

JUDGES

Judges 1:1-15

1-2 It is rather sobering to realize that the battle for the land went on for many years. Even after Joshua died, they were still making conquests. We should learn that the battles are never done until the Lord returns and He defeats all enemies. We can also learn that we should never attempt anything in our own strength but seek the will of God in every matter.

3 We should enlist the help of our brothers in the battles we have. We, in turn, can help them.

4 The Lord did not give the enemies into their hands until they attacked. We need to be people of action.

5-7 God's judgments are sometimes carried out "in history." Other judgements will be carried out in eternity. When we are obedient to God and follow His directions, then He can use us as instruments of judgement on the world.

8-11 As the people of God took the land, they eliminated the occupants that were there. As we bring areas of our lives under the control of the Spirit, then we also must eliminate the worldly ways we have known and relied upon in the past.

12-15 Caleb's name means "impetuous" and he (true to his name) offered his daughter to someone who would win a battle. Othniel, whose name means "God is force," behaved in a way fitting to his name. He also became the judge of Israel after the death of Joshua. Acsah was apparently true to her name (serpent charmer) in that she was able to obtain additional inheritance from her father. She was wise enough to know that just having land does not accomplish much unless the land has water to give it life.

A lesson for us to learn: As we make conquests of the land (people) and bring them into the kingdom of God, little fruit will be forthcoming unless the land (people) is well watered. The life-giving spring is the indwelling Holy Spirit. Some believe without receiving - Acts 19:2

Judges 1:16-36

16-19 The conquest continued to bring more of the territory under the control of Israel. The account that they were unable to drive the people from the plains is disturbing. If the Lord was with the men of Judah, then not even iron chariots should have stopped them.

20-21 In life we find that certain problems can be conquered and other things that plague us are difficult to dislodge. Because of this we struggle with problems for years. If the Benjamites had called for help from some of the larger tribes, then the Jebusites could have been conquered. It may be that we might need help in overcoming problems where the enemy is entrenched in our lives.

22-26 Enlisting one member of the enemy camp to help defeat the enemy is used today by the government against the mafia. We may need to consult with those who are lost to determine what is going on inside the mind of the lost. Without that knowledge, we will not be successful in presenting the gospel message to them that addresses the needs they perceive.

27-36 The Canaanites who were conquered but not destroyed (as God had instructed) eventually influenced the Israelites to worship Baal. Worship of false gods proved to be the downfall of the nation. We should be on our guard that we not try to "improve" the old life (flesh), or "sanctify" the world's way of doing things, or rationalize (for expediency or any other reason) any deceitfulness (the father of lies is the devil) to assist us (be our slaves) in the work of the kingdom of God. These things will eventually become a snare to us. We will start to depend on them rather than trust in the Lord. God's solution is to crucify the flesh, die to the world, and to resist the devil.

Judges 2:1-10

The first part of Chapter two is not in chronological sequence with Chapter one. Chapter one tells us that after Joshua died, certain things happened. Now in Chapter two we have an explanation of why those things happened as they did. This is background material and answers questions raised by things that seem inconsistent in Chapter one. In Chapter one, we wondered why iron chariots would prevent the nation from conquering the people of the plains and why the Benjamites could not rid themselves of the Jebusites. Now we learn the source of the problem.

1-3 Was this an epiphany or does the term angel just mean a "messenger" from God? In some later chapters an unnamed prophet brought the same message as was delivered here. The way this is stated here "... went up from Gilgal to Bokim ..." one is lead to believe that the "angel" lived at Gilgal. The message was a reminder of what God had

commanded, an indictment for disobedience and a call for accountability to answer “why.” This was followed by a judgment against the people and the consequences for what they had done (or not done).

It is difficult for us to accept that there are windows of opportunities to accomplish things and when that window is closed, then we may not get another opportunity. We used to hear the adage, “opportunity knocks but once.” That saying has been dismissed and we now believe there are many opportunities and therefore we think that putting off what we should do really doesn’t matter. In this case, the old saying is the right saying. Many Christians are bothered with besetting sins because they did not deal with that sin immediately after they were saved when the Lord brought conviction regarding a particular behavior. These besetting sins may then end up being thorns in our sides and a snare to us.

4-6 What you do when you don’t have to will determine what you will be when it is too late. It was too late for Israel. They grieved over their loss with bitter tears but they had to live with the situation they had created by their disobedience. Though they took possession of the land, their inheritance was not a joyful one since the Canaanites and others were there and could not be removed.

7-10 The afterglow of the early victories lasted throughout that generation. However, if we are relying and trusting primarily in our experiences, then our ardor for the Lord will fade with the passing years.

Judges 2:11-23

11-13 As expected the seeds of worldliness left in the land because the heathens were not completely eliminated grew into a major influence in the nation. Since we tend to trust that which we can see and touch, the people drifted away from God and relied on (worshiped) the false gods of the Canaanites. When we abandon the One true God Who sacrificed so much to save us, then we should expect His anger.

14-15 God’s anger against His people has as its purpose to bring us to repentance. The tragedy of humanity is that we do not typically repent until we are in great distress.

16-19 When we recognize our condition and call upon the Lord, He hears and provides a way out. The too-often-told story of most people is that once we have been delivered from the problems we have, we then forget what got us in the trouble and repeat the same behavior. The forgetfulness may be generational but the cycle repeats itself. With each repeat the depth of the depravity is worse until people come to the point of refusing to repent. “That which the parents ‘allow’ is practiced in excess by the children” -- Bill Gothard.

20-23 When we blame God for the conditions of our lives it is because we fail to realize that our rebelliousness may be the root cause. We often fail to see that the problems that God has allowed in our lives are there to show us what is in our heart and to bring us to repentance and renewal.

