

Dickson Old Testament Commentary

JUDGES

WRITER

Jewish tradition attributes the authorship of the book to Samuel who was a prophet and judge of Israel. However, it is uncertain as to who wrote the book. In reference to the nature of the writing of the book, we can assume that the Holy Spirit used one or several different writers. It is not necessary that we know the writer of any specific inspired book in order to accept the book as inspired. If the Jews accepted the book as inspired when written, and subsequently added the book to the canon of Jewish Old Testament Scriptures, then we also accept the book as a part of the Old Testament.

DATE

The authorship of the book depends a great deal on when the book was written. Isaiah 9:4 seems to elude to Judges 7:21-25. If this is true then the book would have been written before the time of Isaiah who ministered during the 7th century B.C. In 992 B.C. the Canaanites were still living in Gezer (1:29) when Pharaoh conquered the city. However, Pharaoh drove them out and later presented the city to one of Solomon's wives around 970 B.C. (1 Kg 9:16). Thus the book would be dated sometime before 992 B.C. when the Canaanites were still living in Gezer. Also, the Jebusites were still living in Jerusalem (1:21), and thus the book would have been written before the time of David who drove them out of the city around 1048 B.C. (2 Sm 5:6-9). It would have been written before the time of Saul, the first king of Israel, for several times it is mentioned that there was no king in Israel (See 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). There is no conclusive argument that establishes the date of the book. It could have been written any time after the events of the book to the time of the reign of King Saul.

BOOK

The book of Joshua covers about 350 years of Jewish history from the time of the death of Joshua to the judgeship of Samuel. The book derives its name from the Septuagint, Peshitta and Latin Vulgate. The early Jewish copies of the book entitled it, *sepher shophetiym*, meaning "a book of judges," or "a book of governors." *Shophetiym* is a Hebrew word that means "to judge," "to govern," or "to rule." The judges were either warriors, chieftains as Gideon and Samson who delivered Israel from their enemies, priests as Eli who directed Israel's heart back to God, or prophets as Samuel. They worked as God's appointed men to accomplish His work among

the Israelites. However, there was no succession of judges who descended from them in their families. They did not have authority to change the law of God in any way, but worked to lead Israel back to the law. They did not add prophetic messages to the canon of Old Testament Scriptures. They were exceptional people that God raised up in a time of national calamity in order to save Israel from her enemies. We know the names of 16 judges, but not all their names.

The book of Judges is a record of the unfaithfulness of Israel and God's efforts to call her to repentance. It is a book that explains the mercy and grace of God in reference to the sin of His people. One of the major lessons of the book is that after the death of Joshua, and for approximately the next 350 years, Israel continually went into apostasy and was called back to faithfulness. The Israelites' apostasy from their covenant with God was persistent. Their disobedience led them to national disasters, economic oppression and raids by foreign powers. Nevertheless, God was faithful in delivering them from the economic oppression of their enemies. Because of the Canaanites, which Israel failed to drive out of the land, the Israelites were continually influenced to forsake the conditions of the covenant that they had with God. There is thus a repeated cycle of history recorded in this book. The people went into sin, God sent Israel's enemies to subdue and oppress her, the people repented, and as a result of her repentance God delivered her from her enemies.

SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Understanding the social structure of Israel and her economics during the initial years of her possession of the land helps us to interpret the book of Judges. When the Israelites settled in the land, they became an agricultural nation with families living independently on farms throughout the territory of Palestine. Each tribe settled in a particular allotted territory where they farmed the land and grew into a clan of families.

There were 46 cities given to the Levites, and thus at least these cities were places to which the people were to go for instruction in the law of God. The people took their offerings to these cities for the Levites, and thus these cities were not centers of trade, but centers for offerings. Neither were these cities business centers as we would conceive them to be after the modern-day cities in which we live today. The cities of the Levites were actually small towns or villages that could be fed by the produce of nearby farms, and those who brought their offerings to the Levites.

Those Israelites who lived in the rural area of Palestine had to live independently, and thus they sought to sell their produce to any nearby people. The Israelites, therefore, lived in the country, farming the land, and making periodic visits to the cities of the Levites. The tribes settled throughout their allotted territories. The families developed into clans as sons and daughters stayed in close proximity to one another and the patriarch family of the clan. In this way the Israelites grew to

populate the land that was initially given to the families after the conclusion of the national wars of Israel.

As each tribe developed within their allotted territories, they became somewhat autonomous from one another as independent farmers, and to some extent anonymous from one another. This spirit of autonomy eventually led to a sense of nationhood within each particular tribal group. Since each tribe failed in their responsibility to drive out the remaining Canaanites within their allotted territory after the conclusion of the national wars that were led by Joshua, their autonomy became an opportunity that led to oppression and raids. Because of their spirit of autonomy, the Israelites began to associate and trade with the remaining Canaanites in their particular territories. With the trade came social contact and intermarriage. The Canaanites eventually took advantage of this by economically subjecting the Israelite farmers to supply their needs by demanding tribute. Those farmers who did not subject themselves were raided by nearby foreign powers as the Midianites. In their autonomy, and often anonymous relationship with one another, the Israelites were easy victims to the oppression of the Canaanites and raids by neighboring foreigners.

The tribes' socioeconomic relationship with the Canaanites led to the Israelites acceptance of the religious beliefs of those with whom they traded and intermarried. The Israelites did not reject their belief in the one true God, they only added to their religious beliefs the gods of the Canaanites. Their compromise of beliefs, thus led them to compromise their values, and subsequently their behavior. In this spiritual adultery they were led away from the will of God.

PERIOD OF THE JUDGES

It is not possible to reckon the 450 years that is mentioned by Paul in Acts 13:20 with the duration of the ministry of each judge and the respective time of peace given to the judge in this book. In the book of Judges we are not told about the oppression of the Sidonians and the Maonites (Jg 10:12). Neither are we told how long Shamgar judged (Jg 3:31). The following chart helps in some way to understand the oppressions and deliverances of the judges. However, other than the times that are given for judgeship

REFERENCE	OPPRESSOR	YEARS	JUDGE	PEACE
3:7-11	Cushan Rishathaim	8	Othniel	40 years
3:12-31	Moabites & Philistines	18	Ehud/Shamgar	80 years
4:1 – 5:31	Northern Canaanites	20	Deborah/Barak	40 years
6:8-32	Midianites	7	Gideon	40 years
9:1 – 10:6	Civil wars		Abimelech/Tola/Jair	48 years
10:6 – 12:15	Ammonites	18	Jephthah/Ibzan Elon/Abdon	32 years
13:1-16	Philistines	40	Samson/Eli/Samuel	20 years

and peace, it is difficult to determine any exact dates in biblical history prior to the reign of Solomon.

Faithful Years

(1:1 – 3:6)

Outline: (1) Living under God's direction (1:1-36), (2) Rebuke for compromise (2:1-6), (3) Loyalty of the people (2:7-10), (4) Apostasy and punishment (2:11-23), (5) Testing by their enemies (3:1-6).

Chapter 1

LIVING UNDER GOD'S DIRECTION

1:1-7 *Judah will go up:* The command to defend the land was now in the hands of individual tribes, not a central command as through Joshua. A shift from national responsibility to tribal responsibility for driving out the Canaanites now took place in the history of Israel. ***Simeon:*** Because they did not have confidence in themselves to defeat the Canaanites, Judah asked for the help of the tribe of Simeon. ***Perizzites:*** The mention of the Canaanites in this context indicates that these nomadic people continued to dwell at least in the central region of Palestine. ***Abonibezek:*** This was possibly the title of a position and not the name of a specific individual, though the context seems to indicate that this was the name of a person. ***Cut off his thumbs and his great toes:*** The symbolism here was to incapacitate an individual in reference to his ability to carry a sword or run in battle. The physical amputations symbolized the amputation of the power of the leadership of a na-

tion. Abonibezek realized that he must reap what he had sown in reference to his conquest of others (See comments Gl 6:7). He had been brutal to others, and thus he here reaped his own brutality.

1:8-15 *Had fought against Jerusalem:* This is added information concerning the defeat of Jerusalem that took place under the leadership of Joshua (See Ja 10). ***The Negev:*** Or, the Negeb, or South. This was the southern area of Palestine that was mostly desert. ***Hebron:*** Formerly called, Kirjath Arba, Hebron was a city in the hill country about 19 miles (25 kilometers) southwest of Jerusalem (See Nm 13:22; Ja 15:14). ***Othniel:*** This was Caleb's nephew, if we assume that Kenaz was Caleb's younger brother. ***Achsah:*** Joshua gave her beyond what she asked (See Ja 15:15-19).

1:16-21 *Father-in-law:* This term could also be translated "brother-in-law" (See 4:11). The father-in-law of Moses was Jethro (Ex 3:1; 4:18) or Reuel (Ex 2:18). Hobab was the son of Reuel (Nm 10:29), which would make him the brother-in-law of Moses. ***Kenite:*** The Kenites were in Palestine as early as the days of Abraham (Gn 15:19). ***Hobab:*** Because he was familiar with the wilderness in which Israel was condemned to wander, Hobab was invited as a guide for Israel. When Israel settled in the land of promise, the family of Hobab settled in a city at the south end of the Dead Sea (4:11). ***Zephath:*** During the battle

against this city some of the Israelite soldiers were captured (See Nm 21:1-3). Because of this their fellow soldiers made a commitment that they would completely destroy the city (Ja 6:18). Later the city was renamed Hormah. **Gaza ... Askelon ... Ekron:** There were three major cities of the Philistines that were southwest of Jerusalem in the coastal regions of Palestine. Later in the history of Israel, they gained their independence and were a thorn in the flesh of Israel (See 1 Sm 4:2). **The Jebusites:** See Ja 3:10; 18:28. The Jebusites, meaning, "to trample upon," were still in Jerusalem at the time of David's reign (2 Sm 4:6,7; 1 Ch 11:4-8). Since they occupied Jerusalem at the time of this writing, this would indicate that the book of Joshua was written before the reign of King David, for David drove out the Jebusites from the city of Jerusalem.

