

An Exposition of

Judges

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An Exposition of The Book of Judges as Delivered in A Series
of Messages to the Congregation of Sequoyah Sovereign
Grace Baptist Church, Cherokee, NC.

by
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FROM THE PUBLISHER

In 1978, Tim James sold his butcher shop in Ogburn Station, NC and moved with his wife, Debbie, to Cherokee, North Carolina. A small group on the reservation had invited him to pastor their church. Over 42 years later, Tim continues to pastor at Sequoyah Sovereign Grace Baptist Church.

For all of those years, Tim has preached expositively through books of the Bible, having preserved his notes in large three-ring binders. Although visitors to his home have seen them, none had read them. In 2018, a pastor friend asked Tim if he could use his notes for reference in his expositions through a book of the Bible at his church. Astounded at the narrative style in which he had written them along with their simplicity, he could not keep them secret. As a result, Tim has graciously given permission for his entire library of notes to be scanned and published.

You need not expect his expositions to be a lesson in history from the Old Testament, nor a list of goals for posting to your refrigerator from the New Testament. No matter the book or text reference on which you read Tim's expositions, Old Testament or New Testament, you will rejoice as you read of the glorious faithfulness and work of the Lord Jesus Christ for God's elect.

In simple but profound everyday language you will be comforted in reading of Christ's fulfillment of God's law on behalf of the elect. Whether you read his expositions of the Old Testament or New Testament, you will see the revelation

of Christ, the justification of his elect through his imputed righteousness and the glorious liberty and freedom he has obtained for them.

In speaking of the true Christian experience of grace from his own experience of gospel freedom in Christ, Tim's writings may well cause you to pump your fist and declare, "That is me!" God's revelation of his electing grace in Christ has enabled Tim to write a commentary that captures the spirit and meaning of the Old Testament and New Testament alike—Christ is all!

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WHO SHALL GO UP?

1, Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?

2, And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand.

Judges 1:1-2

The time of the Judges embraces about 300 years in the history of Israel, from 1400 BC to 1100 BC. This period of history is rich in gospel types and shadows. It is about the Church in the world, its failures and weaknesses and its deliverance by the Lord at the hands of the Judges. The times of 14 Judges are reported in this book. The first Judge is Othniel and the last is Eli. In this book, there are several accounts of things repeated and further illuminated which transpired in the book of Joshua. This book addresses *faith* and the *faithful men* who were judges in Israel. Paul lists four of them in “faith's hall of fame” in Hebrews 11:32.

The entire time of the judges led up to the time when Israel would seek to have a king rule over them, and thus, the book itself sets forth the coming of the king, the one king, the true king, the king of kings and the one true judge of all the earth (Jer. 23:5-6; Is. 33:22).

The book begins with the reasonable plea of the child of God. When faced with the task of finishing the possession of the promise land and the fact that their savior, Joshua, has

gone to be with the Father, they are naturally reticent about their ability to do the job. It is not unlike the disciple's concern when they realized the Lord was soon to leave them. We are servants and we rely wholly on our Master for direction. We are soldiers and we cannot move without our Captain to lead us in to battle. The most miserable estate the child of God faces in this world is the time when he feels that the presence of the Lord has departed, but the task before us remains. To the troubled disciples our Lord said, "let not your heart be troubled." His promise to the children was that he would send his Spirit to be their leader and guide, and would lead them, watch after them and go before them to conquer their enemies. When the children of Israel were confronted with the task before them and were without a leader, they cried unto the Lord, "Who shall go up for us?" (Ex. 33:12-17).

The answer of our Lord is immediate. As one type of the Lord Jesus Christ is removed and the shadow of Joshua fades away, the Lord sets another type of Christ in Joshua's place. The Lord does not raise up Moses from the grave, nor does he leave the people to themselves to possess the land by means of their own obedience or the power of their will. The children of God must have Christ. He is their head, their captain and sovereign, and they are fearful to move if he is not with them. "Who shall go up for us?" "Judah shall go!"

Who else among the heads of the tribes could it be? Who shall go *for* us... not *with* us, as if to say to assist us? No. Who will go up *for* us, lead us, fight for us, subdue the enemy before us? Christ will go! But he has returned to the father; Joshua has finished his course and died. Our Savior

and deliverer is at the right hand of the Father. Who shall go for us? Christ shall Go! Judah shall go! It has been said, and rightly so, that the Holy Spirit is Christ's other self (John 14:16-18). Christ shall go for you, for in him dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Judah most go, because Judah is almost always seen to arise when the need is greatest, and the people are at their wits end. When Jacob refused to send Benjamin to Joseph in Egypt for fear of losing the last of his sons born of the woman he had truly loved, it was Judah who became surety and willing substitute for him (Gen 43:8-9; 44:32-34).

When Tamar, having played the harlot to ensure the continuance of the seed, it was Judah that declared her righteous. When the tabernacle was to be built it was the tribe of Judah that supplied the man for the job of wise master builder (Exodus 31:1-2; 35:30-31). Bezaleel means "in the shadow of God" (see Ps. 127:1; 91:1; Isaiah 49:1-2). He is the son of Uri whose name means "my light." Christ is the light of God; the light of the world. Uri was the son of Hur, which means "freedom and liberty." Christ the builder of the church, the king, the priest, the brightness of God's glory the one who makes men free indeed, sprung from Judah (Zech. 6:12-13; Gal. 5:1). When John wept upon seeing there was no man worthy to open the book and loose the seven seals thereof; when he cried, "Who is worthy," it was the Lion of the tribe of Judah who prevailed to open the book (Rev. 5:5-9). Who shall go for us? Who else but Judah? Who else but Christ?

"Judah shall go up, sayeth the Lord, behold I have delivered the land into his hand" (John 3:35; Matt. 3:17;

Matt. 11:27; 28:18-20) Go possess the land in the power and authority of Christ—He is with you (John 17:1-3). Who shall go up for us? Judah shall go. Nothing has changed. The need of the people is the same and the remedy of the people is the same. Without Christ they are as sheep without a shepherd, as an army without a captain and they cry with a singular voice—“Who shall go up for us?” The answer is always the same. Be it Joshua, be it Judah, it is Christ who shall go up for us.

The reason is simple. Judah is the *promised one*. From his tribe comes the lineage of Christ the Great High Priest (Heb. 7:13-17). He is the surety of a better covenant. He is the righteousness of his people, and he is the promised seed. Judah is a picture of our Lord, the man of war, conquering now and still to conquer (Ps. 27:1).

Judah shall go up for us. We shall possess the land. We shall be saved with an everlasting salvation, because it is Christ who goes up for us. After Jacob (Judah’s father) advanced in years and was ready to go be with his God, he prophesied concerning the future of his sons. The things he spoke concerning Judah are some of the most assuring words in all of scripture.

Look at Genesis 49:8-9.

8, Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee.

9, Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?

Judah means "he shall be praised" (Gen. 29:35; Phil. 2:9-11)

"Thy hand shall be on the neck of thy enemies" (Ps. 18:40). This signifies utter dominion over all enemies, sin, Satan and self.

"Thy father's children shall bow down before thee." He is Lord!

"Lion's whelp" full of vigor, youth, strength, vitality and power to save (Ps. 110:3)

"From the prey, my son thou art gone up." This alludes to the lion having killed the enemy and devoured him and is now satisfied (Is. 53:11).

