its citizens, territory, and institutions, as well as the promotion of its prosperity and values. A nation that does not invest in its national security is a nation asking to be conquered.

WHAT IS NATIONAL SECURITY?

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO SECURE OUR NATIONAL INTERESTS?

HOW SHOULD WE SECURE OUR NATIONAL INTERESTS?

Judges 18:8-10-*"And when they came to their brothers at Zorah and Eshtaol, their brothers said to them, "What do you report?" 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 do nothing? Do not be slow to go, to enter in and possess the land. As soon as you go, you will come to an unsuspecting people. The land is spacious, for God has given it into your hands, a place where there is no lack of anything that is in the earth."*

Returning south to Zorah and Eshtaol, the spies report back their positive findings saying,*"Arise, and let us go up against them, for we have seen the land, and behold, it is very good."* It's *"a place where there is no lack of anything that is in the earth."* They encourage their countrymen to quickly mobilize as the inhabitants of Laish are "*an unsuspecting people*." Their security is abysmal—they won't know what hits them. They are completely unprepared.

"On the morning of December 7, 1941, 353 Japanese planes attacked Pearl Harbor. The attack on our U.S. Naval Base lasted an hour and fifteen minutes. However, in that short amount of time, more than 2,400 Americans died (including civilians), and more than 1,000 were wounded. The attack destroyed 188 U.S. aircraft and sank or damaged 19 Navy ships...

The biggest lesson we can learn from the attack on Pearl Harbor is to prepare for the unexpected. Most commentaries on the Pearl Harbor Attack believe part of the reason why the surprise attack happened and was so destructive is because America did not anticipate it…

Britannica explains, 'The success of the attack on Pearl Harbor was primarily due to the Americans' false estimate of the enemy's capabilities and intentions.' Our government knew Japan was a threat; however, they greatly underestimated this threat. We cannot underestimate the ability of our enemies…

In other words, don't get cocky. Recognize that while we live in the greatest nation in the world, there are plenty of others who will go to great lengths to see our country crumble…

Don't think, "It'll never happen here!"'(*mypatriotsupply.com, "Survival Lessons from Pearl Harbor"*).

DOES OUR COUNTRY SOMETIMES UNDERESTIMATE OUR ENEMIES?

DO WE AS CHRISTIANS SOMETIMES UNDERESTIMATE OUR ENEMIES?

HOW SHOULD YOU PREPARE FOR ASSAULTS ON YOUR FAITH?

Judges 18:11-13-*"So 600 men of the tribe of Dan, armed with weapons of war, set out from Zorah and Eshtaol, and went up and encamped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. On this account that place is called Mahaneh-dan to this day; behold, it is west of Kiriath-jearim. And they passed on from there to the hill country of Ephraim, and came to the house of Micah."*

Kiriath-jearim

The trip begins as the Danites leave their hometowns of Zorah and Eshtaol and head east to camp along the way in northern Judah at a place called Kiriath-jearim ("*City of the Forests"*).

Nothing is reported to have happened here, but the occasion of the tribe of Dan passing through is apparently unusual enough to result in renaming the place to Mahaneh-dan, which means "*Camp of Dan.*"

The biblical city of Kiriath-jearim is best known as the temporary home of the Ark of the Covenant from the time of Samuel until the time of David (about 120 years).

From this city the 600 Danite soldiers, along with their wives, children, livestock, and possessions, begin their journey. It's not just a crusade to conquer a foreign adversary, it's an imperialistic exodus to inhabit another land to start anew.

"Imperialism is a policy where a nation extends its influence over other regions, often through territorial acquisition, political control, or economic dominance. It is driven by various factors, including economic motives like access to resources and markets, military and political ambitions, and even cultural or religious beliefs.

But before the Danites reach their final destination, they must first pass by Micah's home in the hill country of Ephraim. This is when the story gets interesting.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CRUSADE AND AN EXODUS?

WHAT IS IMPERIALISM?

HAS / DOES OUR NATION ENGAGE IN IMPERIALISM? HOW? WHY?

Judges 18:14-15-*"Then the five men who had gone to scout out the country of Laish said to their brothers, "Do you know that in these houses there are an ephod, household gods, a carved image, and a metal image? Now therefore consider what you will do." And they turned aside there and came to the house of the young Levite, at the home of Micah, and asked him about his welfare."*

Approaching Micah's home, the five spies who had previously stayed with Micah, tell their companions about Micah's private priest and sanctuary— *"Do you know that in these houses there are an ephod, household gods, a carved image, and a metal image?"* It's quickly agreed that both the young priest, the vestments, and the idols in the sanctuary would be a valuable acquisition to their proposed settlement. So they engage the Levite in a kind and obliging manner to ingratiate themselves. They are 'wolves in sheep's clothing.'

Many churches today are filled with 'wolves in sheep's clothing'— claiming to teach truth, but instead perverting the Gospel message. Jesus warned,*"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves"* (Matt 7:15). So how does one know if a teacher is teaching truth or not?

To answer this question we need look no further than the agents of the Secret Service who are entrusted with keeping our currency safe. They can detect a counterfeit bill simply by looking at it because they have studied the real one at length.

Likewise, all we have to do to detect a false teacher is compare his teachings against the Bible. The more we study it, the easier it becomes to discern when a false teacher is trying to 'pull the wool over our eyes.'

WHO ARE 'WOLVES IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING 'TODAY?

HAVE YOU EVER HAD THE 'WOOL PULLED OVER YOUR EYES?'

DO KNOW YOUR BIBLE WELL ENOUGH TO DISCERN A FALSE TEACHER?

Judges 18:16-17-*"Now the 600 men of the Danites, armed with their weapons of war, stood by the entrance of the gate. And the five men who had gone to scout out the land went up and entered and took the carved image, the ephod, the household gods, and the metal image, while the priest stood by the entrance of the gate with the 600 men armed with weapons of war."*

With "*600 men of the Danites, armed with their weapons of war"* standing at the gate, the five spies boldly enter the compound and steal "*the carved image, the ephod, the household gods, and the metal image* ." Intimidated, the young Levite priest can do nothing more than anxiously watch.

"'Intimidation' is the action of frightening or threatening someone, usually in order to persuade them to do something that you want them to do" (*Cambridge Dictionary*). Despite what some may claim, Christians <u>*are*</u> being intimidated in America. Even though the United States is the most free nation on the planet and offers the First Amendment protection, religious based intimidation and bullying still occurs.

"Religious-based bullying can happen online or in person, occur at school or at work, come from peers or strangers, and take different forms, including teasing, jokes, rumors, insensitive remarks, slurs, name-calling, or other forms of verbal harassment related to religious practices… (It can include) being ignored or excluded from social events, gatherings, or work because of your religion, or even being physically harmed or assaulted " (Jessica Hicks, *jedfoundation.org, "Religious Bullying: How to Get Help and Cope*").

ARE CHRISTIANS BEING HARASSED AND BULLIED TODAY? WHY? HOW?

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN HARASSED FOR YOUR FAITH? WHY? HOW?

ARE INTIMIDATED? WHY? WHY NOT?

Judges 18:18-20-*"And when these went into Micah's house and took the carved image, the ephod, the household gods, and the metal image, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?" And they said to him, "Keep quiet; put your hand on your mouth and come with us and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and clan in Israel?"*

And the priest's heart was glad. He took the ephod and the household gods and the carved image and went along with the people."

Putting up token resistance, the young Levite asks the Danites, "*What are you doing?*" And they retort, "*Keep quiet; put your hand on your mouth and come with us and be to us a father and a priest."* They then appeal to his ego and ask, "*Is it better for you to be priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and clan in Israel?"*

With his hat size now expanded from 'small' to 'extra-large,' the young priest's heart is "*glad.*" He willingly helps in the theft and leaves "*with the people.*" He's just gotten a better deal— what little integrity he may have once had vanishes down the drain.

"This Levite is a piece of merchandise, valued for his religious profession and bought and sold by the major actors of the chapter. He's pictured as a negative character letting himself be sold to the highest bidder with the most power" (Trent C. Butler, *"World Biblical Commentary- Judges"*).

"In the *Old Testament,* the Hebrew word translated "integrity" means 'the condition of being without blemish, completeness, perfection, sincerity, soundness, uprightness, wholeness.' Integrity in the *New Testament* means 'honesty and adherence to a pattern of good works.'…

"Integrity" in our world today implies moral incorruptibility. Christians should be those who cannot be bribed or compromised because we serve God rather than men (Col 3:17, 23; Acts 5:29). We are to be people who keep our word (Matt 5:37; James 5:12). We are to love those around us in both word and deed (1 John

3:17–18; James 2:17–18; Eph 4:29). We are called upon to believe in God and therefore to follow Him in all our ways (John 6:19; 15:1–17). Our lives should line up with our belief in God and evince a trust that His ways are best (Prov 3:5–6).

Living with integrity in a world where the corrupt seem favored, not to mention our battle with our own sin nature, is challenging. First Peter 3:13–18 gives this encouragement:

> *"Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.' But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.*
>
> *But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit."*

To live with integrity is to follow the example of Christ. We can only live with true integrity by His power, which He graciously and freely gives to all who are His" (John 16:33; Phil 1:6; Eph 1:13–14). (Gotquestions.org, "What does the Bible say about integrity?").

WHAT IS INTEGRITY?

HOW DOES EGO GET IN THE WAY OF INTEGRITY?

HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN YOUR INTEGRITY?

Judges 18:21-24-*"So they turned and departed, putting the little ones and the livestock and the goods in front of them. When they had gone a distance from the home of Micah, the men who were in the houses near Micah's house were called out, and they overtook the people of Dan.*

And they shouted to the people of Dan, who turned around and said to Micah, "What is the matter with you, that you come with such a company?" And he said, "You take my gods that I made and the priest, and go away, and what have I left? How then do you ask me, 'What is the matter with you?'"