1:22-26 Bethel: The Canaanites called this city Luz (Gn 28:19). There was also a second city call Bethel which was located in the territory of Simeon (1 Sm 30:27). **Land of the Hittites:** This land possibly extended into southern Asia Minor. Between 1,900 to around 1,200 B.C., the Hittites were a great empire of people in southern Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). The territory of their kingdom extended south into the northern regions of Palestine.

1:26-36 Manasseh did not drive out: See Ja 17:11-13. What Manasseh failed to do here later became a curse to them and Israel. As the other tribes, after the national wars under the command of Joshua, they were to assume their tribal

responsibility of cleansing the land of the Canaanites once the land was allotted to the individual tribes. They, as the other tribes, failed to do this. Subsequently, the Canaanite culture of wicked idolatry infiltrated Israel. **Beth Shean:** This city was established around 3,000 B.C. and was known as Decapolis in the days of Jesus (Mt 4:25; see 1 Sm 31:10). Today it is called Beisan. **Taanach:** See Ja 17:11; 21:25. **Megiddo:** Or, Megiddon (Zc 12:11) was an ancient city that was established around 3,500 B.C. **Gezer:** See 2 Sm 5:25; 1 Ch 14:16. This ancient city was in existence by 3,000 B.C. **Became forced labor ... tributaries:** The inhabitants of those cities that Israel did not conquer either became bondservants to Israel at this time or they were subjected to paying tribute to Israel. This plan may have seemed good to Israel at the time, but it later became a moral disaster to each tribal group. The idolatrous culture of the inhabitants of these cities later changed the culture of Israel, turned their minds away from God, and finally resulted in Israel's eradication centuries later from the promised land through the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. The reason the religious beliefs of the Canaanites were accepted by the Israelites was because the Canaanite beliefs appealed to the carnal nature of man. They were beliefs that were formed after the desire of those who humanistically looked to themselves as the authority of belief and behavior. As the Canaanites did that which was right in their own eyes, so the Israelites eventually assumed the same world view.

Chapter 2

REBUKE FOR COMPROMISE

2:1-6 *An angel of the Lord:* See Ex 23:20; Ja 5:13-15 (Compare Ex 34:10-27). This was a messenger of God who reminded Israel of their failure to obey the command of God in reference to making any covenants with the inhabitants of the land. Since reference here is to “an angel” we would not assume that this was the preincarnate Christ, but one of His messengers to the people of Israel. The angel was simply delivering to Israel the message of the Lord. ***You have not obeyed My voice:*** The Israelites had formerly promised that they would not break their covenant with the Lord. But they went back on their promise by making alliances with those they were to eradicate from the land (See Ex 34:10-27). ***Bochim:*** This word means, “weepers.” They wept when they were reminded that they had not kept the conditions of the covenant. They were repentant, but they still failed to eradicate the land of the Canaanite culture. Their repentance, therefore, was not combined with works.

LOYALTY OF THE PEOPLE

2:7-10 The statements here end the review of what took place during the days of Joshua. The nation was loyal to God through the leadership of Joshua. However, this all changed in the decades after the death of Joshua. ***Another generation ... that did not know the Lord:*** This new generation was an indication of the failure of the fathers to communicate the wonders, works and will of God

to their children. It seems that they not only failed to teach their children the work of the Lord in settling Israel in the land, they also failed to teach them the law of the Lord. This failure would be repeated throughout the history of Israel. Successive generations would fail to remember the Lord, and thus the Lord would discipline them through the oppression and raids of their enemies. The people would repent, have peace for a brief period of time, but then again forget the Lord. This was the history of Israel as it is recorded in the book of Joshua.

2:11-15 *Served the Baals:* The word “baal” means “lord,” “possessor,” “owner,” or “husband.” The plural form, “baalim,” refers to the “great lords” or “sovereign owners.” These gods that were created after the imagination of men appealed to the humanistic lusts of the flesh. In most cases, religious behavior that was connected to Baal worship was focused on the fertility of man, land and animals. Certain occult practices were adhered to because it was believed that such practices were necessary for the productivity of the land, animals and men. Baal was the imagined god of the Chaldeans, Phoenicians and Moabites (Nm 22:41). The Philistines, where Baal was referred to as Baalzebub, or “lord of flies” (2 Kg 1:2), also practiced some of the rites of the Baal gods. Human sacrifice was associated with Baal worship and various lascivious ceremonies (1 Kg 14:24; Hs 13:2). Parents even sacrificed their children to Baal in some instances (Jr 19:5). ***Ashtaroth:*** Astarte was the

ancient Semitic goddess of love, fertility and marriage. This was also an ancient religion that was invented by man to please the lusts of the flesh. It was practiced in the days of Abraham (Gn 14:5) and was a religion of the Sidonians and Phoenicians (1 Kg 11:33). It was also practiced among the Arabs and Philistines (1 Sm 31:10). Among the Babylonians and Assyrians, Astarte, or Ishtar, was also a goddess of war. The practice of fornication was a part of this religion (See 1 Kg 11:5). Astarte was also known as the “queen of heaven” (Jr 7:18). The Greeks referred to her as Aphrodite and the Romans called her Venus. Both the Baal gods and the Ashtaroth were the creation of men who sought to follow after the lust of the eyes, lusts of the flesh and pride of life. These gods were the creation of men who refused to seek out the law of God, but rather sought to please their own carnal imaginations and lusts. Following after such gods was rebellion against God. When the Israelites went after their own imaginations in serving their own religious creations, God became their adversary (1 Sm 28:16). Through the proxy of Israel’s enemies, He disciplined them by removing His protective hand over the nation (Jb 1:10; Zc 2:5).

2:16-23 The Lord raised up judges:

This is the repetitive action of God in response to the cries of Israel to be delivered from her enemies that God released upon her because of her sin. This is the theme of the book of Judges. The judges were leaders, governors or chieftains who were commissioned by God to

deliver Israel from her oppressors. In every case when Israel forsook God, there was a repetitive cycle of restoration. The cycle involved Israel’s sin, bondage to foreign powers, repentance, prayer for deliverance, God’s raising up of a judge, God’s deliverance, and then the death of the judge. ***Prostituted themselves after other gods:*** They were unfaithful to the Lord, and thus gave themselves to gods that they had created after their own imagination (See Hs 2:5,13). ***The Lord left those nations:*** This statement reveals the inadequacy of Israel as a military power to do anything without the power of God behind them. They could never as a nation have driven out of Palestine those nations they did without the power of God working through them. As tribal groups who gave up on God, they were completely inadequate to drive out those Canaanites who dwelt in their homelands. When God left them, they were not able to drive out the nations. God thus took the credit for leaving nations in the land and among the Israelites because the Israelites by their own military strength could not totally eradicate the Canaanites from the land. Christians would do well to remember this principle (See Rm 8:31,37; Ph 4:13). Without the power of God in our lives, we can do nothing.

Chapter 3

TESTING BY THEIR ENEMIES

3:1-6 The Lord left to test Israel:

God turns that which is wrong into good for His people. By forsaking the will of God, He did not work for the tribal groups in their efforts to cast out of their allot-

ted inheritances the remnants of the Canaanites. When they forsook God, God forsook them and allowed them to be overcome by their enemies. However, God used the occasion of Israel's negligence to develop the armies of the individual tribes in order to strengthen them against future attacks by the Canaanites. The Canaanite peoples who are mentioned in this context remained in the land of Palestine throughout Israel's years in Palestine. Since many Israelites intermarried with the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, it would be difficult to say that any Jew was pure Jew in his or her lineage back to the sons of Jacob. By the time of Jesus, no mention is made of the Canaanite people, and thus we would assume that they had been integrated into Israel by the time Jesus was born into the world. **Mt. Lebanon:** This is the snow-covered mountain range of northern Palestine. The highest peak is about 10,200 feet. **Mt. Hermon:** This was the northernmost area of conquest during the time of Moses and Joshua. This mountain is about 9,000 feet above sea level and is covered with snow. It is the source of the Jordan River and was possibly the mountain of transfiguration of Jesus (See Mt 17:1-13).