"He stooped down, couched" signifies that he destroyed the enemy and devoured him in plain view. He did not carry his prey off to a den to hide and eat it for fear that someone might take it from him. He killed it, stooped down and devoured it, knowing that none would dare challenge him (Is. 31:4).

"And as an old lion, who shall rouse him up?" He is not discouraged or disheartened. He has finished the work and rests in sovereignly satisfied repose.

Who shall go up for us? Judah shall go up: Behold I have delivered the land into his hand.

THE LORD OF LIGHT

4, And Judah went up; and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men.

5, And they found Adonibezek in Bezek: and they fought against him, and they slew the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

6, But Adonibezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes.

7, And Adonibezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

Judges 1:4-7

This is the account of Judah capturing and dismembering a local chieftain named Adonibezek. There is historical significance in the treatment of this captured chieftain. It was common in the Middle East as well as among the Greeks and the Romans. Severing the hands and feet of the enemy or, as in this case, the thumbs and the great toes, served to humiliate the enemy and remove his ability to do further battle (e.g. throw a spear; draw a bow). This technique also served to make the enemy dependent upon the victor for further sustenance, even his very life. Often these defeated

foes would be made a spectacle at feasts for the jeers and laughter of the friends and court of the chieftain.

In this passage there is a two-fold display of the gospel. The first is the source of the victory over the enemies of the people of God. It is always the LORD that delivers the elect (v. 4).

What I find interesting is this Chieftain Adonibezek.

First, his name is very interesting as it is seen in context of the enemies of the cross. His name means “Lord of lightning” or “Lord of light.” Immediately we see that he is a counterfeit of Christ. Christ alone is the lord of Light. He is the light of the world. However, the enemies of the gospel appear in the same capacity (2 Cor. 11:13-15). They are false prophets and false Christs (Mat 24:23-27). Their end is that they are destined to tangle with the true Lord of light, and he cannot fail. The chief angel of light was dealt with at Calvary and our Lord bruised his head. The rest of the minions of the devil are held in check and destroyed by the word of his mouth, the gospel, the power of God. Secondly, Adonibezek's name signifies a “flash of lightning,” something that appears for a moment and is gone (Jude 1:12-13). These pretenders to the throne will be made short work of by the LORD, because he has shortened the days so that none of the elect will be deceived.

There is also an indication here that Adonibezek was a counterfeit priest, a false representative of the people. The fact that they cut off the thumb and the large toe are significant, because these were two of the things upon which the blood of consecration was placed for the consecration of the priest (Ex. 29:20). By removing their thumb and great toe

or the ability of the false lord, false priests, and the false light, they are disarmed and made of none effect. The fact Adonibezek owned or admitted this was a right judgment against him, because this is what he had done to his enemies; he established, by type, the true intent of all false religion of Satan and his followers to maim and destroy Christ and his priesthood. This “lord of light” was and is a flash in the pan; he was humiliated and made a spectacle. He was *made* to do obedience to the Conquering King, to the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Unwittingly and unwillingly they are made servants of the King.

The second application of the gospel is the capture and disarming of this chieftain is a picture of the conquering of our *souls* by the Sovereign. We are born in this world as enemies of God. We are completely ignorant of any and everything that has to do with God. Though we reside in utter darkness, we believe that we are veritable repositories of knowledge. We compare ourselves with those whom we deem less than ourselves. We think we are something when we are nothing. We think we have light and prove that we think that by our free opinions on God and the manner in which we are saved (John 5:39-40). We all feel ourselves to be lords of our domain. We are filled with self-defense, self-righteousness and have no idea that we are enemies of Christ. Without God and without hope in the world, we stand oblivious to our estate. We are rebels and we are proud of the fact. Though men do not care to think of salvation in terms of defeat, of being overcome (apprehended), nothing short of that will do for the conversion of our souls.

The first thing we see is that we are captured. The fact that we are captured proves to us that we are not what we think we are. Our ability to resist the Holy Spirit when it comes to the matter of salvation is nil. If we could flee as Adonibezek did, it would be to no avail. Once Christ is on our trail, there is no turning him back. Judah will prevail; the Lord will deliver. (All that the father giveth me shall come to me (Phil. 3:12)). Also, since we are taken captive at the will of Satan, nothing but the defeat of our captor will allow us to be delivered.

Secondly, we must be shut down. We have long trusted in our ability to affect God by the works of our hands or by our righteous walk. Nothing could be further from the truth. First, we have *no* righteousness and we do *no* good thing. That is not to say that we do not believe that we are righteous. We live off that false conception. From birth, we are drilled to believe that we can be good and thereby be accepted by God. For us to seek mercy we must be brought to a place of absolute inability. God kills before he makes alive (1 Sam. 2). The severing of the thumbs and the great toe removes from us the hope of our works and our walk (Job 5:12; 37:7). We must be brought to cease from our labors in order that our works will be revealed for what they are, useless, dead works (Rom. 7:5). Our Lord will show us mercy when our power is gone (Deut. 32:36).

The third thing is found in the words of Adonibezek concerning the way he treated those whom he defeated. He did what he did to *humiliate* his defeated foes. He made them to dine, not on a sumptuous feast but as dogs getting the crumbs and leftovers. The Lord humbles the elect also, but

not for the purpose of *shaming* them. He sets before them that “feast of fat things, wine on the lees and well refined.” They are humbled because the feast they receive is not a product of the works of their hands or their religious walk. They would be satisfied to take the dogs place and get the crumbs of the master's table (Matt. 15:26-27), but such is not the case. They are plucked from the dunghill and made to sit among princes (1 Sam. 2:8). They feel themselves to be broken dogs, but they sit as kings and priest unto God (2 Sam. 9:8, 12-13).

Finally, when confronted with the punishment for sin, the believer owns that he deserves hell even though his substitute has born what he deserved.

HOW THINGS GO WRONG

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

9, And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites, that dwelt in the mountain, and in the south, and in the valley.

10, And Judah went against the Canaanites that dwelt in Hebron: (now the name of Hebron before was Kirjatharba:) and they slew Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai.

11, And from thence he went against the inhabitants of Debir: and the name of Debir before was Kirjathsepher:

12, And Caleb said, he that smiteth Kirjathsepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife.

13, And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife.

14, And it came to pass, when she came to him, that she moved him to ask of her father a field: and she lighted from off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What wilt thou?

15, And she said unto him, Give me a blessing: for thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the nether springs.

16, And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father in law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which lieth in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people.

17, And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they slew the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. And the name of the city was called Hormah.

18, Also Judah took Gaza with the coast thereof, and Askelon with the coast thereof, and Ekron with the coast thereof.

19, And the LORD was with Judah; and he drave out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron.

20, And they gave Hebron unto Caleb, as Moses said: and he expelled thence the three sons of Anak.

21, And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day.

22, And the house of Joseph, they also went up against Bethel: and the LORD was with them.

23, And the house of Joseph sent to descry Bethel. (Now the name of the city before was Luz.)

24, And the spies saw a man come forth out of the city, and they said unto him, Shew us, we pray thee, the entrance into the city, and we will shew thee mercy.

25, And when he shewed them the entrance into the city, they smote the city with the edge of the sword; but they let go the man and all his family.

26, And the man went into the land of the Hittites, and built a city, and called the name thereof Luz: which is the name thereof unto this day.

27, Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Bethshean and her towns, nor Taanach and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Dor and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Ibleam and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns: but the Canaanites would dwell in that land.

28, And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out.

29, Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them.

30, Neither did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, nor the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites dwelt among them, and became tributaries.

31, Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho, nor the inhabitants of Zidon, nor of Ahlab, nor of Achzib, nor of Helbah, nor of Aphik, nor of Rehob:

32, But the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: for they did not drive them out.

33, Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Bethshemesh, nor the inhabitants of Bethanath;

but he dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: nevertheless, the inhabitants of Bethshemesh and of Bethanath became tributaries unto them.

34, And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley:

35, But the Amorites would dwell in mount Heres in Aijalon, and in Shaalvim: yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed, so that they became tributaries.

36, And the coast of the Amorites was from the going up to Akkrabbim, from the rock, and upward.

Judges 1:8-36

As you have probably noticed, this first chapter of Judges is partially made up of recounts of the victories that we've already looked at in our study of Joshua. They are recorded here again for our learning and our understanding. Thus far, we have seen the Lord has appointed Judah to go up and fight for the people, because he had delivered the enemy into the hands of Judah. We know that this pictures the Lord Jesus Christ who was anointed for the task of destroying the enemies of his people, Satan, sin, self and death. His first conquest was that of a false messiah named Adonibezek, whose name meant "Lord of light" and whose candle Judah snuffed out. In the latter part of verse 7 we are told he was brought to Jerusalem, and there he died.

Verse 8 is a kind of parenthetical statement explaining that Jerusalem had already been sacked and was in the

possession of the people. At first, I thought this was merely a chronological reference, but then I remembered that another false Christ had died in Jerusalem. His name was Adonizedek and his name meant “Lord of righteousness.” In Jerusalem the city of peace, the typification of the church of God (Rev. 21:9-10), the false Christs are brought to death. They are false prophets who transform themselves into angels of light and ministers of righteousness (2 Cor. 11). The gospel is the weapon that puts these enemies to death as the church of God assaults the very gates of hell which shall not prevail against it.

Verse 10 is the rehearsal of the fact that God always keep his promise. Caleb believed God concerning the possession of the land. When the ten spies returned to the people with words of fear and unbelief, Caleb stood forth with the gospel, the *promise* of God. He had been promised Hebron and came to Joshua to claim the promise, and he was given Kirjatharba which is Hebron. There, the reason that was given by the unbelievers, the giants and the sons of Anak, were destroyed (v. 20). The true reason for unbelief was that they ultimately believed in themselves and not God (Numbers 14:39-40).

In verses 11-15 is the story of Caleb issuing the challenge to go up and take Kirjathsepher (“The repository of human knowledge”) or Kirjathsannah (“the seat of law and doctrine”) with the promise of his daughter’s hand to the man who took the city. Othniel (“the lion of God”) took up the challenge and as a picture of Christ destroyed the wisdom of the world, and because of his victory, took possession of his bride.

Here we have a *contingent*, which states that in order to have the bride, the conqueror must be successful in his conquest. We have *success*, and the bride and the conqueror are wed. In short, we have the gospel. Here also we see the record of Achsah (“adornment”) moving her husband to seek a gift of the Father. She came to the Father through a mediator, her husband, who is moved by her (touched by her feelings), and she receives the desires of her heart. In this we see the beauty of the fact that as we ask the Father in the name of Christ, he promises it will be given to us.

In verses 16-18 we see the various victories of Judah, and all seems well until we come to verse 19. There, a strange combination of phrases is found. In the first part of the verse we see the language of assurance. “The LORD was with Judah and he drove out the inhabitants of the mountains.” Here Judah leaves off being the type of Christ and becomes the type of the church and the individual believer. This is seen in the second phrase. Notice that it begins with the conjunction, “but” which identifies an opposing thought. The opposing thought is the same with all opposing thought, namely unbelief. The Lord was with them. Of that, there can never be a moment of doubt. But all God's children are sinner-saints and are plagued with their nature of unbelief all their days. The chariots of iron were hardly a problem for the Lord. The bottom of the Red Sea was strewn with the twisted remains of the iron chariots of Egypt, consumed when the LORD but blew with his nostrils.

This verse (v. 19) is a description of the life of the child of God in this world. We are prone to copy this language when we speak of assurance and unbelief. Assurance is the

mountaintop experience of life, that moment when we trust the Lord, and our hearts are assured before him and we feel that nations would fall at our word. The times of weakness and frailty are referred to as being in the valley. We have a prime illustration of these two principles in the life of Simon Peter. On the mountain top he declared he would die before denying the Lord. In the valley he denied the Lord three times. On the mountain top he stepped from a boat and walked on water. In the valley he saw the billows, became afraid and began to sink. The Lord is always with his people, but his people are always with themselves, and unbelief makes cowards of us all. This unbelief begins a downward spiral that reveals the source of the troubles of the children of God. Scripture says of Christ in another place that “he did no mighty work there because of unbelief.”

In verse 21 we see unbelief manifested. Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites, and they remained until King David whose throne is the throne of the Messiah came and put the Jebusites out of business (2 Sam. 5:6-9). The Jebusites of our *heart* will not be finally put away until the King of Kings returns to put every Canaanite out business (Zech. 14:21).

This unbelief begins a trend that consumes the latter part of this chapter. Between vv. 27-36 we see the word “neither” begin five sentences, and each sentence is a reminder of the ultimate end of unbelief, a willingness to mix the truth and the error (Read).

They by making their enemies pay tribute, became rich from the world’s resources, but the price paid in the end was that they were led into captivity by the world (vv. 34-36). The providence of the Lord will often give the children of God the

desires of their heart and send leanness to their souls. They were at no time abandoned by the Lord. He was always with them, but because of unbelief, he removed the enjoyment of what was theirs by mercy and grace. Our Lord had promised that two of them could put ten thousand to flight, but they cowered at the sight of chariots of iron and crumbled before the false promise of worldly riches.

Finally, in vv. 22-26 we have an interjection into this catalogue of unbelief. It is a sad account of another kind of unbelief, one exemplified by the giving of good directions but not following the directions yourself. The record says the house of Joseph went against Bethel and the Lord was with them. This is what the child of God desires, to go to Bethel (the house of the Lord). Jacob so named it because there he saw the vision of Christ as the ladder, the singular way from earth to heaven. We come to Bethel to receive the vision (the word of God) and we see Christ as the way, the truth and the life. Joseph asks a man for directions and promises that no harm will come to him if he helps them find the entrance to Bethel.

Bethel before had borne the name of Luz. That name means “nut,” because a nut seems impenetrable. The Jews held that Luz had this name because it had no visible entrance and had to be entered through a secret passage. The entrance was not visible to the human eye. The house of the Lord has an invisible entrance, a spiritual entrance. Christ said, “I am the door.” Entrance into that blessed place is singular, because of what our Lord accomplished on Calvary (Heb. 10:19-20). This man who gave them directions is likened to the man who appreciates the truth and admires

those who love it yet stops short of going into the city himself. I have known many, over the years, who have said to others, go *here* or *there* to hear the truth yet will not darken the door themselves.