The Danites depart placing their "*little ones and the livestock and the goods in front of them"* to protect them as they anticipate that Micah will come to get his stolen goods. The Danites must travel slowly with their families and this allows Micah to catch up to them.

Micah screams at the Danites to return his stolen merchandise, but they calmly respond, *"What is the matter with you, that you come with such a company?"* The Danites are 600 armed soldiers strong; Micah has only a ragtag group of neighbors with him.

Micah bemoans with false bravado,*"You take my gods that I made and the priest, and go away, and what have I left? How then do you ask me, 'What is the matter with you?'"*

'False bravado' refers to a pretense of courage or confidence, often used to appear brave or intimidating when the person is actually feeling fear or insecurity. It's the opposite of true confidence. As C.S. Lewis says, to give a good first impression you must not try to make a good first impression, and then it will happen by itself. True confidence, perhaps ironically, means you don't really care about having it.

HAVE YOU EVER EXHIBITED FALSE BRAVADO? WHY? HOW?

WHAT IS TRUE CONFIDENCE?

ARE YOU CONFIDENT? WHY? HOW?

Judges 18:25-26-*"And the people of Dan said to him, "Do not let your voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows fall upon you, and you lose your life with the lives of your household." Then the people of Dan went their way. And when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his home."*

Micah discovers that he's 'writing a check he can't cash.' The Danites respond to Micah's false bravado, "*Do not let your voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows fall upon you, and you lose your life with the lives of your household."* In other words, think hard, Bozo—is it really worth it?

Micah's common sense finally kicks in— he realizes he and his neighbors are no match against a hardened army. His false 'gods' really don't matter that much to him after all. He turns and goes home.

WHAT REALLY MATTERS TO YOU?

WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO LOSE YOUR LIFE FOR?

WHAT ARE NOT WILLING TO LOSE YOUR LIFE FOR?

Judges 18:27-28-*"But the people of Dan took what Micah had made, and the priest who belonged to him, and they came to Laish, to a people quiet and unsuspecting, and struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. And there was no deliverer because it was far from Sidon, and they had no dealings with anyone. It was in the valley that belongs to Beth-rehob.*

Then they rebuilt the city and lived in it."

Leaving Micah in their dust, The Danites travel north to Laish, "*a people quiet and unsuspecting."* With the Sidonians too far away to protect them and without alliances with any other nations around them, the people of Laish are sitting ducks. The Danites 'devote them to destruction' ("*Kherem*") and strike down every man, woman, and child and burn the city to the ground.

The Hebrew word (חֵרֶם, *kherem*) refers to placing persons or things under God's judgment, to the extent of their complete destruction. The original Israelite settlers in the Promised Land were instructed to devote all the pagan tribes found within the Promised land to this destruction ("*Kherem*"). But as we've seen throughout the book, this does not occur, resulting in the over three-hundred years of the book of Judges.

The Danites carry out the destruction of the pagan city of Laish, but it's not due to *Yahweh's* instructions. They had not even trusted God enough to conquer the original land He'd given them. Instead, they've pulled up stakes in search of easier pickings. They probably don't even realize they're carrying out God's original command regarding pagan nations within the Promised Land.

Regardless, they rebuild the city and live in it. Many years later, they will be conquered and taken into exile. The tribe of Dan will become one of the "Ten Lost Tribes of Israel."

WHAT WAS KHEREM?

WHY DID GOD ORDER THE TOTAL DESTRUCTION OF ALL PAGAN TRIBES WITHIN THE PROMISED LAND?

WHY DID THEY NOT OBEY?

WHY DO YOU SOMETIMES NOT OBEY?

Judge 18:29-31-"*And they named the city Dan, after the name of Dan their ancestor, who was born to Israel; but the name of the city was Laish at the first. And the people of Dan set up the carved image for themselves, and Jonathan the son of Gershom, son of Moses, and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land. So they set up Micah's carved image that he made, as long as the house of God was at Shiloh."*

The chapter ends with a plethora of tragic information. After re-naming the city 'Dan', *the people of Dan set up the carved image for themselves"* in violation of God's commandments.

But the tale gets sadder as we're finally told the name of the young Levitical priest who accompanies them from Micah's home. His name is Jonathan, a direct relative of Moses (whether grandson, great-grandson, or great-great-grandson is unclear as the term '*son of'* can mean any of these). How far the apple has fallen!

Jonathan's descendants act as 'priests' in Dan "*until the day of the captivity of the land"* by invaders many years later. With "*Micah's carved image*" on their altar, the city of Dan becomes a pagan cultic center of worship "*as long as the house of God is at Shiloh"*— God's true designated place of worship during this time. Shiloh will house the Ark of the Covenant for many years prior to the construction of the temple.

"This series of episodes illustrates the extent to which the religious perspectives and institutions of Israel have become Canaanized. Now the problem has become overt. Individuals design and construct their own shrines in defiance of divine prohibitions. The professional priests have been thoroughly corrupted, selling their service to the highest bidder, and the entire tribes have become sponsors of paganism. The people do not need a king to lead them down this path. They are quite capable of sinning on their own…

Here sin succeeds! Ironically, and perhaps tragically, the agenda people set for themselves are sometimes achieved— which sends a solemn warning to the church today. Success is not necessarily a sign of righteousness or an indication that we must be doing something right. It may in fact be the opposite. God does not stifle every corrupt thought and scheme of the human heart" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

WHY DOES SIN SOMETIMES SUCCEED ?

WHY IS SUCCESS NOT NECESSARILY A SIGN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS?

WHAT LESSONS HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM THE LAST TWO CHAPTERS?

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Judges 19:1-*"In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite was sojourning in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, who took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah."*

This verse marks the beginning of the last story of the book of Judges outlined in three chapters. "The story contains most of the main questions raised throughout the book: what happens when there is no leader, what is the role of Judah verses Benjamin, what is the relationship between Israelites and non-Israelites, and more frightening, the relationship between the different Israelite tribes" (Tammi Schneider, "*Berit Olam: Judges"*).

"A certain Levite" (name unknown, but not the same Levite as in the previous chapters) is described as traveling through the "*remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim."* He had previously taken "*to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.*" "The term '*concubine*' does not imply sexual misconduct outside marriage, but often distinguishes 'secondary wives' from the 'primary wife' who is the mother of the household" (V.H Matthews and D.C. Benjamin, *"Social World Of Ancient Israel"*).

"Just because polygamous marriages are found among God's people in the *Old Testament*, this doesn't necessarily mean that it was a practice God approved of or endorsed. In fact, there are reasons to think the opposite.

Whenever we approach narrative in the Bible, we have to consider what is '*prescriptive*' (telling us how to live) and what is '*descriptive*' (simply reporting what happened). There is nothing to suggest that the accounts of polygamy are '*prescriptive*,' supporting polygamy. They are '*descriptive*' accounts and are actually designed to warn readers off polygamy…

It is noticeable that, almost without exception, the polygamous marriages in Scripture face problems… The narratives thus offer a subtle critique of the practice: it isn't in keeping with God's plan and therefore it inevitably causes problems" (Andrew Bunt, *livingout.org*, "*What About Old Testament Polygamy?"*).

WHAT ARE DESCRIPTIVE PASSAGES IN THE BIBLE? GIVE EXAMPLES.

WHAT ARE PRESCRIPTIVE PASSAGES IN THE BIBLE? GIVE EXAMPLES.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE PRESCRIBE REGARDING MARRIAGE? WHY?

Judges 19:2-3-"*And his concubine was unfaithful to him, and she went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there some four months. Then her husband arose and went after her, to speak kindly to her and bring her back. He had with him his servant and a couple of donkeys. And she brought him into her father's house. And when the girl's father saw him, he came with joy to meet him."*

The phrase *"his concubine was unfaithful to him*" probably does not mean that she was sexually unfaithful because such an act would be cause for stoning. It's unlikely that the Levite would be trying to get her back if this is the case— nothing else in the narrative points to him passing such a harsh judgement upon her.

Instead, many scholars interpret this phrase more as that she simple 'deserted' him and has run home to daddy for support and comfort. Why she left him is not mentioned. But, that the father comes "*with joy*" to meet him implies that both he and his daughter may be pleased that her husband is making some effort at reconciliation.

"When researchers ask newlyweds to talk about issues in their marriages, they tend to list the same concerns over and over again:

1) Debt and Money— This is a really big one, with some studies finding it to be the #1 newlywed problem. Couples fight about debt they brought into the marriage and how to handle it, as well as how to spend their money and budget…

2) Balancing work and family— With or without kids in the picture, new couples seem to have a hard time figuring out how to find enough time for each other while also handling the demands of their jobs…

3) Sex and sex frequency— Although we often like to think of the "honeymoon" days as a time of sexual bliss, reality may be a different story. Many new couples discover that they don't quite have the same preferences…

4) Time and how to spend it— Do you ever argue with your partner about what to do on the weekends? Or is anyone resentful about someone's time at the gym, out with friends, or pursuing a hobby? You're not alone. This issue comes up for a lot of couples…

5) Dividing household tasks— "Why do I always have to do the dishes?" Sound familiar? Unexpressed expectations, stereotypes, or different personal preferences all can combine to make this one a minefield…

6) In-laws and family of origin— This one probably doesn't come as a surprise. Even if you've been with your spouse a long time, tying the knot can make in-law issues feel more acute and intense. (Are they asking you about babies yet?)…

7) Communication / difficult resolving fights— We all like to think we know how to communicate with our partners, but in real life, this is often a challenging task. Maybe one person lets too many things go unsaid, or someone's style feels too confrontational. Couples may not know how to use conflict constructively" (*"Smart Couples- Strengthening Marriages and relationship Training, "The Top 7 Problem Areas for Newlyweds*").

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE FOR YOUR HONEYMOON PERIOD TO END AND YOUR REAL MARRIAGE TO BEGIN?

WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES THEN?

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES TODAY?

Judges 19:4-9-*"And his father-in-law, the girl's father, made him stay, and he remained with him three days. So they ate and drank and spent the night there. And on the fourth day they arose early in the morning, and he prepared to go, but the girl's father said to his son-in-law, 'Strengthen your heart with a morsel of bread, and after that you may go.' So the two of them sat and ate and drank together. And the girl's father said to the man, "Be pleased to spend the night, and let your heart be merry."And when the man rose up to go, his father-in-law pressed him, till he spent the night there again.*

And on the fifth day he arose early in the morning to depart. And the girl's father said, 'Strengthen your heart and wait until the day declines.' So they ate, both of them. And when the man and his concubine and his servant rose up to depart, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said to him, 'Behold, now the day has waned toward evening. Please, spend the night. Behold, the day draws to its close. Lodge here and let your heart be merry, and tomorrow you shall arise early in the morning for your journey, and go home.'"

For five days the father tries to facilitate a reconciliation with his son-in-law and his daughter, though he never allows the two to have much time alone as he apparently dominates the Levite's days into the evenings. Regardless, either because of the father's attempt at helping to resolve their issues (or perhaps despite his attempts), the couple finally readies themselves to leave together.

"As the Scriptures say, '*A man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh*' (Eph 5:31). This is a mandate from God and a clear explanation of what boundaries are for our married children. Our children are to leave their parents and create a family of their own, without our input or influence over their decisions…

One of the hardest things for a young married couple to do is manage their familial differences. It's like learning a foreign language. We can help our children by allowing them to decide how they want to do life with their mate. We don't need to make those decisions for them, that's not our responsibility. We don't need to judge them for what they've decided. We choose to honor them instead…

1) Support your child in loving their spouse well— Communicate to your child that their allegiance is now to their spouse. Don't come in between your child and their spouse by being critical or condemning. Encourage your child to love their spouse well and learn how to have a strong marriage. Don't ever criticize or undermine your child's mate. That's a recipe for disaster…

2) Encourage your kids to have boundaries— You want to call the shots for your grown kids, but those days are over. You are no longer number one in their life. Their spouse is. What are you doing to encourage your children to have boundaries with you? Are you taking a hands off approach and giving them space to decide what works best for them without your influence?..

3) Be respectful when they bring their boundaries to you— There's nothing more frightening for a young couple than to have boundaries with their parents. It feels scary and unsettling because they don't want to disappoint. If and when your grown child asks something of you, be respectful. Honor their wishes. Be grace-filled and commend them for their courage instead of being offended by their boundary…

4) Lay down your expectations of how your children run their family— Conflict abounds when you have expectations on one's child runs her/his own family. Everything from holidays, parenting, and finances can cause conflict…

Your job is to let it all go and allow this young family to forge their own path. Yes, they'll make mistakes, but they need to learn these lessons on their own, without your interference…

One of the greatest ways we can honor our adult children is to respect the boundaries they've built in their family. We play a major role in the success of their marriage by allowing them to leave us and cling to their mate. Honor them through open communication about their boundaries" (Pamela Henkelman, *pamelahenkelman.com, Why It's Helpful to Respect Your Married Kids' Boundaries"*).

WHAT ARE THE BIBLICAL BOUNDARIES ESTABLISHED BETWEEN A CHILD'S MARRIAGE AND THEIR PARENTS?

WHAT CONFLICTS ARISE WHEN THOSE BOUNDARIES ARE VIOLATED?

DO YOU RESPECT THOSE BOUNDARIES WITH YOUR MARRIED CHILDREN? HOW?

Judges 19:10-15-*"But the man would not spend the night. He rose up and departed and arrived opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). He had with him a couple of saddled donkeys, and his concubine was with him.*

When they were near Jebus, the day was nearly over, and the servant said to his master, "Come now, let us turn aside to this city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it." And his master said to him, "We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel, but we will pass on to Gibeah."

And he said to his young man, "Come and let us draw near to one of these places and spend the night at Gibeah or at Ramah.

So they passed on and went their way. And the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin, and they turned aside there, to go in and spend the night at Gibeah. And he went in and sat down in the open square of the city, for no one took them into his house to spend the night."

Having overstayed his welcome at his father-in-law's home, the Levite takes his concubine, servant, and saddled donkeys and they begin their journey home. As they leave Bethlehem late in the day and nightfall soon approaches, his servant suggests that they bed down overnight in "*Jebus (that is, Jerusalem).*"

At the time of this narrative, Jerusalem is under territory originally allotted to the tribe of Benjamin, but it is currently controlled by pagan Jebusites because Joshua had not defeated them (Joshua 15). It will not be until many years later that David will finally conquer the city. Only after Solomon's death and the subsequent division of the kingdom of Israel into the Northern and Southern tribes did Jerusalem become the capitol of the kingdom of Judah. (Of interest, Gibeah will be the city of Saul, whereas Jerusalem will be the city of David).

Regardless, the Levite refuses to stay in Jebus for fear of the pagans who occupied it. He instead forges ahead to the city of *Gibeah,* a city under Benjamanite control, three miles north of Jerusalem and four miles north of Bethlehem. But, as will soon be seen, he has more to fear from the Benjaminites than the pagans who occupied Jebus.

In today's world, we don't usually make choices about overnight travel arrangements based on whether a city is Christian or non-Christian. "While some Christians may choose to prioritize dealing with businesses that align with their faith, the Bible doesn't explicitly mandate that Christians only patronize Christian businesses. The decision of which businesses to support is a matter of personal conviction and discernment. Some Christians may choose to avoid businesses with practices they deem unbiblical, while others may focus on supporting businesses that adhere to Christian values and principles"(*Google AI Overview*).

Should Christians Boycott Companies That Support Anti-Christian Policies?

(Got questions.org)

"Some Christian organizations have declared boycotts of companies with anti-Christian policies. Starbucks, Amazon, Nike, and other corporations have been the target of such boycotts. Those calling for the boycotts want to get the attention of business executives and decision-makers to communicate the fact that Christians will not support an ungodly agenda. Many who are involved in boycotts are also trying to be good stewards of their money: "Why should I feed a company and help it stay in business," they reason, "knowing that it is going to use some of my money to support an anti-Christian agenda?"

The Bible says nothing regarding boycotts. Of course, Scripture contains no direct command to boycott or not to boycott a business. However, at least two passages are relevant to the discussion. First, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:9–10 that, although we are "not to associate with sexually immoral people," we are still part of the world and therefore cannot disassociate ourselves from all immoral people. To totally avoid all corruption, "you would need to go out of the world."

Paul's focus in 1 Corinthians 5 is the church. Christians should not partner (or even eat) with a person who claims to be a Christian yet lives contrary to Christ's word. The only way to avoid contact with immoral people in this world is to leave the world. To apply this principle to the boycott issue, the only way to avoid businesses that support ungodly practices is to leave this world completely.

A second passage is Romans 14:5–12, which deals with doubtful issues, or "gray areas." One principle here is that "each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (verse 5). Whatever one does, he or she should do it "in honor of the Lord" (verse 6) and give thanks to God. "For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord" (verse 8). Believers are to follow their conscience in the gray areas, because "each of us will give an account of himself to God" (verse 12). If God's Word has not clearly spoken on an issue, each believer has the freedom to seek God's will and be fully convinced in his own mind.

This "matter of conscience" principle applies to many issues, including boycotting. Some Christians feel strongly about not supporting a business due to particular moral issues, and they are free to take their business elsewhere. Other Christians may be just as concerned about the moral issues yet not share the same conviction about boycotting. They are free to not join the boycott.

If one does join a boycott, there are other questions that should be answered: for example, how far should the boycott extend? What about subsidiaries of the parent company? Should vendors who sell to the boycotted company also be boycotted? How will the effectiveness of the boycott be gauged, or is that even a consideration? And what about Christians who are employed by the boycotted company?

Some Christians work politically, through the election process, to affect the important social and moral issues. Some work financially, through boycotts. Others work both ways. The important thing is to pray about the issues of the day and take a biblical, principled stand—and then do what one can."

SHOULD CHRISTIANS BOYCOTT COMPANIES THAT SUPPORT ANTI-CHRISTIAN POLICIES?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF THE WORLD?

HOW DO YOU CHOSE BUSINESSES?

Judges 19:16-21-*"And behold, an old man was coming from his work in the field at evening. The man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was sojourning in Gibeah. The men of the place were Benjaminites. 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 parts of the hill country of Ephraim, from which I come. I went to Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to the house of the Lord, but no one has taken me into his house.

We have straw and feed for our donkeys, with bread and wine for me and your female servant and the young man with your servants. There is no lack of anything."

And the old man said, "Peace be to you; I will care for all your wants. Only, do not spend the night in the square." So he brought him into his house and gave the donkeys feed. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank."

As the Levite enters the gate of Gibeah, he meets an "*old man from the hill country of Ephraim*"— the same area to which the Levite is returning. The Levite tells the "*old man*" that they are making their way from Bethlehem back home to "*the house of the Lord*" (the tabernacle in Shiloh where the *Ark of the Covenant* is located near Mount Ephraim).

Unfortunately, no one from the city has yet offered them housing. The Levite explains that they would not be a burden as they had ample supplies and just needed a roof over their heads for the night— otherwise they would have to camp in the town square. Town squares offer a temporary shelter from the weather, as well as a place to be seen and potentially receive help.

The "*old man*" responds, *"Peace be to you; I will care for all your wants. Only, do not spend the night in the square"* because he knows the wickedness of the men of Gibeah. The Levite and his concubine would not be safe in the square overnight.

Even today, being on the streets at night can be a dangerous endeavor. Police departments offer this advise about walking city streets safely:

- If you think you are being followed, change directions or cross the street. If you are still being followed look for a store or a building to enter for safe haven and call 9-1-1.