Judges 3:1-14

1-5 God used the results of the failure of the first generation that came to the Promised Land as an opportunity to bring good to the following generations (Rom 8:28 was true before Paul ever penned the words). Adversity can be used to strengthen us and to teach us how to carry out warfare. Adversity can also reveal to us what is in our hearts -- will we be obedient or not? The first chapter of the Epistle of James shows that the Lord is still using trials as a means to bring us to perfection -- “Count it all joy when you fall into various testings ...”

6-8 Israel fail the tests they were given. They did not remain faithful to God but join in with the world in its ways. This was deemed as “evil” by God. However, God did not give up on them but brought judgment upon them to bring them to a point of repentance.

9-10 Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved is an Old Testament truth that is applicable to His people. When God raised up a “savior” He empowered that person with His Spirit and was then able to have wisdom and to wage war against the enemy. These people were types of the Christ in that they foreshadowed His ministry. When Christ Jesus came He also was empowered of the Spirit. He is the “Wisdom of God” and He waged war that defeated the devil and cast him out of the heavenlies. The battle is still going on and the last foe that will be defeated is death. Now, we should logically ask ourselves, “If the Spirit of God was given to the Judges of Israel and to Jesus for the purposes of great wisdom and the ability to conduct warfare, then why is the Spirit of God given to us? The answer is NOT difficult.

11-14 If the next generation will not learn from the mistakes of the past generation, then they are doomed to repeat the failures of the past. The people remained faithful as long as they had a strong leader. In the absence of leadership,

people run amok. This phenomenon is exactly what is happening in our nation at this very time in history.

Judges 3:15-31

15-19 The cycle of sin, oppression, repentance, and deliverance continued. When we are separated from God and are being oppressed by the enemy, we may find that tribute money is required. The wealth God had intended for us to have as a blessing is eaten up by the destroyer. In order to break the control of the oppressor, drastic action may be needed.

20-23 The enemy to whom we may find ourselves in bondage will usually be subject to pride and that can be the means of defeating him. The king was so proud that he could easily believe that God had a message for him.

24-26 If we are to cast off the oppressor, then we must take advantage of the confusion among the followers of the oppressor when resistance is exerted. Preparation must be made in advance to regain control in our lives so that the enemy is thoroughly routed.

Judges 4

1-3 Psalms 91 tells us “He who dwells in the presence of the Most High shall abide under the (protective) shadow of the Almighty.” By adopting evil ways, the Israelites went away from the presence of God and lost the benefit of His providence. Such behavior is usually gradual and results from thinking that we can provide for ourselves rather than putting our trust completely in the Lord. If we are relying on our own strength, we will find someone stronger. If we are relying on our own wit, we will find someone smarter. If we are relying on our armed men, we will find someone with iron chariots.

4-5 God had already prepared a leader to deliver the people from their oppression. What was missing was their realization that they needed God.

6-7 In the KJV Deborah asked Barak “Hath not God commanded you to take ten thousand men?” Unless this is idiomatic, then God had been dealing with Barak before Deborah sent for him. It helps for a spiritual leader to confirm to you what you believe God has called you to do.

The army was to be raised from among the people most influenced by the enemy. We need to be involved in solving the problems that directly affect us. God provides the means and the power but He needs our cooperation.

God already had a plan in mind that would defeat the enemy. He would use the strength of the enemy (the iron chariots) to bring about his defeat.

8-10 Barak was unsure of himself and perhaps a little unsure of God. He also wanted to see if Deborah believed her own prophecy. Barak also realized that Deborah was a person who was close to God and wanted the security of her presence. Many times people gravitate to positions of leadership, not because they have leadership capability, but because of the need for recognition and fame. Because Barak was tentative in his leadership the credit for the victory would go to someone else. For a macho kind of guy, having the credit go to a woman would be humiliating. Barak, however, did not protest the proclamation but proceeded to call up an army.

11-13 This is clearly a case of doing what was good for business. Heber the Kenite was a metal worker and some of his best clients were the Canaanites with iron chariots. So he allied himself with the enemies of Israel and told Sisera that an army was being gathered to resist his forces. Sisera reacted as could be predicted and came out to fight. Of course, he wanted the fight to take place in the plain where his chariots would have an advantage. The Israelites had taken the high ground. This is a good plan of action for us when we battle the enemy. We should always take the moral high ground and wait for God to give the enemy into our hands.

14-16 At God’s timing the attack began. God had lured Sisera into a trap that would only work on iron chariots. The Lord sent a flood to the plain of the river basin and the iron chariots became a liability rather than an asset.

17 When the chariot bogs down, then we are walking. When all our gadgets and things on which we rely fail us (and they eventually will) then we are reduced to relying on who we are -- we are back to the basics. If we are “only human” then we are in a lot of trouble. On the other hand, if we have been born of the Spirit of God and have His indwelling presence then we rely on God from the start and He is sufficient.

18-20 The problem with those who are motivated by their own greed and financial gain is that they make very poor allies when things are not going well for us. Sisera thought that his chariots mechanic would remember all the good business he had sent his way and would be eager to help him. However, the wife of his business friend was about to give him “the business.” Whether she carried out this treachery because she saw the impending victory of the Israelites

or if she were loyal to Israel is not known. She offered hospitality but had something else in mind.

21-24 The combination of being tired and consuming milk made Sisera sleep soundly and this was his undoing. Too much sleep and not being alert can bring defeat to anyone. Jael killed Sisera and then led Barak to the body.

After his general had been killed the Canaanite king was easily defeated and the nation of Israel then prospered again.