This, to me, is a sad thing. This man, after he told Joseph's tribe where the entrance was and was spared by the tribe, went to the land of the Hittites and built a city. Because he loved his darkness, he called the place Luz. His city became impenetrable. How many have seen some of the truth and embraced it to a degree but returned to their darkness because they cannot let go of what was? He was like a signpost that pointed to the city, but he never entered in. He is like those who embrace doctrine but choose the ways of the Old Covenant as a rule of life. He is like those who try to put new wine in old bottles and a new patch on an old garment. He is in Luz and has hidden the entrance. Would to God that he had been the kind of guide that said, "Let us go up to the house of the Lord." (See: Heb. 4:3; Luke 13:23-24). Do not be satisfied with knowing where the door is. Do not be satisfied with directing others to the door and retreating to your former safety. Enter in, and you will find pasture and you will go in and out.

FROM GILGAL TO BOCHIM

1, And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swear unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you.

2, And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?

3, Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.

4, And it came to pass, when the angel of the LORD spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept.

5, And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto the LORD.

6, And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land.

7, And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel.

8, And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being an hundred and ten years old.

9, And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathheres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash.

10, And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

Judges 2:1-10

In our previous study from the first chapter of Judges we were confronted with what proved to be an ominous and foreboding series of events that, verse by verse, depicted the decline of the people of God into gross idolatry. If it were a musical score it would be played entirely in a minor key. Rather than believe God for the victory over their enemies, they instead chose to keep their enemies alive and near and use them for the gain of the world. Man cannot serve two masters else he will hate the one and love the other.

In reading these things we must be careful to avoid putting them off to another time and another covenant. All scripture is for the benefit of the children of God and this passage in Chapter 2 is a message to the church. It is the message of our Lord and comes as a reminder and warning of the dangers of compromise on any level. I have seen many pastors, whom I held in high esteem, slowly and incrementally embrace the world and its religion first by tolerance and then by acceptance, until though *they* would heartily stand for the doctrine of truth, they find the ones they have embraced prove only to be a source of acceptance by the world. What value is the truth when it is enwrapped

in the vines, thorns and thistles of religion to the point that it is held as just one thing among many and virtually indistinguishable from any other.

I fear this could be my case, for I am no different from any other. My desire is to end well, to die with the gospel upon my lips, because I know in my heart there is a natural bent to avoid standing out. Blending is much less painful. I am not alone in my fears. Paul used the same tenor in his epistles to the churches, as did our Lord in his messages to the churches in Asia Minor. The danger exists that in any moment we could succumb to the wiles of the pervasive religion that surrounds us on every hand. I know the remedy. I know what I must do. I know what food I must always put on the table and what nourishment I must take for myself. Nothing but the gospel will do.

In the passage we will look at tonight, we as the church are confronted by the messenger of God. His words are both reminders and warnings. It is not difficult to discern who the angel is. He is the angel of God, the messenger of the covenant. He is the messenger of the covenant revealed in Malachi who shall suddenly come to his temple, who is the delight of God, who sits as refiner and purifier of silver, who shall purify the sons of Levi and his priesthood (Mal. 3:1-4). He is the Lord Jesus Christ.

We know he is this Angel of the covenant, because he came from Gilgal. The significance of this place is that it is where the Lord God *renewed* his covenant with his people (Joshua 5:2). The name Gilgal means “a wheel” and signifies the Lord rolling the reproach of Egypt away from his people (Josh. 2; 9). Also significant is where he appears to the

people in this text because it sets out the message he is about to speak. He came from Gilgal to Bochim. Bochim means “weeping.” From covenant blessings to weeping; this was the harbinger of what was to come, as revealed in the last chapter. The blessed people, the people with whom God has renewed the covenant and rolled the stench of their former bondage from them like a great wheel, are about to weep as the truth of their actions in light of their blessings is revealed. The Angel of the Lord came from Gilgal (covenant blessings) to Bochim (weeping).

The words he speaks immediately identify him in the capacity of Covenant Savior (v. 1). He speaks in the language of glory. “I made.” “I brought.” “I swear.” “I said I will never.” Those are all proclamations of who he is and what he has done. This is the Christ, mighty to save. He comes with words of assurance and warnings that reveal he is speaking to *spiritual* Israel, the church of God.

Also, part and parcel with the message of deliverance, our Lord reminds the people of his command to avoid idolatry and destroy it. Then he reveals to them his knowledge of their failure to obey (v.2). The last phrase of verse 2 is not a request for information. It is the revelation of the compassionate Savior. It is the Lord calling to Adam and saying, “Where art thou?” It is the Lord saying to his people, “Why will ye die?” It is a confrontation. It addresses the seemingly unbelievable aspect of their sin in light of their blessing. The sin of the child of God is more miserable than that of the infidel, because it is done by one who has received freely the gift of grace. “Why have ye done this?”

He further reminds them of what he has said concerning the chastisement due for such behavior (v.3). He will no longer drive the enemy from them. He will allow them to stew in the soup they have made. This is worse than punishment, and much more painful. It carries with it the idea of a continual unease and sorrow. They in effect got what they asked for. They because of unbelief allowed and even sometimes embraced the enemy, and the Lord said, "OK, you desired their riches, and their riches will turn to thorns in your side." If you embrace to some measure the strange gods that surround you, they shall become a trap to you.

The result will always be the same. When we are confronted with what God has done for us and that truth is held over against the fact of our idolatry, the tears will flow like rain (v. 4). The sadness is doubly sad, because there is no reason for it. We have received so much. We have received *all* things. It makes no sense that we should ever turn our eyes from our master. Yet warnings are in scripture because they are needed. These words are not generic. They are specific to something we can fully expect to encounter. We have all experienced Gilgal and we have also been residents of Bochim. Bochim becomes to us as a hometown. Those experiences never leave us. They remain painful reminders to us because those gods whom we have allowed into our life, and even embraced, are visible thorn-scars on our testimony. False religion has a good memory, and even though we have repented and offer Christ as our only hope (v. 5), what has been done cannot be undone. Thank God it is forgiven, but the ghosts still walk in our midst. They are

ghosts of recollection and shame and the Lord leaves them with us.

Verses 5-10 are a recounting of the *difference* between Gilgal and Bochim and a suggestion of one of the reasons why we *end* up in Bochim.

In the days when Joshua delivered us and was with us, in the days that we possessed the land, our words and hearts were filled with continuous rehearsals of the great things that God had done. We could barely speak without telling of the great salvation we had received. There is a saying. "Time heals all wounds." It is true to some degree, but the real truth is that time wounds all healings. Time passes and a new generation takes the place of the old (v. 10). They do not know the Lord or the works of his hands. It is easy here to blame them, but they did not appear after we disappeared. They missed out because somewhere along the way we came to Bochim and other gods entered our world and it became increasingly difficult to speak passionately of our great deliverance while allowing the presence of false influences.

This passage teaches that it behooves us to always be ready to give reason for our hope, to make it our business to be about the things that pertain to godliness, to avoid compromise at all cost and make our next generation to know of the God who saved us and the great things he has done. It is a sad, painful and costly trip to go from Gilgal to Bochim. May the Lord keep Gilgal in the forefront of our minds, and may we do what is necessary to use what is available to us to continually be reminded of the glory of the gospel.

DEPRAVITY AND MERCY

10, And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

11, And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:

12, And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.

13, And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

14, And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

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

16, Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.