- Always be alert to your surroundings and aware of the people around you, especially if you are alone or it's dark. Avoid wearing both earbuds.

- At night, stay in well-lit areas as much as possible.

- Walk confidently at a steady pace on the side of the street facing traffic.

- Walk in groups when you can. Predators like to prey upon people that are alone

- If you cannot walk in a group, tailgate a group or another person to give the appearance you are not alone.

- Trust your instincts and change your route if you sense that you are in danger.

- Always tell someone where you are going. Write down or leave word of where you are going.

- Carry a cell phone, whistle, or personal alarm to summon emergency assistance.

- Don't acknowledge or respond to verbal harassment.

- Avoid displaying by wearing jewelry (chains, medallions, rings, expensive watches, etc.)

- Always carry some form of personal identification (including medical ID bracelets, if applicable) that includes a point of contact in case of emergency

- Avoid eye contact persons exhibiting erratic behavior.

- The key to personal safety is to remove "<u>opportunity</u>". If there is no "<u>opportunity</u>" the crime cannot occur !

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SAFETY AND SECURITY?

IS FOLLOWING CHRIST ALWAYS SAFE?

IS FOLLOWING CHRIST ALWAYS SECURE?

Judges 19:22-*"As they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, worthless fellows, surrounded the house, beating on the door. And they said to the old man, the master of the house, "Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may know him."*

The "*old man*" knows the evil inhabitants of Gibeah only too well. Later in the night, "*the men of the city, worthless fellows,"* surround his house and demand that he send out the Levite that they might "*know him*"— a polite way of saying "gang rape him."

Approximately 1,500 years before a similar situation had confronted Lott and two angels:

> *"But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house. And they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them."* (Gen 19:4)

Rape is defined as "unlawful sexual activity and/or sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against a person's will or with a person who is beneath a certain age or incapable of valid consent because of mental illness, mental deficiency, intoxication, unconsciousness, or deception"(*Merriam Webster*).

Sexual assault humiliates, dominates, degrades, overpowers, and violates a person causing significant physical, emotional, and psychological harm. It is an act of violence and injustice that is considered to be a violation of God's creation and the sanctity of human life.

WHAT SHORT TERM CONSEQUENCES DO RAPE VICTIMS FACE?

WHAT LONG TERM CONSEQUENCES DO RAPE VICTIMS FACE?

WHAT SHOULD THE PENALTY BE FOR RAPE?

Judges 19:23-25-*"And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing. Behold, here are my virgin daughter and his concubine. Let me bring them out now. Violate them and do with them what seems good to you, but against this man do not do this outrageous thing."*

But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and made her go out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go."

These three verses concisely represent the theme of depravity woven throughout of the book of Judges— "the people do what is 'right' in their 'own' eyes." The men of Gibeah desire to forcefully sodomize the Levite, the 'old man' offers his "*virgin daughter"* to be gang raped, and the Levite actually seizes his concubine and throws her out the door to be defiled and "*abused all night*" (use your most debased imagination to define "*abused"*).

Every single man in this account is guilty before God— each puts his own desires above God's moral Law. Whether driven by lust, some misguided sense of duty to a stranger, or simple cowardliness, these men are without excuse. The women are but commodities to be used and abused.

The apostle Paul describes these despicable men the best:

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them." (Rom 1:18-32)

WHAT IS SEXUAL SIN?

WHAT IS SEXUAL SIN OF OMISSION? GIVE EXAMPLES.

WHAT IS SEXUAL SIN OF COMMISSION? GIVE EXAMPLES.

Judges 19:26-27-*"And as morning appeared, the woman came and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was, until it was light. And her master rose up in the morning, and when he opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, behold, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold."*

Just when you thought things couldn't get worse, we discover that the Levite's concubine somehow makes her way back and falls down "*at the door of the man's house'* while her "*master*" lies snug as a bug in his comfortable bed— apparently without a care in the world. After a good night's sleep, her 'husband' eventually arises in the morning, opens the front door, and "*behold*," finds "*his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold."* His lack of empathy is mind-numbing.

'Empathy' is defined as the ability to share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in that person's situation (*Cambridge Dictionary*). Unfortunately, 1 to 4% of the general population have a psychological disorder that severely limits their capacity for 'empathy.'

"While there isn't one single perfect term, "antisocial personality disorder" or "psychopathy" are often used to describe individuals who demonstrate a significant lack of empathy, along with other traits like manipulation and disregard for others' feelings. Other terms like "narcissistic personality disorder" and "borderline personality disorder" can also be associated with difficulties with empathy"(*AI Google Overview*).

"One doesn't have to operate with great malice to do great harm. The absence of empathy and understanding are sufficient" (Charles M Blow, *psychopathsandlove.com, "Objectification-and-Dehumanization-in-Abusive-Relationships*").

WHAT IS ANTISOCIAL PERSONALITY DISORDER?

DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE WITH AN ANTISOCIAL PERSONALITY DISORDER?

HOW CAN LACK OF EMPATHY CAUSE HARM?

Judges 19:28-30-*"He said to her, "Get up, let us be going." But there was no answer. Then he put her on the donkey, and the man rose up and went away to his home.*

And when he entered his house, he took a knife, and taking hold of his concubine he divided her, limb by limb, into twelve pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel.

And all who saw it said, "Such a thing has never happened or been seen from the day that the people of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt until this day; consider it, take counsel, and speak."

Instead of rushing to his concubine's aid, her husband sternly looks down at her and roughly commands, "*Get up, let us be going.*" But he hears no reply as it's awfully hard for a dead woman to speak. Realizing the futility, he grabs her and throws her body over a donkey for the trip home.

Once back in the hill country of Ephraim, the Levite dismembers his dead concubine "*limb by limb*" and sends parts of her body to each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Omitting his own culpability in her death, his intent is to stir the tribes to anger against the men of Gibeah. "Sending the dissected pieces of the corpse to the tribes is a symbolic act, by which the crime committed upon the murdered woman is placed before the eyes of the whole nation, to summon it to punish the crime" (*Keil and Delitzsch Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament- Judges 19:29).*

This Levite isn't noble— his callous actions on the night of her death prove he considers his concubine merely 'property' unfairly taken from him. But, regardless of his motives, he gets the sympathy of all the tribes of Israel except one— the tribe of Benjamin within whose borders the town of Gibeah lies. As we'll soon see, the Levite doesn't yet realize it, but he's lit a fuse that cannot be put out— his actions are the powder keg that starts a civil war. The Genie cannot be put back in the bottle.

HAVE YOU EVER ACTED CALLOUSLY? HOW? WHY?

HAVE YOUR ACTIONS EVER LEAD TO UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES? HOW? WHY?

WHAT DOES THE SAYING "YOU CAN'T PUT THE GENIE BACK IN THE BOTTLE" MEAN?

CHAPTER TWENTY

Judges 20:1-3-*"Then all the people of Israel came out, from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, and the congregation assembled as one man to the Lord at Mizpah. And the chiefs of all the people, of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, 400,000 men on foot that drew the sword.*

(Now the people of Benjamin heard that the people of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.) And the people of Israel said, "Tell us, how did this evil happen?"

For the first time in the book of Judges the twelve tribes assemble as one. Stirred to anger over the atrocities at Gibeah, they gather from the corners of the Promised Land— Dan in the north, Beersheba in the south, and Gilead in the east. "*The chiefs of all the people, of all the tribes of Israel,"* present themselves in the "*assembly of God*" in Mezpah.

Located in the territory of Benjamin, Mezpah is strategically positioned just northwest of Jerusalem (Jebus) and easily accessible for all the tribes of Israel. The tribal chiefs bring with them 400,000 heavily armed men to impress upon all that this was serious business that needed to be dealt with definitively.

"*Now the people of Benjamin heard that the people of Israel had gone up to Mizpah"*— 400,000 soldiers from tribes throughout Israel are hard to miss! The tribunal begins with a question asked before the leaders of Benjamin, "*Tell us, how did this evil happen?"*

The tragic facts of the offense are not up for debate— what is in question is "why." How could the tribe of Benjamin have allowed this evil to be let loose on a fellow Israelite?

What are they going to do about the men of Gibeah who obviously deserve punishment. Why hasn't the entire tribe of Benjamin already condemned them?

Throughout history tribunals have been held to settle disputes when ordinary judicial means prove inadequate. "Many are international tribunals established to prosecute individuals accused of serious

international crimes, such as genocide, war crimes, and terrorism. These tribunals allow countries to collaborate on justice efforts, particularly when domestic legal systems may be insufficient or biased.

Historically, such tribunals emerged prominently after World War II, most notably through the Nuremberg Trials ('The International Military Tribunal' established in London after the end of the war), which set precedents for prosecuting war crimes and established that government officials could be held accountable under international law." *(ebsco.com, "International Tribunals")*.

WHAT ARE TRIBUNALS?

HOW DO TRIBUNALS DIFFER FROM ORDINARY COURTS?

WHY DID COUNTRIES UNITE FOR THE NUREMBERG TRIBUNAL?

WHY DID ISRAEL UNITE FOR THIS TRIBUNAL?

Judges 20-4-5-*"And the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, "I came to Gibeah that belongs to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to spend the night And the leaders of Gibeah rose against me and surrounded the house against me by night. They meant to kill me, and they violated my concubine, and she is dead."*

The Levite quickly answers the tribunal to put his own self-serving spin on the situation. Despite his abhorrent treatment of his concubine, "the Levite's testimony gives the impression that he narrowly escaped with is life and was unable to save his wife" (Carolyn Pressler, *"Joshua, Judges, and Ruth"*). He told the truth, but not the whole truth.