Judges 5:1-18

1 When there is joy in victory, a natural expression of such joy is in song.

2 It is good when leaders lead and the people follow their leaders. It is something for which we should praise the Lord.

3 Ballads usually have a message and part of the target audience for this song was the foreign kings and rulers. It was a subtle warning that the people of Israel had turned back to God and He was their protector.

4-5 The praise offered to the Lord attributed to Him great happenings as earthquakes and great storms. These were the most powerful things the people had witness and they associated the greatest power with the great God of Heaven.

6-8 A lamentation on the condition of the nation. They had gone away from the Lord and had worshiped other gods. They then became vulnerable to the enemy without any defenses or weapons of warfare.

9 This similar to verse 2 and may be a refrain.

10-11 The call for rich and poor to think about what God had done for the nation of Israel All should listen to the words of the ballad that the singers were singing. The words speak of the righteous acts of both the Lord and His people who answered the call to war.

12 Apparently, the people had called for a celebration and asked Deborah and Barak to write a ballad commemorating the events.

13-18 All Israel joined in the celebration but all did not readily join in the battle. The song chides those who were slow but commends Zebulun and Naphtali who acted sacrificially -- risked their lives.

Judges 5:19-31

19 The tale of the battle showed the reversal of fortunes for the enemy. In the past the kings of Canaan had carried off plunder and the people of Israel were helpless to stop them. But now the Lord was on their side.

20 It would seem that the writer realized that the battle was not against flesh and blood but against powers and principalities in the heavenlies. If we fail to win the spiritual battle for a city, then all the marching, protests, petitions, and legislation will be to no avail.

21-22 The disabling of the strength of the enemy by their own power. The water sent by the Lord soften the ground and the prancing feet of the horses that pulled the dreaded iron chariots made a quagmire that bogged down the enemy. God will do this very thing to the enemies of the kingdom of God if we His people will repent, seek His face, etc.

23 The Lord did not overlook the action of those who held back and did not join the battle. Meroz was a town in Naphtali that did not help the cause. This should be a wake-up call for all of us in the church who spend our time in useless pursuits while the world is on a slippery slope into the gate of hell.

24-27 There were commendations for those who help win the battle.

28-30 There was an ironic taunting of the relatives of the slain leader of the Canaanites.

31 The song ends with a curse on the enemies of the Lord and a blessing on those who love Him.

Judges 6:1-24

1-5 Sin in our lives can cause us to fall victim to those who are more powerful than we are. When people are victimized they will tend to withdraw and hide unless they have hope and confidence of casting off the oppressors. Without God our hope is absent, without hope our confidence finds no place to stand. In our nation, we have move a long way toward such a condition in the inner cities. Gangs and individuals roam the landscape to kill and steal and vandalize. People have turned their homes into fortresses with bars on windows, deadbolt locks on doors and intruder alarm systems. The number of criminals we have locked up is staggering and the tragedy is that more are still out there.

6-10 We have not yet come to the point of being "so impoverished" in our quality of life that we (as a nation) cried out to the Lord for help. Nevertheless, He has sent His prophets to remind us that we have not listened to Him and this is why we are in the mess we are in.

11-12 At the time the people cried out to the Lord for help there was not a leader in the land of Israel. Why God

chose Gideon is not obvious based on his behavior up to that point. Fear had forced people into hiding and into doing strange things such as threshing wheat in the winepress. People today may own expensive jewelry or a fine watch but they are reluctant to wear them in public places for fear of someone stealing it.

The angel of the Lord did not address Gideon according to the evidence of the past but addressed him according to his potential in the Lord. He called him “mighty warrior” and provided information that Gideon was not aware of. Gideon that the Lord was with him. He did not behave as if the Lord was with him. That same indictment applied to most Christians today. Without realizing that God is with us, then we tend to behave as Gideon did.

13 Our tendency is to keep our eyes on the problems and not on the solution. We see the problem and hear the word of God and what we see conflicts with the word. We must what we will believe -- the problem or the word. Gideon had concluded that God had abandoned them, when, in fact, they abandoned God.

14-16 The angel of the Lord did not get into a theological discussion with Gideon. He ignored the attempt to debate the issue and gave Gideon a command to go and to save Israel. Gideon protested that he was too weak to do the job. He did not realized the “the strength you have” was special power from God because the Lord was with him.

Gideon was not ready to obey. He was not a courageous person, he did not see himself as a mighty man of valor. He was, in his own mind, unimportant, poor and insignificant. But the Lord is not interested in our excuses about inability since we are to rely on His ability and not our own anyway. What we need to supply is the willingness to do what God has commanded. We have the same assurance the Lord gave to Gideon and that is “I will be with you.”

17-24 Gideon was starting to believe but he was cautious. He want proof or a sign that this message was really from God. He prepared a sacrifice of food and the Lord provided a demonstration of power that satisfied Gideon that this person was really the angel of the Lord.

Judges 6:25-40

25-27 The first priority was not to go attack the Midianites. The cause of the problem was Israel’s unfaithfulness to God in turning from God to worshiping Baal (materialism) and Asherah (sexuality). The Lord started with the cause rather than the results of the problem. The solution was to pull down the idols. Our idols are in our minds. The New Testament tells us to “cast down every thought and imagination that exalts itself against God.” Materialism and sexuality are top priorities in the lives of many people today!

Gideon was to use the symbol of their occupation with sensuality as fuel for the fire that would consume the sacrifice. There are many things around today that are symbols of our problems -- TV, the movie industry, the Internet. Can these be the fuel to consume the sacrifice we need to bring to God? All of these could be powerful tools to spread the gospel message to all the world.

28-32 Though Gideon hid his act of pulling down the idol, he could not keep it a secret. (This lesson would apply to many situations in life.) The men of the city were going to kill him for his rash act. However, Gideon’s father was wise and advised that if Baal were any kind of a god, then he could take care of Gideon and did not need any help from them. What Gideon did discredited the worship of Baal and marked the turning point in the people coming back to God.