History Of Unfaithfulness And Repentance (3:7 – 16:31)

Outline: (1) Othniel delivers Israel (3:7-11), (2) Ehud delivers Israel (3:12-30), (3) Shamgar defeats the Philistines (3:31), (4) Deborah and Barak deliver

Israel (4:1 – 5:31), (5) Gideon delivers Israel (6:1 – 8:35), (6) The tyranny of Abimelech (9:1-57), (7) Tola and Jair (10:1-5), (8) Jephthah delivers Israel (10:6 – 12:7), (9) Ibzan, Elon and Abdon (12:8-15), (10) Samson and the Philistines (13:1 – 16:31)

OTHNIEL DELIVERS ISRAEL

3:7-11 *The children of Israel did evil:* This phrase introduces each occasion when God was sought to rescue Israel from her oppressors. The cycles of sin and restoration started with Israel forgetting the Lord and serving the Baals at the Asherahs (groves) (See 2:11). **Asthoreths:** See Ex 34:13; Dt 16:21; 1 Kg 16:33; 2 Kg 13:6; 17:16; 18:4; 21:3; 23:6,15. Once they sinned, the anger of the Lord was kindled against His people. By the Lord's discipline through a foreign oppressor, the apostasy was stopped when Israel repented. After their repentance, the Lord delivered them. **Cushan-Rishathaim:** The Hebrew word here means "an Ethiopian of great wickedness." **Mesopotamia:** This is a Greek word that was given to the region between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (See At 2:9). Since the Cushite king was king over Mesopotamia, we would assume that this invasion of the land of Palestine came from the east. **Othniel:** Since Othniel was Caleb's younger brother, this apostasy took place soon after the death of the patriarchs who initially took portions of the land of Palestine from the Canaanites. **The Spirit of the Lord:** The judges whom God rose up could do nothing without the help of

the Holy Spirit of God. Though the judges were often charismatic leaders, their leadership was enhanced by the Spirit, and thus people saw in them the help of God. **Rest forty years:** This generational period of time was the result of the influence that a strong leader had on the people. It seems that Israel had a difficult time instilling in her children the knowledge of and obedience to the will of God. They remained faithful throughout the life of those who experienced the direct work of God to deliver them from their enemies. However, when the generation that experienced the deliverance of God died, the children digressed into sin.

EHUD DELIVERS ISRAEL

3:12-30 Eglon: The Moabites resided east of the Jordan in the region between the Dead Sea and the Arnon River. By forming a coalition with the Ammonites and the Amalekites, Eglon was used as God's proxy judgment against Israel. The Ammonites, meaning "born of a kindred (incest)," originated from Ben-ammi (Gn 19:38). Ben-ammi was the son of Lot whose mother was Lot's younger daughter. The Amalekites originated from Amalek, the son of Esau (Gn 36:12), who was the father of an Arab people (See Ex 17:8; Dt 25:17). **Ehud:** As most of the Benjamites, Ehud was left-handed. **Present to Eglon:** This was probably the regular tribute that was being paid to Eglon by Israel. **Gilgal:** This term refers to sculptured images, or idols. **Message from God:** Because Ehud was left-handed, he caught Eglon off guard, and

thus the lethal blow was struck with a knife that was approximately 18 inches long. Ehud struck the king so hard with the knife that the hilt of the knife was also thrust into the abdomen of Eglon. This death of the Moabite King rallied enthusiasm on the part of Israel. Through Ehud's leadership, God once again delivered Israel out of the hand of oppressors from the east. As a result, Israel had peace from oppressors for 80 years.

SHAMGAR DEFEATS THE PHILISTINES

3:31 Only one verse of scripture is dedicated to the work of Shamgar. With a long pole that is sharpened at one end, and is used to direct oxen, he slew 600 Philistines. From the brevity of this account of the third judge doing such great harm to the Philistines, we would assume that God wanted Israel to remember that it required only one person with His help to inflict great harm on Israel's enemies. There would have been no possible way for Shamgar to do what he did on his own. We must conclude that only through the physical empowerment of God he was able to kill 600 men with one sharpened pole. This physical empowerment was magnified in the life of Samson.

Chapter 4 DEBORAH AND BARAK DELIVER ISRAEL

4:1-3 Jabin: This was a Canaanite king who reigned in Hazor which was located in the territory of Naphtali (See Ja 11:13; 1 Kg 9:15). **Mightily oppressed:** The oppression was the

Canaanite king's subjection of the Israelite farmers to supply his people with food. The oppression was probably greater than the oppressions that were brought on Israel by other nations. It may be that Jabin was overconfident in his 900 chariots of iron, and thus extracted extreme servitude from the Israelite farmers. Whatever the case, this oppression was extreme, and for this reason, a great deal of history is here dedicated to the victory of Israel to throw off this oppression.

4:4-10 Deborah: As a prophetess, Deborah had been judging Israel at the beginning of Jabin's oppression. Unfortunately, Israel was not listening to this woman prophet, and thus did not keep themselves close to God. **Ramah:** There were other cities named Ramah in Israel (See Ja 19:8,29,36; 1 Sm 1:19; 2 Kg 8:28,29). **If you will go with me:** For some reason, Barak was cautious about the plan of Deborah, for he wanted her presence by his side when the plan of attack was carried out. Because he wanted the presence of Deborah, Barak would receive no glory from this victory, for Jabin would be delivered into the hand of a woman.

4:11-16 The Lord has delivered Sisera: Credit was always given to the Lord for Israel's victories. This case was no different. Sisera was informed of the challenge of the assembled army of Israel, and thus marshalled his army to put down the rebellion. **The Lord routed Sisera:** The Hebrew word for "routed" means to "confuse," or "scatter." The direct hand of the Lord was involved in

this battle, for a flash flood of the Kishon River turned the plains into mud through which the 900 chariots of Sisera could not pass. There was thus great confusion in the army of Sisera. With his entire army, Sisera fled on foot in fear of the Israelites.

4:17-24 The tent of Jael: This nomadic family lived in peace with both the Canaanites and the Israelites. Jael had surely heard of the defeat of Sisera's army, and thus under the guise of being hospitable, invited Sisera into her tent in order to pretend to protect him. Unaware of being deceived, Sisera fell into a deep sleep. While asleep, Jael drove a tent peg through Sisera's head. The Kenites thus maintained their peaceful relationship with the Israelites by the act of a woman who killed one of the leaders of the enemies of God. **Until they had destroyed Jabin:** The defeat of Sisera was the beginning of the end of Jabin and his oppression of Israel. From the time of this victory, the Israelite army grew stronger and bolder until they destroyed Jabin and his kingdom.

Chapter 5

5:1-5 This chapter is a poetic song of the victory of Israel over the army of Sisera. The composition of the narrative is one of the oldest pieces of Hebrew poetry. **Willingly offered themselves:** God gives victory to those who totally commit themselves to Him. When the leaders accept their responsibility to lead God's people and the people sacrifice themselves, great things happen to the glory of God.

5:6-11 *The days of Shamgar ... Jael:*

Because of thieves, the main roads were not used in those days. Because it was unsafe to live in the villages, the people lived in walled cities. Not even a spear or shield could be found among 40,000 soldiers. Anarchy prevailed until Deborah, the mother of Israel. ***Mother in Israel:*** Deborah's motherly concern for Israel was the salvation of Israel. Not only did she have responsibilities in the home (4:4), but as a prophetess, she spoke to the people for the Lord. She inspired others to walk by faith (4:8,9), and in this chapter, and on behalf of the people, she gave praise to God. The lives of godly women have great impact on the people of God. ***Governors ... offered themselves willingly:*** When leaders offer themselves for the people, the people are inspired to follow. Good leadership is defined by those who lead for the sake of the people and not for themselves. In this case, it was the leadership of a godly woman who led by the righteous example of her commitment to the Lord.

5:12-18 Deborah and Barak were called to inspire faith and confidence in the people to stand against Sisera. Jabin sent Sisera to oppress the regions of Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir, Zebulun and Issachar. On the other hand, Reuben, Dan and Asher were indifferent to the appeal to fight against Jabin and Sisera. While the concerned risked their lives for their own existence and freedom, others sat idly by without concern. At this point in the history of Israel, the brotherhood of the nation had to a great extent been lost. The Israelites' independent spirit had

taken them to a point of little concern for one another's tribal conflicts.

5:19-23 *No gain of money:* This was a war for freedom. The soldiers did not fight for the spoils of the enemy, but for their freedom from the oppression of the Anakim. ***Kishon swept them away:*** This was the direct hand of God against the enemies of Israel (Compare Jr 51:33). The chariots of the enemy were bogged down in the mud of the swollen river. ***Horsehoofs broken:*** The riders in the chariots probably deserted their chariots in the flood, and the horses subsequently went wild in the torrents of the water. It was a scene of mass confusion among animals and men. ***Curse you Meroz:*** It is sin to fail to come to the rescue of those you can help.

5:24-27 *Jael:* See 4:17-22. Honor for the final victory over Sisera went to a woman in fulfillment of the prophecy that glory would go to a woman and not Barak (4:9).

5:28-31 *Mother ... cried:* The wickedness of every son or daughter brings grief to some mother. ***Rest forty years:*** Another generation of Israel rested from oppression because Deborah and Barak assumed their responsibility to lead the oppressed tribes of Israel to freedom. However, once this generation died, their sons and daughters returned again to forgetting the Lord and forming trade alliances and religious connections with unbelievers.

Chapter 6**GIDEON DELIVERS ISRAEL**

6:1-6 *Midianites:* The Midianites

were a nomadic people who dwelt in the Arabian Desert region southeast of the Dead Sea. They descended from Abraham through his wife Keturah (Gn 25:2-4; compare Ex 3:1; Nm 22:4-7; 31:10,11; 31:8,17). The Midianite oppression of Israel here was an act of vengeance. On Israel's march to Canaan under the leadership of Moses, Israel had killed five Midianite kings (Nm 31:8). Their oppression of Israel at the time was so severe that the Israelites fled to the mountains and lived in caves. ***They came as locusts in number:*** The fact that the Midianites and Amalekites were able to invade the territory of Israel on such a large scale is evidence of the fact that the tribes of Israel at this time in history had little allegiance to one another. After the death of Joshua, they went to their own territories, and subsequently disengaged from one another because of their independent spirit. They had no central leadership to muster an army against invading foreign powers. And because they had forsaken God as their "central government," they were vulnerable to the invasion of any foreign power. When later in history they did become weary of the invasion of foreign powers, they turned to a king on earth while forsaking the King in heaven. Their choice of Saul to be their king many years later, therefore, was evidence that they continued to trust in themselves and not in God. Their trust was not in men as Moses and Joshua, who throughout their lives, focused the people directly on God as their King.