Judges 2:10-16

The last phrase of verse 10 sets the stage for all the things that are reported in the remainder of the chapter. Though the new generation had not personally experienced the battles, had not seen Jordan divided, and had not seen Jericho fall without a shot being fired, they were no less responsible to follow the commands the Lord had given (v. 2). However, I see within these words a sad but true indicator. Some of the blame for what takes place must be laid at the door of the generation that preceded this one. The world is a powerful place. Natural religion, which is idolatry, is interwoven in practically every aspect of human life. Because this is so, every generation must be diligent in holding forth the truth so that the succeeding generation may face it with at least an intellectual understanding undergirding them to recognize and battle against that which is false. This is accomplished with a continual rehearsal of the truth and living a life of example being willing to call evil what it is. Most of us who have passed the middle of life cannot imagine that what is tolerated and accepted as normal today would have been tolerated in our youth. Even false religion of fifty years ago would cringe at the extent to which false religion embraces the world in this day. We as believers cannot make others believe. If we could, all of our loved ones and even our enemies would be believers. However, we cannot lay full blame for the state of things at the door of the infidel. We who have the truth must at least bear witness to what God has done for us, the truth of the gospel, and be genuine in our life and honest about what is going on around us with the next generation. We cannot change the

course of providence and we would not if we could, but it is incumbent upon us to do what we can to open up that alabaster box of precious ointment, anoint the head of the savior and fill the room with the fragrance of the his substitutionary sacrifice, a sweet smelling savor to God. We cannot make someone *know* the LORD, but we can and must speak often of the works that he has done for us.

Verses 11-13 are a catalogue of declension. Because this new generation knew not the LORD and was not aware of the things he had done for Israel, their own depravity was disclosed. They did evil in the sight of the LORD. The first thing to note is their evil was in the sight of him who was savior and deliverer. This particular evil was not what men could put in a box or a bottle. The evil they did was in direct correlation to the one whom the evil was against. Their evil was specific to salvation and therefore was done against the salvation of God. Those who have been saved serve the Savior. They are of one mind and heart in the matter of the worship of God. They worship him in spirit and truth by rejoicing in Christ and having no confidence in the flesh. They acknowledge him as their singular and absolute salvation and refuse to give space, even for an hour, to those who would add anything to the grace of God in the salvation of their souls. So, the evil done was the same as saying that Christ was not the only salvation, but there was more.

Since there can be no mixture of truth and error because it is forbidden by God (2 Cor. 6:14-18), the action they took is declared in terms of betrayal. They served Baalim (v. 11). They forsook the LORD God of their fathers, the very God who was responsible for their deliverance from the bondage

of Egypt and commanded them to have nothing to do with the gods of the people who surrounded them. They provoked the LORD to anger, because he is a jealous God and will not give his glory to another (v. 12). Their idolatry was full and complete as is seen in the description given. They served Baalim, they served Baal and they served Ashtaroth. This covers the spectrum of false deities. Baalim is the plural of Baal and suggests a multiplicity of gods, a pantheon, if you will.

This aligns with the words of verse 12; “They followed others gods.” The name Baal is often used to refer to any single idol, but it is primarily a reference to the sun god. This was the name given to Nimrod, the great leader of Babel after he died and attained to the lofty estate of deity. He was given names such a Rah in Egypt and was associated with light and fire. When Prometheus of Greek mythology brought fire to the mortals he is represented as holding the sun. Much of pagan ritual is associated with the sun and has been adopted into Christendom. The Easter sunrise service and Saturnalia (our Christmas time) are both feasts of the sun. Ashtaroth was a goddess. Her feast was held on a lunar calendar and had to do with fertility. A transliteration of her name became what we know as Easter. The date of Easter is decided upon by the lunar rather than the Julian calendar. Artistic renderings of these gods and this goddess often picture Baal as the Sun, Ashtaroth as the moon and Baalim as the stars of the heavens.

In any event, the worshipper of these gods worshipped the creature rather than the creator. The trick employed by religion is to worship these strange gods and simply give

them Christian identities. This chicanery is seen in Matthew 7 when our Lord said to the religious crowd whom he never knew, that they worked iniquity in the name of Christ. In truth there is no incorporation. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Since the LORD is singular, any addition to him is actually forsaking him altogether.

We saw in the previous chapter that the end of such activity was the chastisement of the Lord, so we cannot divorce what takes place here from our own experience. Chastisement is in direct correlation to the transgression. The Lord's chastisement is his kind and benevolent correction of his people. There is no punishment involved, though it may certainly feel as it were punishment, and deservedly so, while it is going on. Chastisement does not fall under the purview of the general trials that are common to all men, the elect as well as the non-elect. Chastisement is for sons and is designed to prove the people of God and bring them to the place where they have no one to call upon but the One true God.

This is seen in verses 14-15, 17-23. The context teaches that this chastisement reoccurred often. What a clear testimony this is of the depravity of the sinful heart. We are depraved. We cannot keep our selves. Though we are new creatures in Christ, the old creature, the old man still plagues us by constantly enamoring us to the strange gods around us and those of our past. Idolatry is our natural religion and shamefully we resort to it with natural ease. Thank God that our salvation is not about what we do or don't do. Also, thank God that he is for us and that he will do what is necessary to assure our allegiance to him. The

fact that we are often chastised reveals that were it not for grace, we would fall away completely.

Our depravity does not prevent God's mercy. In fact, this entire context can be summed up in these two principles. We are depraved and God is merciful. In the very midst of the open display of our depravity and our consummate worthiness of punishment, we see the mercy of our God (v.16; Ps. 89:27-34; Is. 43:21-28). Nevertheless, in spite of the fact of our sin, the LORD raised up judges (deliverers, saviors), which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them (Romans 5:20-21). Even the language is the language of mercy and compassion. Notice that our Lord does not refer to their depravity in this verse but refers to their oppressors as the ones to be blamed for their affliction (those that spoiled them). This is often the case as our Lord refers to the sin of his people. He calls it disease and a thing to be pitied. This is mercy.

The "Judges" is plural as the writer of the book is covering the entire time of the Judges. However, we will see that these judges appeared *one* at a time. This points us to the Savior, the single source of our salvation and deliverance. I am sorry and embarrassed by my depravity. I own the fact and shame of it. Nevertheless Christ is my judge, my Savior and my deliverer. In spite of what I am, he shows mercy. This is his way (Micah 7:18-20).

The knowledge of my depravity and his mercy is what keeps me going in this old world (1 Cor. 1:26-30).

PROVEN

1, Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan;

2, Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof;

3, Namely, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baalhermon unto the entering in of Hamath.

4, And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.

5, And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites:

6, And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

7, And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgat the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves.

8, Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the

children of Israel served Chushanrishathaim eight years.

9, And when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.

10, And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushanrishathaim.

11, And the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

Judges 3:1-11

In these words, our Lord teaches a doctrine of paramount importance. This teaches that everything that God does has a purpose beyond the obvious. Some might assume from these words that God was at a loss as to the end result or that he did not know the outcome. How the people would fare was never in question. It was all in God's purpose. Trials and tribulations are by design. They are by divine appointment, and they always prove precisely what they are designed to prove.