"'Do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?' That's the question all witnesses in a trial have to answer before they give testimony. In these past few years, aren't there people you'd love to see on the witness stand have to swear to that — and face perjury charges if they strayed from it? I have a few in mind and I bet you do too…

Why is the oath written that way? Because adding or subtracting from the whole truth is lying as much as telling a full-fledged lie. Withholding information or mixing truth and falsehood is misrepresenting the true situation and can complicate or prevent solutions" (Bob King, *medium.com, "Tell The Whole Truth"*).

DO YOU ALWAYS TELL THE TRUTH? WHY? WHY NOT?

DO YOU ALWAYS TELL THE WHOLE TRUTH? WHY? WHY NOT?

DO YOU ALWAYS TELL NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH? WHY? WHY NOT?

Judges 20:6-7-*"So I took hold of my concubine and cut her in pieces and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel, for they have committed abomination and outrage in Israel. Behold, you people of Israel, all of you, give your advice and counsel here."*

This Levite is nothing more than a "pot calling the kettle black" — an idiom describing a situation where someone criticizes another for a fault or flaw that they themselves possess. It's a form of hypocrisy, where the critic is also guilty of the same thing they're pointing out. The Levite conveniently leaves out his own abhorrent treatment of his concubine— throwing her to sexual predators and abandoning her to die alone on his doorstep. He's a hypocrite ready to start a civil war for his own revenge just to save face with his countrymen.

"The irony is that the Levite man demanded that the Israelites go to war on account of the woman whom he had done nothing to help and whose situation he had caused in the first place" (Tammi J. Schneider, *"Berit Olam: Judges"*).

Hypocrisy is rampant in our society. In recent years the term 'law-fare' has become popular to describe the 'weaponization of the law' in politics 'Law-fare' is the strategic use of legal proceedings to delegitimize, harass, bankrupt, disqualify, and sometimes imprison politicians of other parties— often hypocritically accusing them of the same behaviors they themselves engage in.

"Hypocrisy is defined as the practice of claiming to have moral standards or views to which one's own behavior does not meet. It is a pretense of morality that cloaks our inability to meet some predetermined moral code….

We accuse one person of doing exactly what we are doing, but believe that it is somehow different' when that person does it. It is typically caused by an inflated sense of ego and self-righteousness, coupled with an inability to be humble" (s*traighttalkcounseling.org, "The Psychology of Hypocrisy – Why We Do it & How to Stop"*).

"YOU'RE A HYPOCRITE TOO"

So you just don't like church because it's filled with hypocrites. Well, you're right, it is! The term "hypocrite" comes from the Greek word, 'hypokrites,' which means 'actor,' 'stage player,' or literally 'an interpreter from underneath'— a reference to masks worn by actors to designate the role they were playing.

Every church is filled with actors. Before they walk through the door, they put on their masks and fancy costumes to set the stage for their audience. Once inside, they speak well rehearsed lines with conviction to impress all within earshot. And when they leave, they look for a round of applause for their great performance. But guess what, you're a hypocrite too!

We've all, at one time or another, put on a mask to hide our true self in church— we role play. Sometimes we tell others we're fine when we're not and pretend the Christian life is always just grand. Other times we try to hide a sin that's nagging at us because we're embarrassed and are supposed to be above all that nonsense. We may even occasionally act one way at church and another in the secular world— we definitely don't want anyone to pull back the curtain on that bad actor.

But isn't church the perfect place for hypocrites? Could there be a better place to wipe off the makeup, hang up the costume, and place the script back on the shelf than in a room filled with like-minded performers. Actors can only stay in character for so long before they have to get off the stage and *"get real"* again.

If we want others to take off their masks, we need to take ours off first. It's hypocritical to expect others to do what we won't do ourselves. Every single person sitting around you in church is a sinner, just like you and me. That may not be the most uplifting thought, but it does put everyone on equal footing— the only way to go is up.

As Christians, we can hide behind a mask only so long before it catches up to us— God will eventually expose us. Quit being a hypocrite, show up on Sunday, and demonstrate to others how to safely pull their masks off.

Here's some food for thought: Is a Christian who doesn't see a need to honor God at least one day a week just play-acting his or her faith? How hypocritical is that? (Steve Glaser, *"It's Time To 'Get Real' In Church— Escape The Digital Loneliness Epidemic"*).

ARE YOU A HYPOCRITE? WHY? HOW?

ARE YOU A HYPOCRITE IN CHURCH? WHY? HOW?

WHY IS CHURCH THE PERFECT PLACE FOR HYPOCRITES?

Judges 20:8-11-*"And all the people arose as one man, saying, "None of us will go to his tent, and none of us will return to his house. But now this is what we will do to Gibeah: we will go up against it by lot, and we will take ten men of a hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and a hundred of a thousand, and a thousand of ten thousand, to bring provisions for the people, that when they come they may repay Gibeah of Benjamin for all the outrage that they have committed in Israel."*

So all the men of Israel gathered against the city, united as one man."

In response to the atrocities at Gibeah, "*all the people arose as one man*"— united at long last. "It is truly remarkable that this nameless Levite from an obscure place in Ephraim is able to to accomplish what none of the divinely called and empowered deliverers have been able to do" (Daniel Brock; *"The New American Commentary- Ann Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture— Judges, Ruth"*).

They declare that no man will return to "*his tent*" (temporary dwelling) or *"his house"* (permanent dwelling) until justice is satisfied. To be determined by lot, ten percent of them will supply food and provisions while the other ninety percent will prepare for battle. If the tribe of Benjamin can not deal with the situation, they will be deemed to be as guilty as the men of Gibeah— a sin of omission. Gibeah of Benjamin will be repaid "*for all the outrage that they have committed in Israel."*

*"*The quote 'The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing' is attributed to Edmund Burke, an Irish philosopher and politician. This quote highlights the idea that when those who are moral and good choose to remain passive or inactive in the face of wrongdoing, evil is able to flourish and prevail. It's a reminder that inaction can have consequences, and that taking a stand against injustice is crucial for maintaining a just and ethical society" (*Google AI Overview*).

Turning a blind eye to evil is a sin of omission. James 4:17 says, *"So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."*

WHAT ARE SINS OF OMISSION?

WHY/HOW DO SOME 'GOOD MEN' DO NOTHING TO PREVENT THE TRIUMPH OF EVIL?

ARE YOU A 'GOOD MAN'?

WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO PREVENT THE TRIUMPH OF EVIL?

Judges 20:12-13-*"And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What evil is this that has taken place among you? Now therefore give up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and purge evil from Israel." But the Benjaminites would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the people of Israel."*

The tribes of Israel send "*men through all the tribe of Benjamin"* imploring them to to "*give up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah"* that they might pay with their lives for "*the evil that has taken place*." But the Benjamanites refuse— they will *"not listen to the voice of their brothers, the people of Israel."* They choose nationalism over what is right.

*"*Choosing nationalism over what is right can mean prioritizing the interests and perceived needs of one's nation above all else, even when those actions conflict with universal moral principles or the well-being of other nations or individuals. This can lead to a variety of problematic outcomes, including…

Justifying harmful actions— Nationalism can be used to justify actions that would otherwise be considered unjust or immoral, such as wars, political repression, or discrimination against minority groups…

Ignoring global concerns— Nationalist agendas can focus on internal issues at the expense of global challenges like poverty, or pandemics, where cooperation is essential…

Damaging international relations—Nationalism can fuel tensions between nations, leading to conflict and making it difficult to find common ground on important issues…

Undermining human rights— In extreme cases, nationalism can be used to erode individual rights and freedoms in the name of national unity or security…

Promoting division—Nationalist ideologies can foster a sense of "us vs. them," making it harder to see the shared humanity of people across borders" (*Google AI Overview*).

WHAT IS NATIONALISM?

IS NATIONALISM INHERENTLY WRONG? WHY? WHY NOT?

WHAT IS THE DANGER OF NATIONALISM BEING TAKEN TO THE EXTREME?

HOW CAN NATIONS FIND THE RIGHT BALANCE OF NATIONALISM?

Judges 20:14-17-*"Then the people of Benjamin came together out of the cities to Gibeah to go out to battle against the people of Israel. And the people of Benjamin mustered out of their cities on that day 26,000 men who drew the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, who mustered 700 chosen men. Among all these were 700 chosen men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.*

And the men of Israel, apart from Benjamin, mustered 400,000 men who drew the sword; all these were men of war."

Instead of trying to unite the tribes in battle against the pagan inhabitants of the Promised Land as God had instructed, the Levite ignites a civil war. The battle lines are drawn— "*26,000 men who draw the sword"* for the tribe of Benjamin verses "*400,000 men"* mustered from the remaining eleven tribes of Israel. It seems that the tribe of Benjamin is vastly outnumbered, but they have a secret weapon— 700 elite troops of left-handed super-slingers, renowned for their deadly accuracy.

"Most soldiers were 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. 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, they could surely smash a right ear" (Dale Davis, *"Judges: Such Great Salvation"*).

In the United States military there's an ongoing debate about which warriors are the most elite— 'Navy Seal Team Six' or 'Army Delta Force.' Both are the most meticulously trained, skilled, and toughened group of individuals the military has to offer. They live by the mottos, "The only easy day was yesterday" and "No one left behind." They're the best of the best— ready to do battle at a moment's notice in the most dire of conditions. When the going gets tough, they get going.

But the truth is, there is only one 'best of the best'— God. He can defeat anyone man puts before Him. He has the strength to destroy our enemies and take us safely through any spiritual battle we face. With God on our side, what do we really have to worry about? Choose sides wisely. As both sides of this civil war will soon discover, it's never a good idea to ignore God.

WHAT ARE ELITE SPECIAL MILITARY FORCES?

HOW DO ELITE SPECIAL MILITARY FORCES CHANGE THE DYNAMICS IN WAR?

HOW IS GOD THE BEST OF THE BEST?