Joash made an interesting argument regarding the people’s attempt to defend Baal. He said, “Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning.” This is almost as if we need to defend “a god” then it would be considered an insult to that “god” and would be something for which the “god” would punish by death. Many times we Christians engage in “discussions” to defend Jesus or God, the Father. Is that a sound practice?

33 No reason is given for the gathering of the enemies of Israel. The objective of the neighboring states around present-day Israel is to annihilate the Jews -- that could have been the objectives 3300 years ago also.

34-35 When the time to act came, God empowered the one He had called. The Lord had made preparation for the day when Gideon would need to act. Gideon had already had a visit from the angel of the Lord and when the Spirit came upon him, he knew the purpose. When Jesus called Peter, James, and John and said “Follow Me” He had prepared them to do just that. He had already been doing things in their area and they knew something about Him before that day.

Gideon’s first call was to his family clan and then to four other tribes of Israel. We should be able to obtain help from those closest to us before going to the rest of the community.

36-40 Gideon had not fully overcome his fearful, doubting nature just because the Spirit of the Lord had come upon Him. Our transformation from our old nature to the new is not instantaneous. Working through our doubts and finding God faithful is part of the process of building our faith. God has given us enough faith to get us started. We should be able to look back on the times when God has protected us and be assured that as He will keep His promises.

Judges 7:1-14

1-3 To Gideon, the 32,000 men seemed to be too few. It was too few if they were going to fight the battle in their own strength. However, God was going to fight the battle for them. In that case, it was too many. If they had entered the battle and had won, then they would have been sure that they were really good warriors. Such pride is typical of all people after they experience any kind of success. We do the same thing in our church work. Too few show up for visitation, too few come to prayer meeting, too few participate in this or that. How many does God need to get the job done?

God wanted to teach them a lesson about reliance on Him and keeping up their relationship with Him in the future. With that objective in mind, He started to trim down the forces by having Gideon send home all those who were afraid. After that, there were only 10,000 men remaining with Gideon. They started out outnumbered four to one and now they were outnumbered thirteen to one. I would think those who were left might have had second thoughts about whether or not they were afraid after seeing so many of their countrymen leave.

4-7 When God does a miracle to demonstrate His power, then there should be no doubt that a miracle had occurred. It might be possible that 10,000 could defeat more than a 100,000 and then people might question whether the victory was because of their ability or because of what God had done. With only 300 men to fight the battle, there would be no doubt that God had gotten the victory for them.

Much has been written about the way the 300 were separated from the 9,700 others. The 300 brought water to their mouth and lapped it as a dog would. The rest knelt down and drank directly from the stream. Commentaries have interpreted the actions of the first group as meaning they were more alert and watchful and the others were interested only in quenching their thirst. I'm not sure that was part of the consideration. Think about it. Do you think it really matter how brave and alert the 300 were when compared to the 130,000 men the enemy had? We want to try to find something of merit in our humanity that justifies why God chose those particular men. One could make the argument that they were the "most afraid" of the remaining 10,000. I could argue they were afraid to even look down to take a drink of water. After all, God didn't choose Gideon because he was so courageous. The victory was not going to happen because they were so good, it was going to happen because God is so great!

8-14 Gideon did not asked the Lord for a sign this time. He was probably numb from the situation of having only 300 men to go against such overwhelming numbers of the enemy. So God provided some encouragement from the lips of the enemy. God was already at work in planting the seeds of doubt and the concept of defeat in the minds of the enemy soldiers.

Judges 7:15-25

15 Our response to the provision of God for the tasks to which He has called us should be worship followed by action. First step is to identify the tasks -- what has God asked us to do? Second step is to be watchful for confirmation that He has already preordained the victory and then we take action. Gideon's call of the 300 men to action was indicative of his confidence in what the Lord was going to do.

16-18 Gideon had a plan and he had people who would follow his leadership exactly. Many times plans fail because those who are following do not understand the need to carry out even the smallest detail to make the plan work. "For want of a nail a shoe was lost, for want of a shoe a horse was lost, etc."

Trumpet: to sound the alarm or to call to action. It was the signal to attack that was recognized by all the armies of the area. The enemy knew what it meant and their defeat was already in their minds because of the dreams the Lord had placed there.

Empty jars: represents the Christian who has been emptied of self so that we can contain the light of the world -- Jesus. It is in our being broken that the world can see what is inside of us.

The sequence of events is important. First the trumpet, then the revelation of the light and next the proclamation. John told of the sounding of the trumpets that would be an alarm to the world in the last days. But first, God will set apart 144,000 who will become broken bearers of the light and interpreter of the events to the people of the world. Each person in Gideon's army had to confront 450 others. The ratio will be 100 times as great for the 144,000 (population of the earth is around 6 billion people).

19-20 The element of surprise is important. When the Lord returns it will be when few are expecting it.

21-22 When we are standing firm in the Lord and have a position of righteousness then the enemy will sense the impending defeat and start to attack each other. In a sense we are seeing something of this happening in our government today. There is a call for integrity that was sounded several years ago and those in power did not submit themselves to the Source of all integrity (to God). However, they did start attacking each other with their own swords. (The sword of the Lord is the word of God, and the sword of the people is their own words.) The media is uncovering and attacking iniquity in businesses, churches, and the government. Business leaders are blaming the government, the government is blaming the churches, various parts of the government are blaming each other and the net effect is that they are killing each other off with their "swords." We must stand firm, blow the trumpet, smash the jars (take

up our cross daily in personal sacrifice), shine the light, and proclaim the sword of the Lord (His word).