This passage has, I believe, a unique application. The people whom the Lord is about to prove are a new generation. In Judges 2:10 they are described as those who "knew not the Lord, nor yet the works that he had done for Israel." They knew of him and they knew of the works that he had done, but their knowledge was second hand, born of

stories and the observance of religious rites and rituals. They were not there when the Lord did his mighty works. They were unproven. In the passage considered here, they are described as those who do not know the arts of war nor the battles and struggles their fathers and mothers suffered that they might enjoy the benefits they now have (v. 2).

Though their fathers possessed what they had solely by grace, they had been made to recognize the value of it by wars and battles they had enjoined at the Lord's bidding. Crisis and struggle are the things that build character and cause men to have an appreciation for what they have. This, I know, sounds like the often-rehashed generational argument of parent and child since the beginning of time. There is however the ring of truth to it. Very little is learned on flowery beds of ease. Human life is struggle and is appreciated only by struggle, and the life of the believer is doubly so. War and warring is unpleasant, and to one who has already taken possession of the prize without the battle, it sadly may seem unnecessary.

This is certainly seen in the attitudes displayed in the generation before us in this text. The former generation had done one of two things. They had either gone to war and won utterly destroying their enemies, or they had fought, and though not fully destroying their enemies, had at least made their enemies indentured. The language of the text before us suggests neither war nor indenture. Verses 5-6 come across as a general statement of fact. Without struggle and without agenda, this generation had possessed the land and simply tolerated and accepted the enemy as a way of life. Any moral or righteous compass had been cast aside, and they dwelt

among the enemies and assimilated into their society. Not only was this so, but the end of that assimilation was they had *forgotten* any sense of truth. They inter-married with the enemy, gave their daughters to form unions with the enemy and ultimately embraced their false religion. They were in Canaan; they possessed the land of promise and thought they were safe and secure. So, they felt no compunction to make waves. They forgot God.

How else could it be? God had commanded them to destroy their enemies, to cut off the heads of their idols and to burn down their groves. To disobey at this point was the same as forgetting God. They had mixed the false with the true, and there can be no mixture. In the matter of truth, the truth ceases when diluted with the corruption of false religion. The gospel becomes “another gospel” which is not the gospel but a perversion thereof. Make no mistake here. The issue of this passage is the purity of the gospel and the consequence of a mindset of tolerance and acceptance. We tolerate other religions because we do not believe in conversion by duress. However, the believer does not tolerate any tampering with the gospel and will not accept anyone or any religion seeking to do so.

The fact this fall occurs in another generation suggests it is not a sudden overthrow of truth. It is incremental, piecemeal but piece by piece, line by line, hear a little and there a little, and it comes because these have not been part of the struggle that makes the truth more precious. I count myself happy that I spent my formative years in false, useless religion. When I heard the gospel and Christ revealed himself to me, I had no difficulty distinguishing between the

false and the true. Also, I found a keener sense of awareness of the part of me that still clung to the false. Though necessity is laid upon me and woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel, I have a true fear of *my own* bent to tolerance and acceptance of that which is false.

I refuse to veer far from my allotted course because I know, for my own case, that only the gospel will keep me safe and grounded. Those who grew up having never tasted the difference, whose knowledge of the false is only cursory, born of hearsay and not experience, have never felt the sting of the arrows of those who despise the truth. According to this text, they are those who more readily embrace the mixture and forget their God. Do not think the Lord is here addressing the heathen. He addresses his people, sometimes leaves them with their desires and sends them among the enemies to prove, test, and try them (V. 8).

Do not think you are exempt from the possibility of becoming enamored with that which opposes God. Peter denied the Lord three times. He took his eyes off Christ, sank into the depths, and even tried to dissuade the Lord from the cross. Paul succumbed to Jewish peer pressure. David fell for another's wife and committed murder. Some of the

Galatians fell under the spell of legalism. The Corinthians fell under the spell of one-upmanship concerning spiritual gifts, and we are no different than they. The necessities the Lord places on marking out the enemies, not listening to the false teachers and judging who is a swine and who is a wolf in sheep's clothing, is not in the Word of God as window dressing. The warnings are there because the false teachers are real and because there remains a bent in us to let down our guard in their presence (Matt. 7:6, 15, 21-23; 2 Cor. 11:3-4, 13-15; 2 Tim. 3:1-8; 2 Peter 3:1-3; 1 John 4:1-4). These are present in our world to prove us (1 Cor; 11:19). The enemies are here and do what they do by divine appointment (Ps. 105:25). They are here to prove us and prove us they do!

This passage proves us in three ways.

First it proves our *depravity*. This is our incurable and terminal disease. When faced with temptation we more often than we wish to admit yield to it. The design of a test is to reveal what we are. Trials do *not* make us better; they do *not* move us apace in a progression to holiness. They bring us back to see our true selves. They kick out all the stops, cut all our guywires, lay the ax to the root of our pedestals and plunge us into the knowledge of just what we really are. In the midst of the trial we see nothing but darkness. We are proved to be utterly depraved.

What is God's intent in bringing us to this place? It is the nature of this test to do one of two things. Some temptations are designed to bring down. Others are designed to lift up. All are designed to prove us. It would seem this temptation was designed to bring us down, but in truth, in the matter of grace the way up is to go down. The trials of the believer are like unto an arc. The revelation of our depravity is the bottom of the arc but the track ends in an upward swing. These are the children of God, the chosen, and scripture declares no evil shall happen to the just. The revelation of our depravity only causes us to despair of ourselves, to realize once again we are not the captains of our domain but are rather, in ourselves, without hope and slaves to our own vileness. Here is the rub. That is a *good* thing!

The second thing proven is that we know our *impotent* condition (v. 9). The proof of our depravity turns our eyes from self, from all that is false and puts us firmly at mercy's door. Thus, we see the beginning of the upward arc and the true design of the trial. It proves that we realize our help must come from outside our self. When God tries his children, they all wind up at the feet of Christ. They cry by reason of their utter calamity (Jonah 2:2-10). How can we despise that which brings us to call on our God for mercy (2 Cor. 12:7-11)? The trial proves to us that we will indeed walk in his commandments to believe and to repent. It proves us needy sinners and dependent children of the Most High.

Third, the trial proves we are the children of God because God sends us the deliverer (v. 9-10; 1 Thess. 1:5-7). He sends the One upon whom the Spirit resides without measure (v. 10; Isaiah 61:1-3). He sends Othniel ("the lion of

God”) to deliver us; the enemy is in his hand, and he prevails to deliver us. The appointed trial brings us down to bring us up, brings us out to bring us in, and every trial ends well (v. 11—rest—Heb. 12:11-13). If you are his, you will be proved.

“And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses” (Judges 3:4).

A MESSAGE FROM GOD

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

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

14, So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.

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

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

17, And he brought the present unto Eglon king of Moab: and Eglon was a very fat man.

18, And when he had made an end to offer the present, he sent away the people that bare the present.

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

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

21, And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly:

22, And the haft also went in after the blade; and the fat closed upon the blade, so that he could not draw the dagger out of his belly; and the dirt came out.

23, Then Ehud went forth through the porch, and shut the doors of the parlour upon him, and locked them.

24, When he was gone out, his servants came; and when they saw that, behold, the doors of the parlour were locked, they said, Surely he covereth his feet in his summer chamber.

25, And they tarried till they were ashamed: and, behold, he opened not the doors of the parlour; therefore they took a key, and opened them: and, behold, their lord was fallen down dead on the earth.

26, And Ehud escaped while they tarried, and passed beyond the quarries, and escaped unto Seirath.