6:7-10 *The Lord sent a prophet:*

The name of this prophet is not given. His name was not important, but his message was. His message was to remind Israel of how God worked with and protected them when the nation lived under the leadership of Moses and Joshua. Moses and Joshua had given Israel an example of trusting only in the Lord. Unfortunately, the Israelites digressed to trusting in themselves, that is, going after other gods that they formed in their minds to cater to their own desires. The prophet's message was a pronouncement of this sin in Israel.

6:11-18 *Hide it from the Midianites:*

The fact that Gideon had to hide what wheat he thrashed indicates the severity of the oppression the raiding Midianites maintained over Israel. The Israelites had lost their freedom to carry out the ordinary functions of life. They were an unorganized people with no resistance to foreigners who without opposition raided them continually for the produce of their farms. ***The angel of the Lord:*** In this context the article "the" is used with the word angel, thus indicating that the "angel" was the preincarnate Son of God. In verse 14 the angel speaks as the Lord. ***You mighty valiant man:*** God knew the character of Gideon before Gideon himself realized his leadership ability. There are hidden gifts in every person, though the gifts often go unrecognized and under utilized by each of us. ***My family is poor:*** Too often people have used their poverty as an excuse not to serve the Lord with all that the Lord has given them. Gideon used his poverty as an excuse. He claimed to be poor, but poor in com-

parison to whom? There were evidently still some in Israel who were not as economically poor as he was. But in this case, God would not allow him to use his poverty as an excuse. ***I am least:*** As both Moses and Jeremiah, the lack of confidence of Gideon moved him to excuse himself from duty (See Ex 3:11; Jr 1:6). But again, God would not allow him to use his lack of confidence as an excuse. ***Show me a sign:*** Only those who lack faith need a sign before they act for God (See comments Jn 20:26-29). In this case, Gideon lacked faith (Compare Mt 12:39). God provided the sign for Gideon to take action, but from there on, he had to use his ingenuity to carry out the attack against the Midianites.

6:19-24 *You will not die:* After Gideon realized that the messenger was the Angel of the Lord, he perceived that he would die. It was believed that if one had such a personal experience with the Lord that he would actually die (See 13:22; Gn 16:13; 32:30; Ex 20:19; 33:20; Is 6:5). Knowing the fear of Gideon, the Lord comforted him with the words that he would not die. ***Jehovah Shalom:*** After being reassured by the Lord that he would not die, Gideon built an altar. He named it, "The Lord is peace," a fitting name for an altar that reminds us that the presence of the Lord brings peace.

6:25-27 *Thrown down the altar of Baal:* Gideon lived in a house that had an altar of Baal. This altar of pagan worship was to be pulled down with an ox. The grove of trees, the Asherah, was to be cut down. He was to build another altar and offer a bull as a sacrifice on it

with the wood of the Asherah that he cut down. The symbolism was to manifest that he was personally repenting in reference to the idolatrous worship of Baal.

6:28-32 *So that he may die:* The extremity of Israel's digression into false gods is here manifested by the reaction of the people of the community to the deeds of Gideon. They would kill someone for religious sacrilege against their false gods, but not for serving the one true and living God. The pitiful religious condition of Israel at this time in their history manifests the extreme patience of God to preserve Israel in the land in order to bring about His eternal purpose.

Let him plead for himself: The father of Gideon stood firm against those who would take the life of his son for the sake of giving honor to Baal. At least in this case, the father of Gideon had not fallen for belief in Baal. In verse 25 it is stated that Gideon's father had built this altar that was torn down. In view of what the father here stated to those who would kill his son for destroying the altar, it seems that the altar was built by the father in order to comply with the wishes of the community. He built the altar, but did not conform to any belief in Baal. One must never underestimate the power of community peer pressure to do that which is against the will of God. ***Jerubbaal:*** The name means, "let Baal contend." His name was later changed to Jerubbesheth (2 Sm 11:21). The change in the name was to rid it of the word "Baal."

6:33-40 *The valley of Jezreel:* This lush valley in the territory of Issachar (1 Kg 21:23) was the campsite where the

Midianites and Amalekites camped in order to prepare for their annual raid on the farms of the Israelites. **Abiezer:** The Abiezrites were those of Gideon's own tribe. He then sent messengers to Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali in order to rally soldiers against the invading Midianites and Amalekites. **A fleece of wool:** Again Gideon needed the reassurance of the Lord. Not only did Gideon establish the occasion for the sign, that is asking that a fleece of wool be used, but also that the miraculous sign occur twice. The Lord accommodated Gideon because He knew that he had little confidence in himself. Gideon had enough faith to muster an army together for war, but not enough to actually launch the attack.

Chapter 7

7:1-3 Gideon's battle against the Midianites was to be a test of the faith of his men in the work of God in their lives. The battle was set up to bring glory to God in order that Israel know without doubt that God worked through Gideon and his men in order to defeat the Midianites. Gideon's victory over the Midianites in one battle would signal to the rest of Israel to take up arms against the Midianites and drive them from their lands. **From Mt. Gilead:** Since the camp of Israel was at Mt. Gilboa, we would assume that the translation here in reference to Mt. Gilead could be translated "through Mt. Gilead." **Whoever is fearful:** This question resulted in 22,000 going home. The fact that there were so many who were fearful indicates that at

this time in the history of Israel the men of Israel had long forgotten their trust in God to fight for them. They were farmers settled in the land, and thus lost their bravery in reference to defending themselves against any enemies. Years of peace had brought lethargy in Israel. Gideon's battle against the Midianites was an opportunity for God to prove to them that He was still fighting for Israel. It was also an opportunity for the individual tribes of Israel to once again work together as a nation, instead of living so autonomously from one another. Gideon's call to all the tribes was a call to nationalism.

7:4-8 Test them: The Hebrew word for "test" is the same word here that is used in smelting of metal from ore. It was a test to see how pure they were for the battle in which they were to be engaged. **Putting their hand to their mouth:** This was the cautious group, for they drank by putting their hands in the water and drawing it to their mouths. They drank while keeping watch for the enemy.

7:9-14 Purah: This was probably the person who bore Gideon's armor. **Dream:** God evidently sent the Midianites the dream in order to spread fear among them. **A cake:** This was Gideon's army of farmers. **Tent:** This was the army of Midian that was defeated by the Israelite farmers.

7:15-18 Worshiped: Gideon worshiped right at the camp of the Midianites, reminding us that worship is not confined to specific locations. Worship results whenever one realizes the

work of God, which in this case was Gideon's conclusion that the dream was from God.

7:19-25 *Trumpets ... pitchers ... lights:* Since the attack was launched at night, the actions of Gideon's army gave the impression that a large army of soldiers was attacking. The breaking of the pitchers created the illusion of sound that many men were racing down the mountain. The trumpets created the sound of calling men to war. With the 300 lights in the hands of the men, the Midianites would assume that each light represented many soldiers. The entire display was a bluff to the Midianites, a bluff that worked. Once the fear-stricken Midianites had been routed by the small band of Gideon's men, men from Naphtali, Asher and Manasseh joined him to chase the Midianites back to the desert regions east of the Jordan. ***Oreb and Zeeb:*** The heads of these chieftains, or princes, were taken to Gideon in order to confirm that the Midianites had been defeated.

Chapter 8

8:1-3 *Contended with him sharply:* It seems that the men of Ephraim were somewhat jealous, or at least felt left out of the initial battle. But Gideon answered them by praising them for their victory over Oreb and Zeeb. ***Abiezer:*** Reference to this person may indicate that the major part of Gideon's 300 men were his kinsmen.

8:4-9 *The princes of Succoth:* These leaders answered that they would not give provisions to Gideon in response

to his request because Gideon had not yet won the battle. This is typical of those who are in fear of both sides in a civil war, and are often innocent victims. Two kings of the Midianites had not yet been defeated. If Gideon were helped, then these kings would return and punish them (Compare Gn 32:30). So Gideon says the same. If he is victorious, he will return and punish them. Gideon assumed that they should have known that he was fighting God's battle, and thus they should help God by giving his army provisions. The mistake of the princes was that they did not believe that God was working for Gideon.

8:10-17 *Princes of Succoth ... elders:* The young man revealed to Gideon the names of the leadership of Succoth, which leaders would pay the price for not helping the one who was delivering Israel from the oppression of the Midianites. Their unpatriotic attitudes would lead to their punishment. ***He punished the men of Succoth:*** Some have assumed that the wording here means that the men were tortured to death. But others have interpreted this to mean that they were beaten into submission. The key point was that the leaders had to pay the price for their poor leadership and lack of faith in God to help Gideon's men.

8:18-21 *They were my brothers:* The men whom Zebah and Zalmunna had murdered were the brothers of Gideon. They confessed to their crimes, and as the next of kin, Gideon had the legal right to render their judgment of death (See Dt 19:12,13; Nm 35:19,21).

8:22-28 *The Lord will rule over you:*

Though victorious in his leadership over the Midianites, Gideon did not lose his humility, or this understanding that it was God who gave him the victory. Politics did not appeal to him, nor did fame. He clearly understood the theocracy of Israel, that only God would rule over Israel from heaven. Israel was to have no central leader or government in order that there be no distraction from the centrality of their King and government from heaven. ***Gideon made an ephod:*** The fact that it became a snare to Gideon indicates that the people worshiped this idol against the wishes of Gideon. He possibly wanted the spoils of his victory over the Midianites only because his kinsmen were traders. Unfortunately, he made this ephod that became an object of reverence in the years to come. The people had a yearning to pay homage to fetishes that presumed to have some magical influence over their lives. When men focus on idols and fetishes to bring them protection, they have digressed in their thinking from heaven to things of this world.