23-25 When the enemy is in sufficient confusing and flight, then the call for the rest of the church to come forward in the clean up operation goes out. The relentless pursuit to eliminate evil influence in the land is a final phase that few have a heart to carry out.

Judges 8:1-17

1-3 Even when you are faithful to what God has called you to do and are victorious, someone will find something to criticize. The people of Ephraim were aware of the problem with the Midianites but had not done anything about it. Now, instead of being glad to have been brought into the battle when they were, there were resentful that someone else would be getting credit for the victory. Gideon took the path of humility, bragged on what they had done and that disarmed them.

4-12 Gideon and his 300 men were not willing to let exhaustion keep him from finishing the job. A great victory had already been accomplished but there was a remnant left. When he asked for help in getting the job done from the people of Succoth and Peniel, they adopted an attitude that additional sacrifice was not necessary and they would not help. Gideon promised retribution for not helping. Our refusing to help the work of the Kingdom of God does not prevent the work from being completed; however, there is a price to pay when we are asked to help and we refuse.

13-17 God gave Gideon the victory in spite of the lack of help from those whom he requested help. The sad situation is that punish came upon those who had refused to help. This should give us great concern regarding our withholding of resources we have that would benefit the Kingdom of God.

Judges 8:18-35

18-19 Crimes should not go unpunished. It makes little difference if the crimes are “war crimes” or crimes in the streets. A society, indeed a world, cannot survive unless criminals are dealt with.

20-21 Those in leadership have certain responsibilities that cannot be delegated. Sometimes we do not have “the heart” to execute judgment but it goes with leadership.

22-23 People tend to think that a person with talent and ability in one area of life would have such ability in every area. Just because Gideon was successful in defeating the Midianites, the people thought he should be their leader (judge, ruler). Gideon realized that he was not a great leader - God had not called him to do that. With wisdom, he pointed them to the true King of Israel, the Lord God.

24-26 Gideon wanted a remembrance of this time in his life. The ephod was a type of vest (front and back) that was worn by the priests. It was to be something like a “dress uniform” those in the military might want to keep, or a football jacket from high school. It was highly decorated with gold and fine linen. It was a trophy in honor of the great victory.

27 People tended to treat the trophy as something to be venerated and they worshiped it. We need to be careful that our accomplishments do not become a trap for us. Some people have never gotten over being state champion in the pole vault event when they were in high school. Some still live in the days when they were a star quarterback in college. They need to “just get over it” and “get on with their lives.”

28-35 The cycle repeated itself once again. When people are focused on a local leader rather than looking to God for leadership, then they are easy prey for the enemy of their souls when that local leader is no longer present to exercise control over them. The belief system of the people had not really changed. They secretly trusted in the pagan deities in spite of what they professed. This same phenomenon happen when missionaries go into places such as Africa. The people hear the gospel message and they profess belief in Jesus. However, when trouble comes they still rely on ju-ju and go to the witch doctor for help. All they have done is to add Jesus to the list of gods they worship.

Judges 9:1-21

1-5 As you sow, so shall you reap. Gideon fathered a child of a concubine. That child grew up and destroyed the sons of his wives. In pride coming from successes in life, we sometime indulge in acts that are less than noble. These eventually return to cause trouble. Abimelech, unlike Gideon his father, was hungry for power and recognition. He was so hungry that he was treacherous. He murdered 70 sons of Gideon to eliminate any opposition. But Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon escaped.

6-18 Jotham showed up at the anointing party for Abimelech and told the people of Shechem a story to illustrate that Gideon had many noble sons who would have made a better leader than Abimelech but they refused to take positions of leadership because of other priorities. This left the way open for an evil person to rise to leadership. People would rather follow a good man than an evil one. But they will follow an evil person if he is the only one who is willing to lead!

19-21 The consequences of following an evil person is that we will be exposed to the judgement due him for his evil.

Judges 9:22-41

22-25 God has assured us that vengeance belongs to him and He will bring judgement upon evil. Sometimes this judgement come in a short time (in this case three years) or after much delay. Some of God's judgements will not be manifested until Judgement Day. The very participants that killed Gideon's family were now fighting among themselves. We are not comfortable with the idea that God initiated this conflict between Abimelech and the people of Shechem.

26-29 Abimelech used "localized" pride to stir up strife and then Gaal came along and used the same tactics against Abimelech. Those who live by the sword will die by the sword.

30-41 The uprising against Gideon's sons was carried out because they had no advanced warning of what was coming. Abimelech had been warned and took the offensive in the battle. The lesson is that we must be aware of what the enemy is doing if we are to have victory. Too often, we in the church, play the role of ostrich with our heads in the sand and seem not even to care that the devil is taking many soul captive into eternal destruction.

Judges 9:42-57

42-57 God uses the wickedness of the wicked to destroy themselves. We have heard there is no honor among thieves. The pride and the greed of the wicked will cause them to fight among themselves. We, in the church, must always guard against pride and greed or we will find ourselves fighting among ourselves rather than against the power and principalities in the heavenlies.

The way Abimelech died shows that we can plan and prepare for the predictable and protect ourselves. However, unpredictable and unexpected things happen. The only preparation for such events is to be ready for worst in that we put all our future in the hands of God.

Judges 10

1-6 We can experience relatively long periods of time in which we have peace and people do not turn to wickedness. However, after several generations of lack of major conflict people tend to drift away from God. Regular self examination and comparison with what the word of God says we should be doing are needed to avoid drifting away.

7-9 If we are not dwelling in the presence of God, we cannot experience His protection. We will be victimized by the enemy of our souls. We will discover that we are not strong enough to protect ourselves if we do not draw near to God.