Judges 20:18-19-*"The people of Israel arose and went up to Bethel and inquired of God, "Who shall go up first for us to fight against the people of Benjamin?" And the Lord said, "Judah shall go up first." Then the people of Israel rose in the morning and encamped against Gibeah."*

The eleven tribal leaders go to Bethel— one of several suitable holy places to inquire of God and located just 10 miles north of Jerusalem. The ark of the covenant appears to have been moved from Shiloh to Bethel at this time (20:26, 27).

Throughout the tribunal, the leaders of Israel have not sought God's advise— instead relying solely on their own human wisdom to guide them. But now, as they are committed to war against their brothers, they finally ask Him not if they should proceed with the battle, but only a procedural matter as to how the campaign should be conducted. They inquire of God, *"Who shall go up first for us to fight against the people of Benjamin?"* God chooses Judah, the largest tribe, to march out front of the eleven tribes.

Some might argue this is a lesson of it's better to inquire of God later rather than never, but the subsequent opening events in this civil war will seem to argue against the premise in this particular case. Though it's never too late to call on God, there are often temporal consequences— wasted time can never be recovered.

But it's still better to face the future with God than without Him. And it's definitely better to face eternity with Him than without Him!

WHEN DID YOU COME TO JESUS? EARLY IN LIFE? LATER IN LIFE?

IS IT BETTER TO COME TO JESUS LATE THAN NEVER? WHY?

ARE YOU GLAD YOU DID?

Judges 20:20-23-*"And the men of Israel went out to fight against Benjamin, and the men of Israel drew up the battle line against them at Gibeah. The people of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and destroyed on that day 22,000 men of the Israelites.*

But the people, the men of Israel, took courage, and again formed the battle line in the same place where they had formed it on the first day. And the people of Israel went up and wept before the Lord until the evening. And they inquired of the Lord, "Shall we again draw near to fight against our brothers, the people of Benjamin?" And the Lord said, "Go up against them."

These two verses describe the first of three battles between the Benjaminites and the rest of the tribes of Israel The men of Israel attack, but the men of Benjamin *"come out of Gibeah"* and destroy *"22,000 men of the Israelites."* In preparation for a second direct assault on the Benjaminites the next morning, the tribes of Israel regroup and "*form the battle line in the same place where they had formed it on the first day"*.

The Israelites spend the evening weeping over their losses and consulting God's direction on the impending battle. They ask God, *"Shall we again draw near to fight against our brothers, the people of Benjamin?"* Losing 22,000 of their close family and friends in battle has refocused their attention on God.

The Lord responds, *"Go up against them."* But as we'll soon see, He doesn't guarantee a victory the next morning. God has His own timing and makes His own plans.

"*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD*" (Isaiah 55:8)

"If we try to understand God's ways from earth looking up, we won't find many answers. His ways are not merely different from ours, they are higher. Better. Superior. They exist on a grander scale…

God's ways are higher than our ways because His ways are always part of a bigger plan. We see only our small piece of the puzzle; God sees the finished work. We see a portion of the jumbled back of the tapestry; God is the Weaver at the loom…

When our desire is to live in step with His plan, we can have confidence that, even when bad things happen, God is still in control" (*Gotquestions.org. "What does God mean when He says, "My ways are higher than your ways"*).

DO YOU SOMETIMES QUESTION GOD'S WAYS? HOW? WHY?

DO YOU SOMETIMES QUESTION GOD'S MOTIVES? HOW? WHY?

ARE YOU GLAD HIS WAYS ARE NOT YOUR WAYS? HOW? WHY?

Judges 20:24-26-*"So the people of Israel came near against the people of Benjamin the second day. And Benjamin went against them out of Gibeah the second day, and destroyed 18,000 men of the people of Israel. All these were men who drew the sword.*

Then all the people of Israel, the whole army, went up and came to Bethel and wept. They sat there before the Lord and fasted that day until evening, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord."

Another day, another battle, another defeat for the tribes of Israel. This time 18,000 more men of Israel are destroyed. Ten percent of the troops they began with now lie dead on the battlefield. As part of their mourning, the remaining men weep, fast, and offer sacrifices to the Lord.

"A fast is a complete abstinence from food and sometimes drink undertaken as a religious observance or as a plea to God. Fasting expresses the self-abnegation (denial of self) in order to assert the reality of God and the imperative of His Law" (R. J. Way in *"New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis"*).

Their Burnt Offering is for atonement and invocation; whereas their Peace Offering, usually a celebratory offering, is anything but celebratory here.

"The 'Fellowship Offering,' sometimes called the 'Peace Offering' was a voluntary act not to achieve fellowship, but to celebrate its reality" (E Merrill, *"Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament"*).

"With two military defeats and God's disfavor, the presentation of both types (of sacrifices) seemingly reflects the Israelites' desire for forgiveness as well as acceptance" (Terry Brensinger, *"Judges: Believers Church Bible Commentary (Believers Church Bible Commentary Series"*).

"The combined forces of the eleven tribes were already unified in their resolve to bring justice to the guilty men of Gibeah. Now they are unified in supplication of God and worshipping Him. The people have joined to secure God's help in overcoming their loss and frustration" (*bibleref.com/Judges/20*).

Instead of causing a rift with God, the Israelites two defeats bring them closer to Him They understand that they cannot go forward without God's guidance. They acknowledged Him with their fasting and sacrifices. He has allowed them to experience the pain of defeat for a reason— He has a plan.

There are only two ways of responding to God when He allows our defeats— we can pull away from Him or draw closer to Him. I don't know about you, but I'll bet on God eventually coming through for me every time. I'll stick with Him.

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE PULL AWAY FROM GOD DURING ADVERSITY?

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE DREAW CLOSER TO GOD DURING ADVERSITY?

HOW MANY TIMES HAS GOD COME THROUGH FOR YOU IN THE PAST?

Judges 20:27-28-*"And the people 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, son of Aaron, ministered before it in those days), saying, "Shall we go out once more to battle against our brothers, the people of Benjamin, or shall we cease?"*

And the Lord said, 'Go up, for tomorrow I will give them into your hand.'"

The men of Israel again ask God if they should go to battle against their brothers or should they cease in their efforts? God responds in the affirmative, but this time gives them assurance of victory— "*I will give them into your hand.*"

Bedsides the actual narrative, these two verses are important to scholars for two historical reasons.

First, it confirms that the ark of the covenant was in Bethel at this time (and not in Shiloh). Second, it dates this and the next chapter of the book of Judges earlier than most of the book's other accounts.

It states that Phinehas (the grandson of Aaron) is present at this time serving at the arc of the covenant. Since Phinehas ministered near the end of Joshua's time (just before the time of Judges) and as the accounts in the book of Judges cover over 300 years, it's obvious Phinehas could not have ministered late in the book. Therefore these events must have occurred very early in the book of Judges.

Out of chronological order, the last two chapters of the book act as an appendage to thematically demonstrate the degradation of God's chosen people. The book ends with the tribes of Israel engaged in a civil war.

Everything is 'topsy-turvy.' Instead of aligning with their tribal brothers, they assimilate with pagan nations. Instead of devoting the pagan nations to destruction ("*herem"*), they wage war on their brothers. Instead of following God's mandate, they do what is right in their own eyes.

DO YOU DO WHAT'S RIGHT IN GOD'S EYES?

DO YOU DO WHAT'S RIGHT IN YOUR OWN EYES?

DO YOU NEED YOUR EYES CHECKED?

Judges 20:29-36a-*"So Israel set men in ambush around Gibeah. And the people of Israel went up against the people of Benjamin on the third day and set themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times. And the people of Benjamin went out against the people and were drawn away from the city. And as at other times they began to strike and kill some of the people in the highways, one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah, and in the open country, about thirty men of Israel.*

And the people of Benjamin said, "They are routed before us, as at the first." But the people of Israel said, "Let us flee and draw them away from the city to the highways." And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place and set themselves in array at Baal-tamar, and the men of Israel who were in ambush rushed out of their place from Maareh-geba.

And there came against Gibeah 10,000 chosen men out of all Israel, and the battle was hard, but the Benjaminites did not know that disaster was close upon them.

And the Lord defeated Benjamin before Israel, and the people of Israel destroyed 25,100 men of Benjamin that day. All these were men who drew the sword. So the people of Benjamin saw that they were defeated."

Unlike the first two direct assaults on the Benjaminites, the men of Israel devise a better plan. They feign a frontal attack as before, but this is only to lure the men of Gibeah out of the city. Easily killing "*about thirty men of Israel,*" the Benjaminites declare, "*They are routed before us, as at the first*" and pursue the rest of the soldiers as they retreat.