27, And it came to pass, when he was come, that he blew a trumpet in the mountain of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mount, and he before them.

28, And he said unto them, Follow after me: for the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over.

29, And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valour; and there escaped not a man.

30, So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years.

Judges 3:12-30

Before us is the continuous, recurrent theme that we encounter throughout the book of Judges. The people of God rebel and fall into gross idolatry and are sent into captivity by God. The people are oppressed and finally cry out to God, and he sends a deliverer. After they are delivered, they live in a state of rest for the duration of the life of the savior. Upon his death, they resort to their old depraved ways when the cycle begins anew. As I considered this fact, two things came to my mind.

The first was what my reaction would be if I, having been delivered, found myself suddenly without a living savior. Would I act any differently than these who rebelled when their deliverer died? What depths of depravity would I plumb if I no longer had *the* intercessor at the right hand of God and could no longer hold to the fact that the one whom God heard spoke for me?

My second thought was to rejoice in the knowledge that my savior *ever* liveth to intercede for me. The Lord liveth, let

all the earth rejoice! This repeated theme teaches us several things. The first is that we are kept by the living Savior. Secondly, although the children are in the promised land and have been given all its attendant benefits, they are yet under a conditional covenant and are doomed to fail. They but picture the church in specific areas of the life of the child of God. Thirdly, without the living presence of Christ in us continually, we would not make it at all. These often-repeated themes are designed to teach us to be thankful that our Savior lives, indeed, is life altogether.

Our passage begins with the word “And” which suggests a continuous and reasonable course of events. The deliverer died, and it does not say “but” the children did evil. Rather it says “and” they did evil. The fact that this is the natural course of events is further revealed with the word “again.” The repetitive action reveals that “and” is the correct word. The word “again” assures us that though the characters may change, the reaction is still the same, a steady downhill tumble into idolatry. We see God also acting in the same manner as always. With the intent and purpose of grace, he starts the process that will bring the people to their knees at his feet. He prepares the rod of their chastisement designed to administer the exact number of stripes to bring them to sue for mercy.

Our Lord strengthens the pagan, the enemy, the king named Eglon. It is God who turns the heart of the king whithersoever he will. It is God who strengthens the king and it is God who breaks the king (Ezek. 30:24). This strength given Eglon was rife with purpose. Eglon means “bull,” or “young bull,” and his strength is given against

Israel. Their previous captivity was eight years, now they are put under the bull's hoof for 18 years. Whether there is a correlation between the crime and the length of the chastisement is not known but our Lord does seem to speak along these lines in Lev. 26:27-28.

As we saw in the last study, the result is sure. The temporary trial under which the Lord brings his people will reveal their depravity, their inability to better their estate and their utter dependence upon God. When they cried unto the Lord, he sent them a savior. Many would look at this and see the children as the ultimate initiator of their own salvation. Such would declare that God did not act until the people cried for help and this proves free will. The problem with such thinking is that it discounts the fact their cry for help came as the result of a well and perfectly orchestrated series of divine manipulations of everything and everyone to bring his people to see their need of him. What he has *purposed*, he will bring to pass (Is. 14:24-27).

Beginning in verse 15, our Lord raises up a savior to deliver the people from the king who he has employed against them. The savior is Ehud, son of Gera, a Benjamite. Ehud means "I will be thanked; I will be praised." Benjamin means "son of thy right hand," though Ehud himself was left-handed. The reason for inclusion of this fact is not clear. I personally think that it made for a better way of disguising the dagger, as most people, being right-handed, would wear it on their left thigh or hip. These names however, point to Christ our Savior, to whom all thanksgiving and praise belong and who sits at the right hand of the Majesty on High. The delivery itself follows a general theme in the Word

of God. The salvation of the people involves the destruction of the enemy. No sacred ground is possessed until the enemy is destroyed. We were delivered after Christ nailed all that opposed us to his cross and openly triumphed over them. That which enslaved us is Satan and sin. In order to set us free, these first must be dealt with; they must be eliminated.

This fact is summarily set forth in the remainder of the chapter and several things are important to the understanding of the gospel. The first thing is that this was all according to purpose and comes to us in the language of the gospel. What takes place is “a message from God” (v. 20).

The *dagger* represents the *word* of God, the sword of the Lord (v. 16; Hebrews 4:12-13). The design of the words, the purpose of the gospel is to reveal the truth about the person to whom it is applied. The word does not change men; it reveals what they are. The same gospel that melts the wax hardens the clay. The same gospel that convicts and condemns also convicts and comforts. It is the discerner of the inward man.

Eglon is described as a very fat man. This surely contributed to his being less able to defend against the surprise attack. However, I think this refers to his being satisfied in his state of idolatry. This fatness refers to the girth of self-righteousness (Is. 6:9-10). This fatness refers to the weight of his oppression of the people of God. This corpulence refers to the state of delusion under which God had strengthened this man. He was at ease, complacent and fattened for the slaughter.

The children of Israel sent him a present. Whether this was truly a gift designed to allay some of the burdens that

were put on them or as a tribute they sent to their king is not known. But it is ever the will of the self-righteous to receive a tribute from those whom they hold in check and control by their legal oppression. Likewise, it is ever the delight of the self-righteous to have things done for them (v. 19). He was also a religious man. When Ehud told Eglon he had a message for him from God, he immediately stood up. Ehud used the name *Elohim*. This name may be applied in many ways. It can be applied to a judge, a magistrate, a king, an idol or even God himself. Ehud used it in the plural for Eglon's benefit. This immediately peaked king Eglon's interest because the Israelite was, it appeared, attributing deity to the gods of Moab.

While Eglon waited with bated breath for a word from his idols, Ehud delivered a message from the one true and living God. The impetus for Ehud's approach in this manner is seen in verses 18-19. It appears that after the present was delivered, Ehud and those who delivered the gift were headed back to their houses, but Ehud only made it as far as the quarry. The quarry was the place where the slaves were made to carve out the numerous deities of the Moabitish pantheon. Here Ehud stopped in his track and returned to the house of Eglon for the express purpose of killing him. We cannot enter into the mind of Ehud, but from the evidence of his return from the quarry and the words he spoke to Eglon, it was from his sight of the idols that his intent was formed.

This tells us something about the message and the messenger of God. In this day, preachers seem to be little more than motivational speakers spouting their positive thinking pap to the multitudes who worship at the altar of

self-improvement. In scripture, preachers of the gospel are called, “sons of thunder,” and they are armed for the kill. There have strapped to their thigh a weapon of mass destruction. Their message is designed for the salvation of sinners and is delivered with a loving heart for men. Their message is also born of indignation against the idols of men and the men who love to worship them. Their message is both life and death (2 Cor. 2:14-17).

To the lost and dying, the message is good news of substitution, satisfaction and salvation accomplished. To those who seek not Christ but rather opt for the idols of their own merit, the messenger is out to kill, to give no quarter and take no prisoners. Barnard used to say, “If I'm gonna' introduce you to my God, I'm gonna' have to kill yours first.” That does not sit well with the tolerance and acceptance-minded religious multitudes, but it is nonetheless true. Once the Word of God finds its target, it does not go away (vv. 21-22). Men have no control what the Word of God does to them. It is a well-placed dagger that cannot be removed. It will prick your heart and make you call on God for salvation, or it will pierce your heart and kill you to the things of grace. The word also reveals and discloses what is in the inward man (v.22, last phrase). “The dirt came out.” The Word of God reveals whether you are a child of God or an idolater every time it is preached.