10-14 The patience of God can wear thin and He will allow us to prove to ourselves that the things in which we trust (money, fame, friends, etc.) are insufficient by withholding help.

15-16 We sometimes have to lose everything before we are willing to completely trust God to use us. We are so tied to trusting in that which we can see and feel that we are reluctant to let go of them unless we have "hit the bottom."

17-18 People need leadership in order to be effective.

Judges 11:1-20

1-11 Many times we are prejudiced against a person for a situation for which he has no responsibility or control. Jephthah could not change the fact that his mother was a prostitute. The Lord can use people who are available to Him regardless of their background.

12-20 The controversy over the land of Israel has been around since they came into the land. It continues today. We are to take control of the spiritual territory that has been given to us. The enemy will not give up easily and the battles will not cease.

Judges 11:21-40

21-28 When contending with the Lord's enemies, logical arguments do little or no good. The world does not accept the authority of God. The modern day world does not care what the Bible says. However, to those who are saved, that is all that matters.

29 God will enable those who work to do His will.

30-31 We should not lightly make vows unto God. God did not require such a vow from Jephthah. Was this a lack of trust in the intent and will of God to deliver Israel? Do we sometimes think that we have to make a deal with God in order to have victory?

32-33 The Lord gave the victory to Israel.

34-40 A tragic ending to an otherwise glorious victory. We need to guard the words of our mouth and seek to know God's will in all that we think, say and do.

Judges 12

The clan of Ephraim again found itself in a position of being left out of the victory that God gave to others

in Israel. A similar situation had developed in Gideon's time. When we fail to act when we are called to action, then we miss out on what God is doing. In Ephraim's case procrastination had become a way of life that affected multiple generations.

We see evidence that many in the church will not go on with the Lord as He is moving and they rise up in criticism of those who do. They will even oppose and fight against those who are faithful to God calling them heretics. At times in the history of the church, physical war resulted from such opposition (as happened between Gilead and Ephraim in this passage).

Judges 13:1-14

1 The pattern of deliverance and then drifting away from God plagued the Israelites for hundreds of years. The oppression at the hand of the Philistines probably started when Israel was in a greatly weakened condition because of fighting among themselves. It would seem that Christians spend more time criticizing and pecking at other Christians than they do in fighting evil in the world.

2-3 It would seem that God is establishing a pattern of miraculous births from which leaders or deliverers would result. The births of Isaac, Samuel, Jacob, and John the Baptist could be added to the list.

4-7 When God chooses a person for a special assignment He sometimes imposes restrictions on behavior and diet. The reason for the absence of alcohol can be understood because of the debilitating affects it has on a person. Not cutting one's hair could be simply to set the person apart from others.

8-14 Manoah was eager to do what it took to be obedient to God. He wanted to be taught the specifics of what was required. This willing attitude may have been the very reason God chose this family into which Samson was to be born.

The angel of the Lord did not give Manoah any additional instructions beyond that which he had told Manoah's wife. The instructions were simple enough and elaborate details were not needed. We need to be obedient to the truth that God has already revealed. The parts of the Bible we don't understand should not concern us so much as the parts we do understand.

Judges 13:15-25

14 The commandments of God are sufficient for success in life. They do not change. The word from the angel of the Lord was the same to Manoah as it was to his wife.

15 This is literally a case of "entertaining angels and not being aware of it." The people of the middle east have a strong tradition of hospitality to strangers. This is part of their culture.

16 The spiritual world is so different from the physical world that we cannot understand it. We enjoy eating food that provides physical nourishment to our bodies. The thing that gives pleasure to God is something of value that we give up in honor of Him that serves no other purpose than that. The world would call it wasting resources. (See also the story of the perfumed ointment that Mary poured out on Jesus prior to His death.)

17-18 Names had meaning and were descriptive of a person's character. Young's Literal Translation renders the response of the angel to be "It is Wonderful." This would be in keeping with one of the names by which the Messiah would be known (see Isaiah).

19-21 Manoah and his wife provided the sacrifice and the Lord provided the fire. The flames from the burning sacrifice provide the channel by which the Lord is lifted up in the sight of men so that they who see will realize that He is God and Lord of all.

22-23 The common understanding of the people of that day was that to see God meant to die. There may be truth hidden in that concept in that in order to really see God, then one must die to self.

24-25 The child's name meant "strong" and was well fitted for his role in life. The real strength of Samson was there because of the presence of the Spirit of the Lord which began to stir in him. The mighty acts that Samson did cannot be explained in terms of human strength.

Judges 14:1-9

1-4 Sometimes when people do seemingly irrational things, it may be that the Lord is stirring in their life to accomplish another purpose.

5-9 The incident with the lion and honey comb would prove to be a means by which Samson would provoke the Philistines. God can use the things around us for His purposes if we are walking in His will.

Judges 14:10-20

10-13 Apparently, the preparation and partying was part of the tradition of marriage. Some have suggested that Samson's going to find a bride in the Philistines is a picture of Christ calling His bride out of the Gentile world.

14 The riddle could be related in some way to the *mystery* mentioned several times in the NT. For example, *1Ti*

3:16 *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.* The lion could be our old carnal nature - the flesh. Upon the death of the flesh we then see sweetness manifested in the life of Christ in us -- which is the mystery hidden until Christ came: *Col 1:27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:*

15 The way of the world is to discover the mystery of life through its own means. There are many secret religious societies that attempt to discover such truth that is only found in God through His Son.

16-18 Samson's wife is an example of the apostate church that seeks to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God -- learning but never coming to the knowledge of the truth -- for the sake of survival. Many "join the church" as a fire insurance policy. These can quote scripture and mouth the right words but they have never been converted -- they are still Philistines. Such wide spread knowledge of the Kingdom principles results in those of the world being able to understand just enough about the church to cause it harm.