But this is a trap. As the Benjamites travel further down the highway, another contingent of Israelite soldiers await in ambush. Suddenly "*10,000 chosen men out of all Israel"* descend upon the Benjaminties and kill 25,100 of their soldiers. The men of Israel's third try works like a charm— "*so the people of Benjamin saw that they were defeated.*"

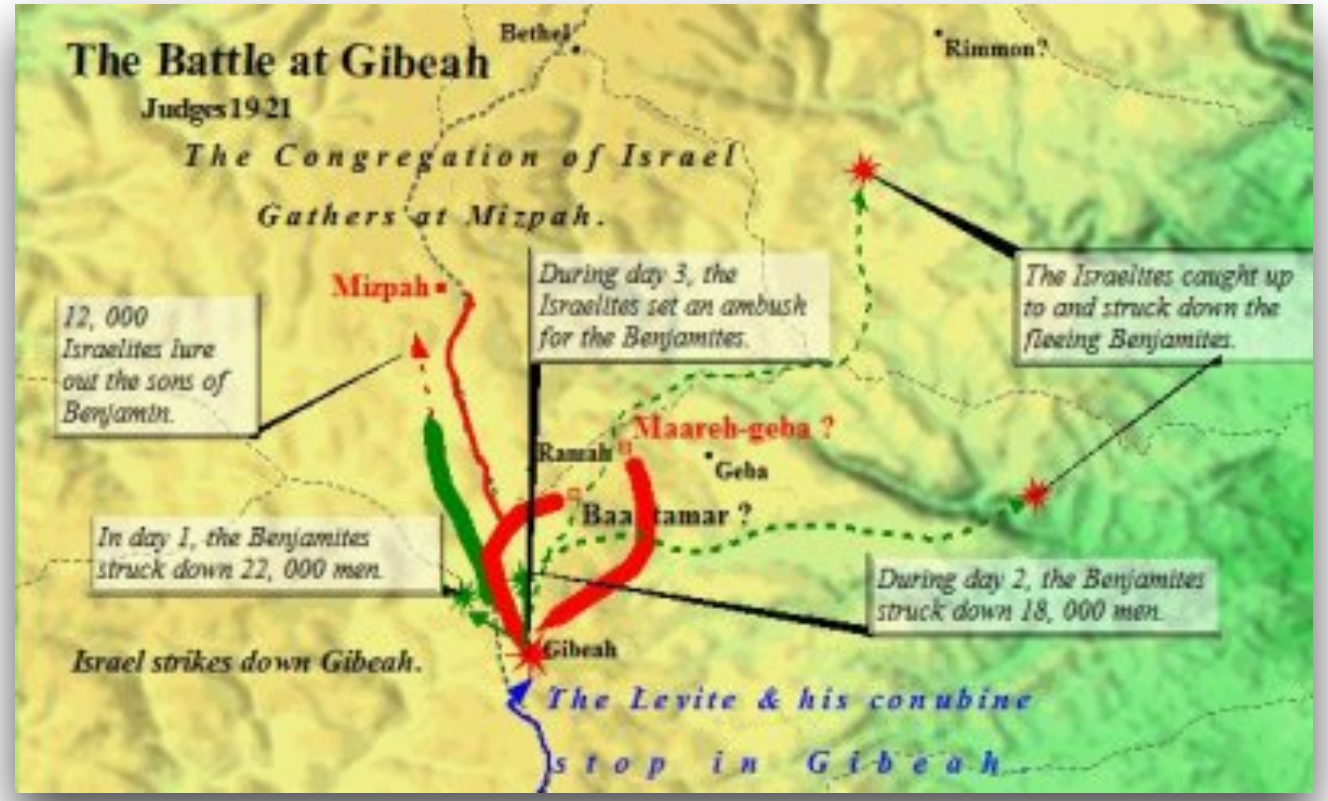
Everyone takes two steps forward and one step backwards from time to time. No-one always gets it right on the first try. The most important thing to learn from our failures is to actually try to learn from them. Trials are put in our way for a reason. They focus us. They sharpen us. They refine us. But they should never define us.

When unforeseen circumstance come our way, we should use our God-given skills to adapt, discern, and pivot when necessary. Always prepare for the next challenge— I'll guarantee there's one waiting around the next corner.

HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU TAKEN TWO STEPS FORWARD AND ONE STEP BACKWARD?

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM YOUR FAILURES?

DO YOU LET FAILURE DEFINE YOU OR FOCUS, SHARPEN, AND REFINE YOU ? WHY? HOW?



Judges 20:37b-43-*"The men of Israel gave ground to Benjamin, because they trusted the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah. Then the men in ambush hurried and rushed against Gibeah; the men in ambush moved out and struck all the city with the edge of the sword.*

Now the appointed signal between the men of Israel and the men in the main ambush was that when they made a great cloud of smoke rise up out of the city the men of Israel should turn in battle.

Now Benjamin had begun to strike and kill about thirty men of Israel. They said, "Surely they are defeated before us, as in the first battle." But when the signal began to rise out of the city in a column of smoke, the Benjaminites looked behind them, and behold, the whole of the city went up in smoke to heaven.

Then the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were dismayed, for they saw that disaster was close upon them. Therefore they turned their backs before the men of Israel in the direction of the wilderness, but the battle overtook them. And those who came out of the cities were destroying them in their midst.

Surrounding the Benjaminites, they pursued them and trod them down from Nohah as far as opposite Gibeah on the east."

Like a movie giving two different witness perspectives, the battle story is repeated in greater detail. As the first contingent of Israelite men retreat from their initial frontal assault to draw the Benjaminites out of the city, another contingent of Israelite forces wait in ambush and move into the city.

Looking back upon their town, the men of Benjamin now only see "*smoke to heaven*" emanating from Gibeah. With the soldiers of Israel both in front and behind them, the Benjaminites are trapped and attempt to escape into the wilderness, but for most of them, the battle overtakes them. The few remaining men are pursued and trodded down "*from Nohah as far as opposite Gibeah on the east."*

There's an old expression—"Trapped between a rock and a hard place." It implies a difficult situation where you have to choose between two equally unpleasant and unacceptable courses of action. But from a Biblical perspective, we're never really trapped if we rely on God.

"We say, "It's impossible." God says, "*All things are possible*" (Mat 19:26)
We say, "I am too tired." God says, "*I will give you rest*." (Mat 11:28)
We say, "Nobody really loves me." God says, "*I love you*." (John 3:16)
We say, "Nobody really cares for me." God says, "*I care for you."* (1 Peter 5:7)
We say, "I cannot go on." God says, "*My grace is sufficient*." (2 Cor 12:9)
We say, "I cannot figure things out." God says, "*I shall direct your paths*." (Prov 3:6)
We say, "I cannot do it." God says, "*You can do all things through Christ*." (Phil 4:13)
We say, "I am unable." God says, "*I am able*." (2 Cor 9:8)
We say, "I am not worth it." God says, "*It will be worth it*." (Rom 8:28)
We say, "I cannot forgive myself." God says, "*I forgive you*." (1 John 1:9)
We say, "I cannot afford to." God says, "*I will supply all your needs*." (Phil 4:19)
(*bethelchapelchurch.com, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place*").

We just need to be be convinced that God is big enough to solve our problems and trust Him to do what we cannot do:

"*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight"* (Prov 3:5-6).

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." (Phil 4:6-9)

HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU BEEN STUCK BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE?

HOW DID YOU ESCAPE?

DID YOU THANK GOD?

Judges 20:44-48-"*Eighteen thousand men of Benjamin fell, all of them men of valor. And they turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon. Five thousand men of them were cut down in the highways. And they were pursued hard to Gidom, and 2,000 men of them were struck down. So all who fell that day of Benjamin were 25,000 men who drew the sword, all of them men of valor.*

But 600 men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon and remained at the rock of Rimmon four months. And the men of Israel turned back against the people of Benjamin and struck them with the edge of the sword, the city, men and beasts and all that they found. And all the towns that they found they set on fire."

Eighteen thousand, five thousand, then two thousand men— 25,000 Benjaninites ultimately lose their lives because they would foolishly not punish wrong-doers in their midst. Only 600 soldiers escape and flee to the "*rock of Rimmon*"— a place of sanctuary.

There they remain for four months while the men of Israel turn back against the people Benjamin and strike "*with the edge of the sword*" each *"city, men and beasts, and all that they find*" (apparently including their women). They then set each city on fire.

The tribal line of Benjamin nears extinction. But as will be seen in the next chapter, God will not allow them to be wiped from the face of the earth by their brothers. However, the means that the Israelites utilize to insure the Benjaminites' survival may "seem right in their own eyes," but it will surely give God a massive headache as He watches in disgust.

"The final judgement of the book is clarified in this episode; while a system of government dependent on judges did not work for Israel, the concept of group leadership was even worse" (Tammi Schneider, *"Berit Olam: Judges"*).

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE UNNECESSARILY DIED IN FOOLISH WARS THROUGHOUT HISTORY?

HOW CAN FOOLISH WARS BE PREVENTED?

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PREVENT FOOLISH WARS?

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Judges 21:1-3-*"Now the men of Israel had sworn at Mizpah, "No one of us shall give his daughter in marriage to Benjamin."*

And the people came to Bethel and sat there till evening before God, and they lifted up their voices and wept bitterly. And they said, 'O Lord, the God of Israel, why has this happened in Israel, that today there should be one tribe lacking in Israel?'"

The eleven tribes of Israel have a dilemma. They had previously "*sworn at Mizpah*" that they would not give their daughters in marriage to the tribe of Benjamin due to their transgressions. But suddenly they come to a realization— only 600 men of Benjamin remain and since Israel has destroyed their cities (including their women) the tribal line of Benjamin will soon be gone (oops!). Israel wanted to punish Benjamin, not wipe them off the face of the earth! They really hadn't thought through the consequences of their oath.

"There are about 30 biblical references to vows, most of which are from the *Old Testament*. The books of Leviticus and Numbers have several references to vows in relation to offerings and sacrifices. There were dire consequences for the Israelites who broke vows, especially vows to God…

Jesus taught concerning vows, *"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No ,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one"* (Matt 5:33-37)….

Jesus was not condemning all forms of promises, contracts, or agreements. He was speaking of the kind of spontaneous vow made when a person says, "I cross my heart and hope to die" or "I swear on a stack of Bibles" or "I swear on my mother's life." Jesus warns against using those types of flippant oaths. His teaching in Matthew 5 is not meant to discourage careful, thought-out promises, such as wedding vows or a legal contract…

The principle here is clear for Christians: be careful about making vows, either to the Lord or to one another. The fact that we are prone to errors in judgment means that we may make vows foolishly or out of immaturity" (*Gotquestions.org, "What does the Bible say about keeping your vows / oaths?"*).

HAVE YOU MADE GOOD VOWS? WHEN? WHY?

HAVE YOU MADE FOOLISH VOWS? WHEN? WHY?

IS YOUR 'YES' A 'YES' AND YOUR 'NO' A 'NO'? HOW? WHY?