8:29-35 *Played the harlot:* We find it almost incomprehensible that Israel would soon turn from God after the victories of Gideon. But we must understand that at the time of this turning to idol gods, the people were turning to fulfilling the lusts of the flesh and pride of life. They were turning to depending on themselves, and thus created gods and religious behavior that conformed to every man doing that which was right in his own eyes. Since the Israelites were a stiffnecked people, they were very independent, and thus had a tendency to look

to themselves and not to God. This national character continually led them to create any god in their minds that would soothe their consciences. We must also keep in mind that the history of the book of Judges covers a period of about 350 years. There is a great deal of time between the events that are recorded in the book, which time we often fail to realize when reading the book. ***Did not remember:*** It is easy to forget God's work in our lives when we are consumed with our own personal wealth. As each individual clan grew to expand their own personal wealth and possessions within their allotted territories of Palestine, they worked independently of one another, and often in competition to one another. They became rural clans independent of one another in a land wherein was left the influence of the Canaanites and their false gods. To a great extent, their turn to these gods was a failure of the Levites to continually minister to this rural culture by keeping their minds focused on the one true and living God. Or at least, the influence of the Canaanites with whom the Israelites associated was greater than the work of the Levites to keep their minds focused on God.

Chapter 9

THE TYRANNY OF ABIMELECH

9:1-6 *Abimelech:* This son of Gideon through a concubine from Shechem (8:31) did not have the humble spirit of his father. He sought to do that which Gideon refused, that is, become a king (8:22,33). ***Seventy persons .. or that one reign:*** His apostate thinking had

missed the point in reference to Who was reigning over Israel. In the theocracy of Israel God only was to reign. But in their apostate state in reference to the central authority by which the Canaanites ruled themselves, Israel's thinking was portrayed to the men of Shechem in this statement of Abimelech. ***Vain and reckless people:*** After stealing the money from the temple of the false god Baal Berith, he hired those who were arrogant, wanton, worthless and lewd. Abimelech knew that he could not carry out his evil desire unless he surrounded himself with men of similar motives. Evil motives attract those who are of the same character. ***Slew ... his brothers:*** Ruthless leaders who seek to dominate a country will kill the opposition. Under the supposed sanction of the people from Shechem, Abimelech carried out a genocide against the sons of Gideon. The young Jotham hid, and thus escaped this evil act of Abimelech. ***House of Millo:*** This was possibly a fortified military headquarters within the territory of the Shechemites.

9:7-21 The election of Abimelech was the result of two unfortunate problems that persisted among the people. First, while the humble and sincere busy themselves with their tasks, idle and arrogant men presume to rule. Second, family loyalties too often prevail over the interest of the general public. Thus those who are qualified to lead are often rejected by the people. In this fable told by Jotham, he spoke of how the citizens of Shechem (trees) looked to a bramble (Abimelech) to be their leader. Since neither the olive and fig trees, nor vine

would reign over them, they sought out a bramble, a low-growing shrub. While the olive and fig trees and vine were busy with their work, the opportunity arose for the morally debased to seize the opportunity to rule. Political aspirations appeal to the arrogant who are without honor in the community. In this fable of Jotham, his message was directed both to the unworthy character of Abimelech, as well as the fickle nature of the people of Shechem. The Shechemites felt no gratitude for the deliverance by Gideon who saved them from the oppression of the Midianites. Since Gideon would not reign over them, they sought anyone who would. Such illustrates the seemingly unquenchable desire of men to have some leader over them. This feeling is born out of the desire in society as a whole to collectively reject the reign of God from heaven. Men can deal with their leaders, but they cannot deal with or change the unchangeable God. Therefore, they seek for one to reign over them whom they believe they can control. For this reason, righteous leaders often find it difficult to lead a people who want to do that which is right in their own eyes. At the foot of Mt. Sinai, Aaron fell victim to this public pressure by making the golden calf (See comments Ex 32). Today many righteous leaders fall victim to the same public pressure.

9:22-25 *God sent:* God worked in the environment in a way that contention developed between the elected (Abimelech) and the ones who put him in office (the Shechemites) (Compare 1 Sm 16:14). God allowed the political

scenarios to develop in order to bring an end to the reign of the presumptuous Abimelech. ***Evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem:*** When agreements are made between evil men with unrighteous motives, the fruit of such agreements eventually develops into division and destruction. After Jotham had stated his fable, he fled and let the political game between Abimelech and the Shechemites play out its course. Wise leaders do not involve themselves in nonsense debates with those who thirst for power and pomp (See comments Ti 3:9-11).

9:26-29 *Gaal:* The festival of this context was usually one of celebration. In this case, however, it was used by Gaal as an opportunity to win the confidence of the men of Shechem. ***Hamor:*** Centuries before, Hamor was killed by Simeon and Levi. Hamor's son Shechem had raped Dinah, the sister of Simeon and Levi (Gn 34:2). Gaal thus appealed to the race pride of the men of Shechem. He challenged them concerning their desire to have an Abiezrite (6:11), Abimelech, the son of Gideon, reign over them rather than one of their own countrymen.

9:30-33 The conspiracy of Gaal was made known to Abimelech by Zebul who ruled in Shechem. Zebul's suggestion to Abimelech was a surprise attack against those who sought to oust him as their king.

9:34-45 God judged the Shechemites through the proxy of Abimelech's men. God will use unrighteous men to judge unrighteous people. The inhabitants of Shechem were slaughtered by the army

of Abimelech. The city was destroyed and the land was sowed with salt as a symbol that it should never produce again (See Dt 29:23; Jr 17:6).

9:46-49 *The tower of Shechem:* This wooden tower of refuge for about one thousand men and women became a furnace for their execution. Abimelech burned to death those who took refuge in this tower to false gods.

9:50-57 *A piece of a millstone:* Through the unrighteous Abimelech, God judged the Shechemites. But after this battle, it was time for judgment to come upon Abimelech. ***God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech:*** God took credit for the death of Abimelech, though it was the woman who cast down the stone upon his head. God worked in the circumstances to bring about the end of the unrighteous Shechemites and the wicked Abimelech. We must never underestimate the providential work of God to bring about the end of evil people and their rulers. The righteous must patiently wait on the work of God.

Chapter 10

TOLA AND JAIR

10:1-5 *Tola:* Tola was possibly named after the sons of his ancestor, Issachar (Gn 46:13). He is the sixth judge whom God sent to deliver Israel. He received little mention for his 23 years of service in judging Israel. ***Jair:*** Likewise, Jair, for his 22 years of service was given only three verses of Scripture. ***Thirty cities:*** We would assume that this family was wealthy throughout the region that Jair judged.

JEPHTHAH DELIVERS ISRAEL

10:6-9 Served the Baals: This is the first time we are given the numerous false gods to which apostate Israel gave their allegiance in rebellion against God. The word “baals” in this context is plural. Ashtaroth is mentioned, with the gods of Ammon, Moab and the Philistines. All these gods were the creation of men, who in rebellion against any authority above their own minds, would not seek knowledge of the one true and living God. Since all the Canaanites knew of God working through Israel to bring them into the land of Palestine, we would rightly assume that these gods were created in order to pacify the desire of men who sought to follow after their own lusts or pursue their worldly goals. They were hardened in that they arrogantly refused to accept the God of Israel.

10:10-16 Cried to the Lord: The oppressors in this context did not come into Israel as invading armies. In this confession, Israel stated that they had “forsaken our God and also served the Baals.” They did not give up their knowledge of God. The text says “also,” that is, they brought into their pantheon of belief the gods of the nations mentioned in verse 6. They became polytheists. Since they brought into their theology belief in the false gods of the nations around them, then we would assume that the reason for doing this was both social and economical. Socially, they intermarried with those who believed in the false gods. Economically, they sought to trade with the nations of the false gods. What started with a seemingly harmless union

in cultures and economics turned into oppression. When those who believe in God seek to partner with those who do not have their God-given values, only oppression results. Being unequally yoked with unbelievers always brings oppression to the believer. Israel’s history of doing such is surely the thought behind Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians 6:14. **His soul was grieved:** Every time His people bring themselves into the oppression of unbelievers, God grieves. He allows his people to be disciplined for their own wayward sin. But He takes no pleasure in the discipline that He allows them to undergo.

10:17,18 The Ammonites gathered their army in order to put down the rebellion of the Israelites. The Ammonites wanted to protect their economic interests. More was involved here than political goals and false gods. Israel had traded with the Ammonites to the point that the Ammonites depended on their trade. It could have been that the Israelites had been brought into the servitude of the Ammonites in order to provide food for them. In Israel’s rebellion, the Ammonites see their efforts to put down the rebellion as an effort to protect their food supply. Formerly, the Midianites from outside Palestine raided the Israelite farms. But in this case, the Ammonites would be putting down a rebellion on the part of those who were serving them economically. Since there were no gold or silver mines in Palestine, we must always assume that in the oppression of Israel, food from farms was involved in the oppression. The oppressing nations,

either from within or without, subjected the farmers of Israel to be farmer servants to provide them with food.

Chapter 11

11:1-3 *Jephthah:* This judge was a son of Gilead, the grandson of Manasseh (Nm 26:29,30). He was born of a harlot, and thus a half brother to the other sons of Gilead through his legal wife. He was eventually disinherited by his family, and subsequently lived in Tob. It is certain that he grew up with all the insecurities that come with a child who is rejected by the family. Nevertheless, God can use anyone to do His work. Unfortunately, Jephthah gained his experience in leading men by organizing a raiding party to plunder the goods of others.