19-20 The harm that the world causes the church is eventually repaid. The apostate church will not be recognized as a true bride.

Judges 15

If there is a relationship that can be found in the way God has dealt with the church to what happen in Samson's life, then we might conclude the following:

The time of the wheat harvest was at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was given at this time of the year to the young church. As Christ attempted to restore relationship with the apostate church (Roman Catholicism) He found that it was void of the Holy Spirit and had been given by the leadership (the father) over to the way of the world and had become aligned with the devil. The younger sister could be the church of the Reformation. The fires might be the religious wars that came out of that period in which the power of the Catholic church was broken with the arrest of the Pope in 1798.

The situation of the Israelites coming to bind Samson and turn him over to the Philistines might be related to the Jew arresting Jesus and turning Him over to the Romans. One of the excuses that the Jewish leaders made for arresting Jesus was that He was stirring up trouble and they were afraid that it might bring on a crack-down by the Romans. Samson could have resisted being taken by his countrymen and Jesus could have prevented His arrest and trial.

The cords with which Samson was bound are representative of the grave clothes with which Jesus was bound. The Philistines were jubilant when they thought they had won. I would imagine that the devil thought he had won when Jesus was crucified. However, it was this very act that broke his power.

This event may also relate to the future when the religious coalition will line with the political coalition and attempt to squash the true church. This time will result in persecution of the church and many will die for their faith.

Judges 16:1-14

1-3 If we engage in sinful practices, then we put ourselves in danger from the enemy of our souls. Our deliverance from such is found if we realize the sinfulness of the situation (Samson got up in the middle of the night) and flee from it. Such repentance allows God to intervene on our behalf. In Samson's case he was strengthened to be able to remove the gates and posts of the walled city. (1 Cor 10:13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God [is] faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear [it].)

4-14 The lure of the world is always with us. Samson may have been in love with Delilah but she cared only for herself and the money she could make. The world system is interested in the church only to extent to know how to weaken and use it for their own purposes. It is through sinful alliances that they gain access to us and capture the church for its own purposes. Such influence has already manifested itself in the local church whose members are black. The agenda is not so much the Kingdom of God but is primarily on the "black" political agenda. We can see such error in the political activism of the National Council of Churches, the embracing of the politically correct agendas of various "moderate" (read that liberal) denominations. All these activities are lauded in the secular press. Not all such activities are wrong -- the true church must take a stand against ungodliness and when it does the secular press is quick to censure.

Judges 16:15-31

15-16 The agents of the devil are persistent. Several years ago we watched as the pro-liquor forces came with wave after wave of assault on the community to get package stores and then liquor by the drink approved. In many other areas of decency and morality we have sit by and allowed the enemies of the Kingdom of God to capture the minds of our inheritance (our children).

17-19 Those who have sold out to the enemy have done so for money. The church has been asleep and seemingly powerless to prevent the devastation from happening.

20-21 The control of many of our traditional churches is in the hands of the professional religious people and not true believers. Most of those in the congregations have been blinded or refuse to see what is happening. Consequently, parts of what is called the church are being used to accomplish the purposes of the world system which is oppressing the true church.

22 If we will but repent and realize the error of our ways, then the power of the Spirit of God will again manifest itself in the Church.

23-25 The “Dagon” of modern America and most of Western Civilization is “humanism.” We think that education is the key and economic prosperity is solve all the problems of the world. The church is seen as the enemy of what the humanist are trying to accomplish. The secularization of America is seen as a victory for them. In the meantime, they make “sport” of the church -- they ridicule and criticize at every turn.

26-30 The two central pillars of secular humanism is the basic good of humanity and the power of education bring out that goodness. We have to show the depravity of the old sin nature and the uselessness of trying to report that which is depraved. These “pillars” must be pulled down!

31 Samson was called to a mission in life even before his birth. His life was not one of sinless perfection, but he was useful to God in bring liberation to the people of God. That liberation was temporary but is an example of what was to happen with the come of the Savior.

Judges 17

1-13 This is a rather sad situation. The mother found her money was missing and it would appear that she made a vow to do something religious with part of it if the Lord would let her find it. She also pronounced a curse on the one who stole it. It turns out that her son took it and he (upon hearing the curse) immediately return it to her. She was determine to do something to honor the Lord; however, what she chose to do was an abomination to Him. She created her own little system of worship complete with idols and sacred garments. Was she sincere? Very much so. Was she wrong? Very much so.

The self deception did not end there, the family went so far to hire a priest and to carry out their religious observances in a big way. This occurred after the death of Joshua and is thought to be the start of idol worship in Israel. It was born out of ignorance and the lack of leadership. How many religious cults have gotten started in our times because of well-intentioned but seriously flawed philosophies? A sad situation, indeed.

Judges 18:1-13

1-13 When people are without leadership and when they have been denied what should have been given them (their inheritance), then they will tend to lose patience and take matters into their own hands. Some times they will inquire of God as to what they should do. In this case, they inquired of a priest who was in error and presided over an idol temple. Consequently, they received bad advice. People today who feel disenfranchised have turned to their religious leaders and some have been given bad advice regarding what they should do. Some have even turned away from Christianity to Islam or Eastern mysticism for advice.

Judges 18:14-31

14-16 We tend to put our trust in things we can see and feel. The Danites thought the success of Micah and his neighbors was because of the religious things (idols and ephod) they had. Faulty thinking caused them to believe that if they had these items, then they would be successful.

17-19 Apparently, they thought that the reason these objects worked was that they were used properly. Therefore, they needed a priest to say the right words or go through the right rituals. We sometimes think in similar terms in our approach to God. We think we must use the right words in our prayers and think the right thoughts and even avoid saying certain things. When we do that, we relegate God to the position of a carved image that we can manipulate.