Judges 21:4-7-*"And the next day the people rose early and built there an altar and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. And the people of Israel said, "Which of all the tribes of Israel 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 to Mizpah, saying, "He shall surely be put to death."*

And the people of Israel had compassion for Benjamin their brother and said, 'One tribe is cut off from Israel this day. What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since we have sworn by the Lord that we will not give them any of our daughters for wives?'"

The people of Israel arise early the next morning and build an altar on which they offer burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord— a wise choice since they've certainly gotten themselves in a pickle. But as humans often do, they don't wait for God's answer. They instead start to formulate a plan on their own to "save" the tribe of Benjamin. After all, "*the people of Israel* (now) *have compassion for Benjamin their brother."*

Suddenly, a light bulb goes off in their heads. Most of the clans of Israel had sent men to fight in the battle; but a few had not. In a second oath at Mizpah, the Israelites had sworn of those who did not send their men to the war that they "*shall surely be put to death."* Perhaps they can use this oath to counter their other oath— they'll kill the men and take their virgin daughters for wives for the Benjaminites. Problem solved— two wrongs make a right (or does it?).

Proverbs 3:5-6 states, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and He will make straight your paths"*

How many times have you twisted common sense, your conscience, or even the Bible to justify some convoluted scheme to get yourself out of trouble. We all do it from time to time. We lean on our own understanding and fail to use our brains to rely on the one individual who sees all, knows all, and is always standing by to help in times of trouble— God. Two wrongs don't make a right— they just add up to a heap of trouble leading to more heartache. Wise up—"*Trust in the Lord with all your heart… In all your ways acknowledge him, and He will make straight your paths."*

HAVE YOU EVER TRIED TO MAKE "TWO WRONGS" ADD UP TO "ONE RIGHT?"

HOW DID YOUR MATH WORK OUT?

WHY DO WE TRY TO RELY ON OUR OWN UNDERSTANDING AND NOT GOD'S?

Judges 21:8-12-*"And they said, 'What one is there of the tribes of Israel that did not come up to the Lord to Mizpah?' And behold, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh-gilead, to the assembly. For when the people were mustered, behold, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead was there.*

So the congregation sent 12,000 of their bravest men there and commanded them, "Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword; also the women and the little ones. This is what you shall do: every male and every woman that has lain with a male you shall devote to destruction."

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."

With their half-cocked solution in hand, the people of Israel go around the camp and inquire as to which clan had not sent men to the battle. And behold, there are no men from the clan of *Jabesh-gilead* (of the half tribe of Manasseh) to be found anywhere! The answer to their problem is staring them in the face (or in this case, not, since the men of *Jabesh-gilead* aren't there).

So, in keeping with their oath to destroy the clan of whomever did not send men, *"the congregation sends 12,000 of their bravest men there and commands them, "Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword; also the women and the little ones."* And thus, the men of Israel kill everyone in Jabesh-gilead. Well, almost everyone. There's a caveat to their instructions— they spare 400 virgins!

The Israelites bring the virgins back to "*the camp in Shiloh*" to later present them as wives to the men of Benjamin. In the Israelites' minds, they've kept their original oath. They haven't given their daughters to the Benjaminites— they are simply giving up the daughters of the men of Jabesh-gilead who hadn't participated in the oath. They then try to justify not carrying out their second oath to kill everyone from Jabesh-gilead with a deceptive 'logical fallacy.' After all, "everyone" shouldn't include virgins, right?

"A 'logical fallacy' is an argument that can be disproven through reasoning. For a position to be a logical fallacy, it must be logically flawed or deceptive in some way. For you math wizards, see if you can find the flaw in this simple algebraic proof.

$$a = b$$
$$aa = ab$$
$$a^2 = ab$$
$$a^2 - b^2 = ab - b^2$$
$$(a + b)(a - b) = b(a - b)$$

$$\frac{(a + b)(a - b)}{(a - b)} = \frac{b(a - b)}{(a - b)}$$

$$(a + b) = b$$
$$b + b = b$$
$$2b = b$$

$$\frac{2b}{b} = \frac{b}{b}$$

$$2 = 1$$

(If you can't find the **logical fallacy** here, then **I'll hand you a dollar bill** and **you give me back two !**)

WHAT IS A LOGICAL FALLACY?

HAVE YOU EVER ENGAGED IN A DECEPTION OF LOGIC? HOW? WHY?

HAVE YOU EVER TRIED TO USE A LOGICAL FALLACY WITH GOD? HOW? WHY?

Judges 21:13-15-*"Then the whole congregation sent word to the people 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 saved alive of the women of Jabesh-gilead, but they were not enough for them. And the people had compassion on Benjamin because the Lord had made a breach in the tribes of Israel."*

The congregation sends word to the 600 remaining Benjaminites holed up at the rock of Rimmon— they can return unharmed and in peace. As a bonus they'll even give them 400 virgins from Jabesh-gilead as future wives to keep their tribe alive.

But someone obviously flunked "Arithmetic 101" in grade school. Four hundred virgins divided by six hundred Benjamanites— the math just doesn't add up! A new solution needs to be found. But don't worry, as we'll soon see, the Israelites will once again do "what is right in their own eyes." The good news is that they actually do want peace with their brother tribe.

But what is peace? "Peace is not the absence of something bad; rather it is the presence of something good. In the *Old Testament*, the word peace is '*shalom'* and is a state of wholeness and harmony that is intended to resonate in all relationships…

In Numbers 6:24-26, God gave Moses these words to use when blessing His people:…

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace." ...

The fact that the lack of peace is so pervasive is really nothing new. We can trace it all the way back to the book of Genesis. Humans have been at war with God ever since Adam and Eve sinned. And, beginning with the conflict between Cain and Abel, which eventually led to one brother killing the other, we have been in a bombastic battle with our brothers and sisters up till now…

There are essentially three kinds of people…

1) Peace Breakers— In all the years of recorded history, the world has been at peace just 8% of the time? Over that period, 8000 treaties have been made and broken…

2) Peace Fakers— Some of us are predisposed to have peace at any cost in an effort to avoid conflict with someone. Often this is just pretend peace, as tensions go underground and come back again because they were never dealt with…

3) Peace Makers— Peace must be actively made because it never happens by chance. Left to ourselves, we drift toward divisiveness. Peacemaking is messy work and is often resented. Peace must be pursued until we have it, and then guarded so we don't lose it. A peacemaker does what it takes to establish and maintain peace. Instead of escalating conflict, this person works to extinguish tension and usher in peace" (Brian Bill, *keepbelieving.com, "Making Peace in the Midst of Conflict"*).

ARE YOU A PEACE BREAKER?

ARE YOU A PEACE FAKER?

ARE YOU A PEACE MAKER?

Judges 21:16-18-*"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 not be blotted out from Israel. Yet we cannot give them wives from our daughters.' For the people of Israel had sworn, 'Cursed be he who gives a wife to Benjamin.'"*

Once again the Israelites scratch their heads to come up with a solution to their predicament. And once again, they ignore the one person who can help— God. Instead, they look back and forth, knock their heads together again, and will soon formulate an even more ludicrous plan. I guess one has to give them credit for trying!

As Forrest Gump once said. "Stupid is as stupid does." The quote suggests that if someone acts in a way that's considered stupid, then they are being stupid, regardless of how intelligent or knowledgeable they might appear to be. These Israelites are obviously just plain stupid for ignoring God.

WHY IS "STUPID IS AS STUPID DOES?"

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT STUPIDITY?

ARE YOU SOMETIMES JUST PLAIN STUPID? WHY? HOW?

Judges 21:19-22-*"So they said, "Behold, there is the yearly feast of the Lord at Shiloh, which is north of Bethel, on the east of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah."*

And they commanded the people of Benjamin, saying, "Go and lie in ambush in the vineyards and watch. If the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in the dances, then come out of the vineyards and snatch each man his wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin.

And when their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, we will say to them, 'Grant them graciously to us, because we did not take for each man of them his wife in battle, neither did you give them to them, else you would now be guilty.'"

Yep, you read this right. The Israelites' great plan to get additional wives for the Benjaminites isn't just stupid, it's absolutely diabolical. They can't give their daughters to the Benjaminites, but they can allow their daughters to be kidnapped by the Benjaminites. GENIUS !!! Why didn't they think of this sooner?

The Israelites "*command*" the men of Benjamin to lie in ambush at a festival where "*the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance."* Then they order them to "*snatch each man his wife from the daughters of Shiloh"* and return home with her "*to the land of Benjamin."*

The men of Israel say to the Benjaminites, "And oh, by the way, don't worry about their fathers and brothers coming after you— we'll talk to them. We'll explain that it's better that you steal them because if they give them to you they'd be guilty of breaking their oath. No problem— forget about it!"

Jesus often clashed with the Pharisees who demanded legalism— meticulous observance of the law and traditions while ignoring the real purpose in following them. Jesus condemned them for their hypocrisy and compared them to "whitewashed tombs" as they appeared 'spick and span' on the outside, but were dead on the inside.

These men of Israel are nothing more than "whitewashed tombs' — they won't 'give' their daughters in marriage due to their own rash vow, but they will 'allow' them to be taken. How dead are they not to see the unrighteous legalism of their argument?

WHAT IS LEGALISM?

ARE SOME CHURCHES TODAY GUILTY OF LEGALISM? HOW? WHY?

ARE YOU SOMETIMES GUILTY OF LEGALISM? HOW? WHY?

Judges 21:23-25-*"And the people of Benjamin did so and took their wives, according to their number, from the dancers whom they carried off. Then they went and returned to their inheritance and rebuilt the towns and lived in them.*

And the people of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family, and they went out from there every man to his inheritance.

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

The Benjaminites kidnap a few wives "*according to their number*" and return "***<u>to their inheritance</u>***."

AND

The people of Israel gather their belongings and "*go out every man* ***<u>to his inheritance</u>****."*

All's well that ends well, right ????

Not Really!

The Book Of Judges Tragically Ends The Way It Starts…

“Everyone did what was right in his own eyes”