11:4-11 *Be our captain:* The elders of the Israelite farmers knew that the one they had formerly rejected could lead them as the head of their army. The elders made a foolish oath here with one who had unscrupulous values. For the sake of their deliverance from the Ammonites, they agreed to have a vain person rule over them.

11:12-28 *Israel took away my land:* The Ammonite king was wrong. Israel had taken no land from either Moab or Ammon. When Israel was coming to the end of their wandering in the Sinai wilderness, they asked permission to pass through both Edom and Moab. The kings of these two nations at the time refused passage through their territory. Israel thus skirted Edom and Moab (Nm 20). When Sihon, king of the Amorites, refused passage to the Israelites, Israel at-

tacked the Amorites in Jahaz. Jephthah correctly reasoned that since it was God who delivered the Amorites into the hand of Israel, Israel had a right to their land since it was the Amorites who took the initiative to attack Israel. The land could not be claimed by the king of Ammon, for it had not been delivered into Israel's hand by God when Israel defeated the Amorites. ***Chemosh:*** The god of the Moabites. The Ammonites were at this time worshiping the god of the Moabites, as well as their god, Milcom (See Nm 21:29; 2 Kg 3:27). ***Three hundred years:*** Since Israel had lived in the land that was claimed by the king of the Ammonites for 300 years, the king's argument was not valid. Going back in years to reclaim land that one had taken from another was not a valid argument for taking land from a current occupant. The foolishness of the Ammonite king's argument was in the fact that he wanted to go back 300 years and claim the land as if his ancestors were the original owners of the land.

11:29-33 *Jephthah vowed a vow:* This vow of Jephthah was indicative of his character. We would expect something as this from a person who had few ethics and low morals. Jephthah was a person who was influenced by the apostate religious beliefs of the day. We must keep in mind that it was the elders who asked Jephthah to lead them. His calling was not directly from God, though God used an unscrupulous person as this to accomplish His deliverance of Israel from the Ammonites. ***Be the Lord's ... burnt offering:*** The "burnt offering" here would probably be spiritual in the sense

of one “being the Lord’s.” Burnt offerings were to be made only upon the altar at the tabernacle through the ministry of the Levitical priests. That which was offered was totally consumed by the fire of the offering. Since Jephthah was later revered as a hero of faith (Hb 11:32), we would not assume here that a literal burnt offering is in his mind.

11:34-40 *His daughter came:* It was not only his daughter, but his only child. Jephthah had made a rash vow to the Lord, and now the price had to be paid. ***According to that which has proceeded out of your mouth:*** What is here manifested in the giving of a vow to the Lord is the complete obligation of the one who made the vow to keep it. Jephthah’s daughter realized the binding nature of the vow, and thus resigned herself to her father’s wishes. What is interesting about the vow was that it was made with spoken words only. There were no signatures on paper. There were no lawyers to authenticate and verify the vow and signatures. It was a time when even evil men kept their word. ***According to his vow:*** The statement here indicates that Jephthah offered his daughter as a spiritual offering to the Lord. The way the text reads suggests that the offering was that she not marry for the remainder of her life. The fact that she was offered as a human sacrifice does not correspond to the times, though Israel was debased in many ways. But we must consider that human sacrifices were forbidden by the penalty of death under the law (Lv 18:21; 20:2-5; Dt 12:31; 18:10). Such sacrifices did not come into Israel until the nation

had totally digressed to the human sacrifices of the Canaanites. This came many years later during the time of Kings Ahaz and Manasseh (Compare 2 Kg 3:26,27). Add to this the fact that Jephthah is revered as a hero of faith in the New Testament (Hb 11:32). We would assume that such honor would not go to someone who had offered his daughter as a human sacrifice. On the contrary, the vow of Jephthah was probably something spiritual, though she had to pay the price. Since marrying in Israel was a very sacred honor, Jephthah’s daughter wept because she knew that she would never be given in marriage by her father. Since it would have been shame for her to weep in the presence of the men in her city, she chose rather to isolate herself until she had accepted her fate of life. ***She knew no man:*** That is, for the rest of her life she was not to marry. We would justly assume, therefore, that as other women who gave their lives to the ministry of the tabernacle (Ex 38:8; 1 Sm 2:22), Jephthah’s daughter lived the rest of her life a virgin in complete surrender to the sanctuary of God at the tabernacle. ***Went yearly to lament the daughter:*** This event is not recorded in any ancient Hebrew literature. After Israel’s repentance years later, they would certainly not have accepted what Jephthah had done in reference to denying one’s daughter the honor of marriage.

Chapter 12

12:1-7 *Why ... did you not call us:*

This accusation was not true, since the Ephramites were possibly called before

the elders came to Jephthah. The motive for this complaint is questionable. It could have been that the Ephramites wanted some of the spoil of the Ammonites. Or it may have been that they wanted credit for defeating the Ammonites among their own people. Whatever the motive, they did not come to the original call to battle, though they were called.

Fugitives of Ephraim: This taunt spurred on the Gileadites to punish the hot tempered Ephramites. The Ephramites accused them of being a band of fugitives who took up arms against the Ammonites. Since they were not the official army who represented any of the tribes of Israel, they could not claim any victory in the name of Israel. The Gileadites defeated the Ephramites, and the Ephramites fled to their homes. Unfortunately, they had to pass over the fords of the Jordan before they could get home. Therefore, the Gileadites set up a “road block” at the fords. **Shibboleth:** The Ephramites on the east side of the Jordan had been separated so long from the tribes of Israel who dwelt in the main territory of Palestine, that their enunciation of the Hebrew language changed. In the enunciation of the word “Shibboleth” they could not say it as the Israelites who dwelt on the west side of the Jordan. The evolution of the Hebrew language into different dialects that represented the distant tribes during this period of time does reveal how some of the tribes of Israel had developed some nationalism among themselves in their autonomy from one another. Though they were common de-

scendants from the same father, Jacob, and originally had a common dialect, they were being divided by their nationalistic allegiance in their tribal territories. In this divisive state of existence, it was easy for invading foreign powers to seize territory or oppress any one tribal group without the others coming to their aid.

IBZAN, ELON AND ABDON

12:8-15 *Ibzan:* Little is known of the work of Ibzan whose home was Bethlehem, a small village in the southwest area of Zebulun. **Bethlehem:** This is not the Bethlehem of Judea. **Elon:** Little is known of this judge who ministered in Israel for ten years. The possible reason for the brief record of these judges is to inform us that God continued to work among His people throughout these difficult decades of sin and deliverance. We must keep in mind that the history of the book of Judges covers a period of about 350 years. **Abdon:** The mention of the sons and daughters of these judges indicates the family influence a specific judge had among the people. It seems that families carried on the heritage of their fathers who were key judges. Since the judges were mostly called by God because of their faithfulness, we assume that their children carried on a legacy of faithfulness throughout the lives of their families. The patriarch judge was mentioned in order to record the fact that their families sought to preserve the faithfulness of portions of Israel.

Chapter 13

SAMSON AND THE PHILISTINES

13:1-7 *Philistines:* Since the story of Samson is more detailed than any of the other judges in the book, we have a greater description of how Israel lived with the Canaanite nations within Palestine. Israel not only became apostates to wrong beliefs, but they also did that which was contrary to the will of God. In this case, the Philistines from the southern coastal region of Palestine inflicted oppression on Israel. The Philistines were a people of war. They possibly immigrated from Crete (Am 9:7). They were probably in the Palestine area at the time Abraham arrived (Gn 20 – 22). When Israel arrived, they had settled in five key cities: Gaza, Ashdod, Ekron, Gath and Ashkelon. We are informed that they oppressed Israel for 40 years, which oppression would extend to the time when Samuel encouraged Israel to rid herself of their oppression (1 Sm 7). ***You will conceive:*** The conception and time of Samson's birth were announced by an angel (Compare Gn 17:2,9,10; Lk 1:11-17). ***A Nazarite:*** A Nazarite was either a man or woman who dedicated himself or herself exclusively to the work of God for either a defined period of time, or a life-time. In this case, Samson was a Nazarite for life. Nazarites were not (1) to drink alcoholic drinks, (2) shave their heads, (3) or become ceremonially unclean by contact with a dead body (See Nm 6:1-21).

13:8-14 *What will be the rule for the child:* Since the angel announced that Manoah would have a unique child, then

Manoah asked the angel for instructions concerning how the child should be raised. The angel answered by stating again that the child should observe the rites of a Nazarite. Thus God made the decision concerning whether Samson would be a Nazarite.

13:15-20 *Prepared a young goat for you:* The appearance of an angel was so vivid that Manoah assumed that food should be served to him after the custom of the hospitality of the Israelites. ***What is your name:*** The Hebrew word used here for “beyond understanding” can be translated “incomprehensible” or “wonderful.” The same word is used in Psalm 139:6 and Isaiah 9:6. If the angel gave his name to Manoah, Manoah could not understand it. Names were given on the basis of meaning in reference to the one to whom it was given. Manoah could not have understood the name of the angel, for he had no comprehension of the realm in which the angel functioned and lived. ***Fell on their faces:*** When a man realizes the direct presence of God, as in this case through an angel, the natural response is to fall in worship on one's face to the ground. The presence of God through even an angel causes such a response. One should be cautious, therefore, in proclaiming that he has been in the presence of an angel, when at the same time he did not respond as Manoah.