20 The young priest was as deluded as the people who trusted in the idol. He was vain enough to believe that he was a key to the success of the people through what he did.

21-23 The Danites knew that stealing the religious objects was wrong -- this seems inconsistent that one would combine stealing with what they do for religious observances. They tried to protect their family and livestock from attack from Micah and his neighbors.

24-26 Micah was devastated at the loss of his carved and molten images. It was not just the monetary value of the silver but he believed that these were the most important things in his life. Notice his question, “You took the gods I made, and my priest, and went away. What else do I have?” These objects of religion were more important to him that all else he had in life. It is tragic that Christians do not have the same kind of devotion to the True and Living God that this man had to a false god.

When we make materialism or false philosophies our gods, then other can steal or discredit them. However, if our devotion is directed to the Creator of all the universe, then He will remain forever.

27-31 The presence of a false god and religious objects did not provide any restraint for the Danites in killing the people of Laish. When we put our trust in such false things, they perpetuate themselves and have influence beyond ourselves and our times.

Judges 19:1-15

1-15 Without good leadership and positive examples for people to follow, there is little restraint in what people do. Several practices had happened in this sequence that are outside the will of God and these eventually led to tragic results. The practice of having concubines is questionable. This practice may be similar to what we are seeing today with live-in relationships. The unfaithfulness of this woman to the Levite was tantamount to harlotry.

We see the gracious hospitality of the girl's father. This was typical of that area of the world for respectable people. This hospitality led to several delays in their journey and could have been important regarding the timing of what followed.

The Levite was afraid to spend the night in a city of non-Israelites but moved to the next town where his countrymen resided. As the story unfolds, we may see that an evil countryman can be worse than strangers. Many people discover that they are just as likely to be cheated by a church member as by a nonbeliever.

Judges 19:16-30

16-21 The society of that day will changing and the places were populated by both good and evil people. The older man knew the importance of hospitality and also knew the dangers of people being "on the streets" at night.

22-23 Wanton sexuality and perversion will eventually lead to overt aggressive behavior if it is left unchecked. The laws of Israel call for death to such people because such practices lead to the downfall of a culture. If we want to see where our present policies are taking us in our nation we can get a glimpse from what follows in this account.

24-28 This is a sad commentary on the regard people had for women in such a culture. It was as if the concubine was not even considered a person.

29-30 Sometimes tragedies have to be dramatized in order to get people motivated to take action.

Judges 20:1-16

1-16 When evil become entrenched in an area only drastic action will purge it from the land. Those who have been involved in evil will not readily repent nor give up the guilty for punishment.

Judges 20:17-36

17-25 The people of Israel paid a high price for the sins of a few who had polluted the land. It took much blood being shed in eradication of evil. It is better to not let such sinfulness go to the point of requiring drastic measure to remove it. The Israelites pray and received direction from the Lord and they still suffered many losses.

26-28 The seriousness of the situation did not come to full realization for the Israelites until they had lost 40,000 of their men. They then fasted and sacrificed to God to gain the advantage they needed to defeat the enemy. (In the ministry of Jesus, He had told His disciples that certain problems could be dealt with only by pray and fasting.)

29-36 We cannot win every battle by a direct frontal approach. We must surround and trap the enemy before victory can be gained. Too often the church will attach the symptoms of problems with a frontal attack for which the enemy to all too well prepared.

Judges 20:37-48

37-40 If the enemies of the Kingdom of Heaven are going to be defeated, then planning is needed. Those who advocate and defend pornography, homosexuality, promiscuity, legalizing drugs, legalized gambling, and such things that ruin people and tear down a society have area that are vulnerable. The church must find these point and relentlessly attack them.

41-43 It seems as if the church is on the defensive and retreating by giving up more and more ground to the devil. Jesus told us that the devil came to steal, kill and destroy. However, the victory is ours is we will organized and then take the battle to the enemy in a wise manner. The fortress (wall city) they have is the court system with liberal judges. Once this is corrected, then the final stages of defeating them can occur.

44-46 The Benjamites are described as valiant fighters. They were well trained. Some of the best minds of the people of this nation are aligned against the Kingdom of God. The school system is the enlistment center for luring people into the world system of secular humanism. We have had little success in stemming the tide and too few Christians are willing to get involved in making a difference.

47-48 Our best efforts will not entirely eliminate the influence of secular humanism. Many may find their positions

to be unpopular but will simply go underground and start the infiltration process again. I believe that we must start the process with ourselves. There is a conflict within each of us as to whether we will go the way of the world or the way of the cross. As we take up our cross daily, we must put all the strongholds of the carnal nature to the sword (hold them against the word of God) and set on fire everything all the wood, hay and stubble to purify ourselves.

Judges 21:1-12

1-12 We are cautioned in the proverbs to not be too hasty in making a vow lest we not be able to keep it. In their emotional condition of having defeated the Benjamites, the people of Israel vowed to not let any of their daughters marry a Benjamite. They also vowed severe penalties for those who did not attend a called assembly. This vow resulted in the deaths of many people. They were selective in who they killed in that they saved the virgins to be given to the men of Benjamin. We see a wholesale disregard for human life and a total disregard for the personhood of women.

Judges 21:13-25

13-25 The sinfulness of the men of Gilead in their wanton sexual perversion resulted in the deaths of nearly 100,000 people and the disruption of the lives of many more. Sin exacts a terrible price on the person who sins and on the nation itself.

The consequences of hastily made vows and oaths continued to the point of encouraging the men of Benjamin to kidnap wives for themselves. One mistake leads to many others if we simply try to cover over the initial sin rather than confess it and repent of it.