13:21-25 At this time in their personal experience with the miraculous encounter, Manoah realized that the one to whom he was speaking was an angel of God. He assumed that he and his wife would die because they had come into

such close contact with God through His messenger (See Gn 32:30; Ex 20:19; 33:20; Is 6:5). **Samson:** This name means “sun-lie,” or possibly the Chaldean meaning, “to serve.” **The Lord began to move him:** From his youth, the Lord began to reveal to Samson that he was a unique person. We are not told what happened as a result of the Lord urging him to do certain things, other than what is explained in the following narrative.

Chapter 14

14:1-4 *Get her for me as a wife:*

The foolishness of youth is herein revealed. Not only did Samson fall in love with a foreign woman (See Ex 34:16; Dt 7:3), he also demanded that his father procure her for him as a wife (Compare 2 Co 6:14). Samson’s attitude in his demand upon his father reveals that Manoah and his wife had somewhat spoiled this young man in his youth. Nevertheless, God was using the unwise actions of Samson to generate an occasion for conflict with the Philistines. We must keep in mind in this narrative that Samson was specifically chosen by God to give Israel relief from the oppression of the Philistines. In the case of Samson, God was using his sin in order to deliver Israel. **She pleases me:** Any marriage that is based on physical attraction is a very shaky union. **Philistines had dominion over Israel:** Israel had unwisely entered into trade agreements with the Philistines. They then combined these agreements with the social practices and religious beliefs of the Philistines. This behavior on

the part of Israel brought the rural community of Israel into subjection to the Philistines. Such was the natural social result when a rural farming culture makes friends with a warlike culture as the Philistines.

14:5-9 *Lion roared:* Sometime on the journey to Timnah, and not in the company of his parents, this event occurred. We would assume that this type of strength was unusual at this point in Samson’s life. It was probably at this time that God wanted to build confidence in Samson for future encounters with the Philistines. For this reason God empowered Samson with the strength that was necessary to kill the lion. **Honey in the carcass:** This event took place several months after Samson had killed the lion. In violation of the Nazarite rites, Samson on this occasion, and on many other occasions in reference to the Philistines, came into contact with a dead body.

14:10-14 *They brought thirty companions:* When they realized the strength of Samson, they feared him, and thus, 30 Philistines were brought in order to protect the wedding party from Samson. **A riddle:** This riddle was proposed to the 30 “bodyguards.” Though clear in interpretation to Samson, it was impossible for the Philistines to understand. Since they would not be outwitted by Samson, they devised an evil plan to discover the meaning of the riddle.

14:15-20 In this context is revealed the disloyal heart of Samson’s Philistine bride. **Samson’s wife:** Once a woman was committed to a man, she was considered his wife even before the comple-

tion of the marriage ceremonies. **Lest we burn you:** There was the motivation of fear behind the disloyalty of Samson's bride. Instead of consulting her bridegroom, she worked treacherously in order to spare herself and her family. The fact that the 30 companions at the feast threatened her with death is evidence that Samson should never have involved himself with such an evil people. But there he was in the camp of a wicked people who were living contrary to the morals and ethics of God. Samson's downfall was that he placed himself in the company of those who had no concern for the will of God. **The seventh day:** The riddle was given on the first day of the feast and the girl lamented with Samson for seven days. **If you had not plowed with my heifer:** This was a vulgar proverbial phrase that meant, "if you had not slept with my wife." **Slew thirty of their men:** When the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson, he was given super human strength. This act of murder on the part of Samson was the beginning of God's use of his unrighteous nature in order to deliver Israel from the oppression of the Philistines. **Samson's wife was given to his companion:** In his rage, Samson did not complete the marriage ceremony. Since he left in a rage, the father of the bride assumed that Samson was no longer interested in her. She was then given to a friend of Samson, which friend could have been a Philistine.

Chapter 15

15:1-8 The father of Samson's wife assumed that he had rejected his Philis-

tine bride because she had betrayed him in telling the secret of his riddle. Because of this, Samson felt justified to bring calamity upon the Philistines by destroying their source of food. **Foxes:** He tied the foxes tail-to-tail in pairs, and then tied a torch of fire to the pairs. The Philistines retaliated to Samson's deed by burning his bride and father-in-law. But this enraged Samson even more. He then took revenge on them with a great slaughter. Thus the unwise choice of Samson to involve himself with the Philistines in reference to marrying someone other than an Israelite resulted in the death of many people. Since it was the Spirit of the Lord who moved Samson to punish the Philistines, we would assume that God was using the unrighteous actions of Samson to relieve Israel of the oppression of the Philistines.

15:9-13 *The Philistines went up:* Thus the wedding scandal where Samson was betrayed continued to be carried out as the Philistines here send out an army of men to take vengeance on Samson. **Three thousand men:** The men of Judah greatly respected the strength of Samson. Since the men of Judah would sacrifice Samson for their own safety, they asked Samson to be bound and delivered to the Philistines, to which he subjected himself. Samson saw this as an opportunity to be delivered into the midst of a great number of Philistines.

15:14-20 *A new jawbone:* This jawbone was fresh, and thus not dry and brittle. The great slaughter of Philistines with the jawbone reveals the tremendous power by which the Spirit of the Lord

came upon Samson. **Ramath Lehi:** The meaning was, “the hill of a jawbone.” This great victory of Samson over the Philistines was to intimidate them against oppressing Israel as long as Samson was alive. Since Samson did not judge Israel by organizing an Israelite army against the Philistines, we would assume that God’s intention in using him as a judge was for the purpose of intimidating the Philistines. The intimidation lasted for a period of 20 years.

Chapter 16

16:1-3 Gaza: This was the most southern city of Palestine that was still controlled by the Philistines. **Harlot:** The life of Samson illustrates that God used the unrighteous actions of men to accomplish His work. In the case of Samson, he was his own worst enemy, and thus he eventually succumbed to his own unrighteousness. **The doors of the gate:** With the strength from the Lord, Samson took the doors of the city and carried them about 25 kilometers away to the top of the hill where Hebron was situated. This feat had its impact on those who sought to kill him, and thus we hear no more of their plot.

16:4-9 Delilah: It seems that Samson’s association with Delilah was deceptive from the very beginning, for the lords of the Philistines conspired with her to discover the source of Samson’s strength. **Seven green cords:** These could have been the cords that were used to fasten tents to their stakes. While still green they would have greater strength.

16:10-17 New ropes: These were

stronger than the cords. Again, when Delilah cried out that the Philistines were upon him, Samson broke these as if they were threads. **The seven locks of my head:** Samson was now getting closer to the source of his strength, not that his strength was in his long hair, but that it was a sign of his Nazarite status. Of course, when Samson was awakened with Delilah’s cry that the Philistines were upon him, he went off with the cloth-beam of the loom still attached to his hair. **Your heart is not with me:** Delilah complained that Samson did not trust her. Added to this was her continual nagging that he reveal the truth of his strength to her. **If I am shaved:** Alas, he foolishly revealed his secret that led to his doom.

16:18-22 Come up once more: The Philistine lords were surely disgusted with their being continually deceived and mocked by the failure of Delilah to discover Samson’s secret. However, as with Samson, she was persistent in her request for she had in mind the great wealth that she would receive for her success in deceiving Samson. **He did not know that the Lord had departed:** Samson had moved so far away from the Lord that he did not perceive the fact that the Lord had now moved away from him. **Put out his eyes:** The Philistines took no chances. If somehow Samson regained his strength, they knew that a blind strong man could be beaten. **Grinder in the prison house:** For a great time Samson worked as a grinder of grain in prison. He worked long enough for his hair to grow again. Fortunately, those who had

captured Samson forgot about the hair, which forgetfulness led to their demise.

16:23-31 Dagon: This god of the Philistines is believed to have been worshiped as far back as the 25th century B.C. To the Philistines he was the father of Baal. Dagon was the national god of Philistia. *Let me die with the Philistines:* Samson sought death with the Philistines rather than life as a blind man. He thus bowed himself against the two main pillars of the structure upon which the weight of the building rested. Because there were many in and on the building of large stones, its collapse killed hundreds of people, including Samson.

Social Chaos In Israel

(17:1 – 21:25)

Outline: (1) Idolatry of Micah (17:1 – 18:31), (2) Atrocity at Gibeah (19:1-30), (3) War against Benjamin (20:1-48), (4) Dissemination of Benjamin (21:1-25).

Chapter 17

IDLATRY OF MICAH

Chapters 17 to 21 are an appendix to the book of Judges. The two principal events of this section are the establishment of the city and altar of Dan in the extreme northeastern part of Palestine (17,18), and the almost complete annihilation of the tribe of Benjamin. Four times in the book it is mentioned that in those days there was no king in Israel (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). This statement assumes that when the book was written, there was a king in Israel. This would date the material sometime during or after King Saul. This statement that there

was no king in Israel could be understood to mean that there was no king in Israel at the time as the nations around them had kings. Reference to Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron (20:28), would indicate an early date, sometime immediately after the period of the judges. Some Bible students assume that 18:30 is a reference to the Assyrian captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722/21 B.C. However, a possible alternative understanding of this verse would place the writing in the context of the period following the time of the judges when there was a captivity of a portion of the tribes that is not recorded in the Bible. We will never know the date of writing. This is not necessary when considering the book to be inspired. What we must keep in mind is that the time covered by the history of the book is about 350 years.

17:1-6 Uttered a curse: The mother did not know that her son had stolen the silver. When the superstitious Micah heard that his mother had uttered a curse on the thief, he restored the stolen property. *Micah had a house of gods:* These were idols that were carved out of wood or stone, with some made of molten metals. Instead of smelting their silver and gold into coins, the Israelites combined their apostate religious beliefs at this time with their economy. Their riches were smelted into idols that portrayed their beliefs in false gods, and subsequently placed on display as an indication of their wealth. *Every man did what was right in his own eyes:* This statement is later repeated in 21:25 in order to explain how the people had turned their thinking from

God as their King, to a man on earth as their leader. Because there was no central government that was expressed through the establishment of a king, in their autonomy from one another as tribes, and then as rural farmers, they turned to their religious instincts that were influenced by the Canaanite nations with whom they did business and intermarried. Idolaters are those who have created a god after their own imagination and religious behavior after their own desires. When men forsake the absolute authority of the word of God, in the religiosity of their lives, they will become a law unto themselves.

17:7-13 *Be my father and priest:* Micah bought a preacher. The term “father” referred to a position of respect and influence. The term “priest” referred to the God-designated office the Levites were to have among the people of Israel. Micah thus obtained his own personal religious officer in hope that God would bless his idolatrous beliefs and behavior. This practice is not unlike the religiously institutional people today who take pride in their “priest” or “pastor” who is a symbol of their financial prosperity. The institutionally minded are able to obtain and maintain a certified professional whose duty it is to soothe the consciences of the ones who support the existence of the professional. The Levites were to work among all the people of Israel. They were not to be bought and confined to a particular individual or group of people in Israel (Compare comments Lk 4:42-44).

Chapter 18

18:1-6 Because the Danites had never fully occupied their territory, in this historical context they sent out a scouting party in order to find more territory to possess. ***Please ask counsel of God:*** The Levites were the “living Bibles” among the people of Israel. God spoke through them to the people, and thus they were to circulate among the people in order that the people be able to inquire of God. In this case, the Levite had been personally hired and confined to the house of Micah.

18:7-10 *Laish:* This was a Canaanite city about 125 kilometers (about 77 miles) north of Mt. Ephraim. The residents of this village made the same mistake as the Israelites at this time in their history. They lived autonomously from anyone with whom they could unite if they were attacked by others. Because of their desire to live so independently from others, they could easily be overcome by raiding parties because no one would come to their aid. People will usually leave those alone who want to live isolated from others.

18:11-26 *The priest’s heart was glad:* At least this Levite assumed his responsibility of expanding his ministry to be more in tune with the will of God. Instead of being the hireling of a single man, he could assume his ministry of working among a single tribe of Israel. Of course, Micah complained about the Danites taking his silver idols and graven images, and his priest. They had taken his riches and his religious security.

18:27-31 *They had no business with any man:* The people of Laish lived agriculturally and economically autonomous from anyone who could help them in a time of need. For this reason, they were easily subdued by the Danites. **Dan:** The city of Dan became the northern most outpost of the nation of Israel in the land of Palestine. **Jonathan:** This was probably the name of Micah's Levite priest (17:7-13). **Gershom:** Jewish rabbis today understand that this Gershom was the son of Moses. If this assumption is correct, then the book of Judges was written early, immediately after the events of the judges. **The day of the captivity:** Some students have assumed that reference here is to the Assyrian captivity of 722/21 B.C., or an earlier captivity by Tiglath-pileser in 733 B.C. However, in view of other statements in the book concerning an early writing, this is probably a captivity for which we have no record. It could have been a local captivity of the Danites by the Syrians while the Philistines were still in power in the southwest. It was a captivity that was fresh on the minds of the initial readers of the book, and thus needed no explanation. **House of God was in Shiloh:** The tabernacle remained in Shiloh, which was not the original purpose for the movement of the tabernacle. It was to be moved among the tribal areas. But because of the idolatrous apostasy of the tribal groups, there was no call for it to come to the particular territories of the other tribes. When the Israelites moved away from God, they did not want a reminder of God among them.

Chapter 19

ATROCITY OF GIBEAH

19:1-9 *Concubine:* A concubine was one who was legally bound to a man, but not as his wife (See Ex 21:7-11; Dt 21:10-14). In this situation, a Levite took a concubine from Bethlehem, who eventually sold herself as a prostitute. This entire event reveals the debased moral state to which even some of the religious leaders of Israel had digressed.

19:10-21 *Jebus:* Jebus, or Jerusalem, was occupied by the Jebusites until the reign of David. Instead of staying in this foreign city, the Levite went on to Gibeah where he and his concubine had to sleep in the street. Being found in the street by an Ephramite coming in from the fields, they were invited to stay in his house.

19:22-30 What took place here reminds us of the immoral and debased culture of Sodom and Gomorrah. **Sons of Belial:** Or, they were the sons of the Devil. The atrocity that followed resulted in the death of the concubine. The sin was so grievous that it was remembered for centuries in Israel (See Hs 9:9; 10:9). **There has never been such a deed done:** After the Levite took the body of the dead concubine home, he cut it in pieces and then sent the pieces throughout Israel. The horror of the dismemberment shocked all Israel. It shocked the Israelites into realizing that at least portions of Israel, specifically the Benjamites, had digressed into total moral degradation. If what was reported was true, then the Benjamites must be punished severely for the crime.

Chapter 20

WAR AGAINST BENJAMIN

20:1-11 *Dan even to Beersheba:*

Israelites from the northern (Dan) and southern (Beersheba) extremities of Palestine assembled together in order to enact judgment upon Benjamin. *United together as one man:* At least on this one historical occasion after the death of Joshua, all Israel, except for Benjamin, was united together as an army in order to cleanse Israel of this wanton sin. The irony of the assembly for judgment was that this war was not against a Canaanite army, but against one of the tribes of Israel.

20:12-17 The lack of wisdom among the Benjamites, or their stubbornness, moved them not to give over those who were guilty of the murder of the concubine. Instead, they assembled their own army, which army was tremendously outnumbered by those of Israel who had assembled against them. They may have thought that certainly their brethren would not attack. They were wrong. Israel's disgust with the sin was greater than their respect for the Benjamites.

20:18-28 When they inquired of the Lord as to whether they should go up against their brother Benjamin, the Lord said to go up. However, Israel suffered two defeats with the loss of 40,000 men. We would conclude that the lesson God wanted Israel to learn was that they should never go against a fellow Israelite without paying a great price. These two defeats would remind them in the future that they should never fight among themselves. *Ark of the covenant:* This

is the only time the ark is mentioned in the book of Judges. *Phinehas:* The phrase, "son of" probably refers to this Phinehas being a descendant from Eleazar, the son of Aaron. Phinehas was a common name (See Ex 6:25; Nm 25; 1 Sm 1:3).

20:29-48 Encouraged again by the Lord that they should go up against the Benjamites, Israel schemed an ambush which was successful. As a result, 25,000 Benjamites perished. Except for 600 men who fled to the wilderness, they destroyed the livestock and everyone they found in the region. They burned the cities.

Chapter 21

DISSEMINATION OF BENJAMIN

21:1-12 *They lifted up their voices and wept bitterly:* The Israelites realized that they had gone too far in their judgment of their brother, Benjamin. Except for 600 men, they almost annihilated one of their tribes. Since those tribes who answered the call to bring judgment on Benjamin had sworn with an oath that they would give none of their daughters to the remaining 600 men of Benjamin, they asked among themselves if there were any among Israel who did not answer the call to assemble against Benjamin. It was discovered that the men of Jabesh Gilead had not answered the call. Since the survival of Benjamin was now on the consciences of those who punished Benjamin, they sent 12,000 soldiers to kill all of Jabesh Gilead except for those women who had not had sexual relations with a man. They found 400 virgins who

were brought to be wives for the remaining Benjamites in order that no tribe of Israel be lost from the lineage of Abraham.

21:13-25 *Daughters of Shiloh:*

Since there were not enough virgins for all the remaining 600 Benjamite men, they were told to kidnap the daughters of Shiloh when they came out to dance during their festivities. ***No king in Israel:*** That is, there was no central control of the nation as would be the case beginning with Saul. This statement could also be understood to mean that there was no king as the kings that existed among the Canaanite nations. Regardless of those kings to which reference was made, the Holy Spirit wanted Israel to remember through this record the days when there was no king in Israel. Since God knew that the Israelites would eventually cry for a king as the nations around them, thus establishing a lineage of kings throughout the history of Israel that would eventually lead them away from God, He wanted them to remember the days when they were directly under God's kingship. These were days when Israel did sin, but they were led back to God through the work of the judges and Levites who worked in Israel. God eventually conceded and allowed them to have a king, but He wanted them to remember the days when there was no king. In these these days they existed as a nation regardless of a king. ***That which was right in his own eyes:*** Each was a

law unto himself. Supposedly guided by the Levites, who often failed in their duties to move among the tribal territories and teach the people, the people of Israel in a rural environment lived after their own rules. They became so ignorant of the law of God that they lived by their consciences, which consciences were not guided by God's word. This is a sad conclusion to a book of history that revealed that it is not possible for men to live according to their own laws, for they continually digress in their behavior to live after their own lusts. This is particularly true in view of the fact that God's people are constantly influenced by the societies in which they live. The more ignorant God's people become of the word of God, the more they digress from God. It is for this reason that there must always be a high standard by which the laws of men should be guided. Societies that design their laws without God in mind will design laws that lead to the ruin of society. If the people of God in these societies are also ignorant of the word of God, then they will be led down the same path of degradation that society follows. If the book of Judges teaches any clear lessons, the most evident is that it is not within man to direct his own steps. Therefore, it is the responsibility of every disciple of Jesus to continually feed on the word of God. A people who are ignorant of the word of God can never be a free people. They will always be controlled by the whims of society.