In this passage we also see the gospel is an effectual call to follow the Savior into this glorious victory that gives rest to the people (v. 27-30).

THE END OF SIN

1, And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead.

2, And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles.

3, And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.

4, And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.

5, And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

6, And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedeshnaphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?

7, And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand.

8, And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go.

9, And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh.

10, And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him.

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

12, And they shewed Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam was gone up to mount Tabor.

13, And Sisera gathered together all his chariots, even nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people that were with him, from Harosheth of the Gentiles unto the river of Kishon.

14, And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him.

15, And the LORD discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet.

16, But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth of the Gentiles: and all

the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; and there was not a man left.

17, Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.

18, And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle.

19, And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him.

20, Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and enquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No.

21, Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.

22, And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples.

23, So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel.

24, And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

Judges 4:1-24

Before we look at chapter 4, we need to consider the last verse of Chapter 3. Here we have the short record of a judge of Israel named Shamgar, the son of Anath. He judged Israel for what most historians believe was about one year. Though chapter 4 begins with the record of the death of Ehud, chronologically Shamgar judged Israel for about a year after Ehud's death (after him, after Ehud v. 31). This man is remembered in the canon of scripture as a man of labor, probably a farmer, who with the tools of his trade, his ox goad, destroyed 600 Philistines. He delivered Israel not with a mighty army, but a common tool used to direct dumb oxen to stay on the path to be plowed.

He is much like the preacher of the gospel who plies the only tool of his trade serving to steer the people to stay the right course, while the same tool serves the destruction of the enemies of the cross. Both the farmer and his weapon are common things, foolish to the world, but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise and the despised things to reveal the power and glory of his grace. Samson slew 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of an ass. It is not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit, sayeth the LORD.

After eighty years of peace and rest, after the death of Ehud and Shamgar, the people returned to their ways and

did evil in the sight of the Lord. The Lord raised up a prophetess, a poet, a song writer to be the judge of his people. Her name was *Deborah*. Her name means “bee,” and years of evolution in language have made this name to mean “busy.” We use the term “busy as a bee” and the derivation is from this word. The *original* meaning has more to do with an *orderly manner* than with business. Our God is a God of order and he raised up this blessed woman to restore order to Israel. Because the people had rebelled, God had sold them (delivered them) into captivity under a king named Jabin.

Jabin had at his disposal a mighty warrior named Sisera. Sisera will later prove to be a coward, leaving his post and fleeing for his life. His name gives us a hint of why. His name means “battle array” referring to the *equipment* of war, the armor and in this case 900 chariots of iron. His name does not suggest he was a great leader himself or a man of war, but that he trusted in his chariots. On a human level he had ample reason to do so, because these chariots had iron scythes mounted to their axles which would cut their enemies to bits. So devastating was the potential of these killing machines that when Israel cried for delivery they cried to the Lord because of these chariots (v. 3; Is. 31:1).

Deborah calls Barak to inform him of the word of the Lord. God is about to deliver Israel from the grip of oppression. She tells Barak that the Lord had commanded him to gather a force of ten thousand and go to Mount Tabor where the Lord would draw Sisera and his chariots to the river basin at the base of the mountain. There, God would strike fear in Sisera's heart, and Israel would win the day.

Barak did as Deborah told him but not without requiring Deborah to go with him, but she told him the glory for the victory would not be his but would be to a woman. So, Deborah went with him, and Israel mopped up, the chariots of iron having no power against the Lord God Almighty (Ps 20:7). When Sisera saw the battle was lost and his confidence in his chariots misplaced, he left the battlefield and ran for his life with Barak in hot pursuit.

Sisera fled to the land of the Kenites who were at peace with Hazor and landed at the tent of a woman named Jael. She was kin to Moses by marriage. Sisera believing he had found an ally, because Jael invited him into her tent telling him everything was ok, came into the tent of Jael to rest from his cowardly flight. Asking for water, he instead received milk. From the milk and his weariness, he lay down to rest. Jael gave him a blanket, and when he was in a deep sleep, she took a nail (tent stake), drove it through his temples and nailed him to the ground, ending his life and miserable career. When Barak caught up to Sisera, he was met by Jael who said, "Come and see the man you are looking for." This incident proved to be the undoing of Jabin who later met his death at the hands of Israel. Deborah's prophecy was true. The glory for the victory belonged to a woman, in fact two women, Jael and Deborah.

I read several commentaries on this chapter and was amazed to find that though the commentators saw Jael as the victor, they had somewhat to say about the manner in which she killed Sisera. Some even called it murder and thought it would have been more appropriate for her to have killed him while he was awake and facing her. I suppose they

were trying to say that it is wrong to kill your enemies, but they seemed to forget that it is God who providentially uses such means to destroy the enemies of the cross and the enemies and oppressors of his people (Deut. 9:3).

There also seemed to be, among these commentators, a general lack of interest in looking for the gospel. Every Old Testament occurrence, every Old Testament story is about Christ and the work he accomplished for his people and this is no exception. Each of the stories that make up the book of Judges has to do with some recurring principles, sin, oppression, captivity, calling on God, raising up a deliverer, deliverance, destruction of the enemy and some aspect of the preaching of the gospel. Every story does not contain all of these, but every one has some of these elements.

This historical record is a picture of the child of God seeking to be done with sin. It is set in the sense of a battle, a pursuit and a victory. I want us to consider these things tonight.

First, the child of God dealing with his sin is a *battle*. The language of this struggle is often presented in terms of a war (Matt. 16:18; 2 Cor. 10:3-6; Eph. 6:10-17). Those who are engaged in this battle bear the scars of conflict. Sisera in this battle represents *sin*. Sin has long oppressed us and will continue. Barak is the *believer* arrayed for war, set to ambush based upon the promise of God. Deborah is the *prophet*, the word of God who promises sure victory. Sin is what the believer seeks to be done with all his days (1 John 2:1). Sin is a treacherous foe with many chariots to war against us. Its ability to wound us when we engage it is

profound. Not one of us can say that our personal battles with sin have ended well.

The longer we have been in this fight the more we realize that we cannot win. By God's grace we do inflict some occasional damage, but the idea of *defeating* sin is at best an idea that brings only a partial, temporary feeling of victory. We may knock the wheels off one chariot but there are still 899 in the fray.

Spurgeon said the notion of defeating sin is usually the notion of a young Christian. As we grow older and more mature in Christ, we realize our sin has more power over us than we would care to admit. Yet, because we have been given love for Christ, we continue to engage the enemy; we cannot but try to be done with that which we know hurts our relationship with him. We do not win the battle although God gives us moments when we seem to be able to taste the victory.

Second, it seems as in this story that as soon as the battle appears to be ours the enemy disappears. His strategy changes and he takes flight. We take after him, willing to follow hot on his trail till we do him in, but he is just beyond our reach.

Paul said in Romans 7:15-24, "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not,

that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" These words of Paul are not spoken in the sense that he never gives up the chase but that in the end his efforts to put away sin are fruitless.

We stay in pursuit because we must. We cannot give place to the devil. We must resist temptation. We must with every fiber continue this war, because we know if we cease, our existence will lie in ruins. We cannot win, but the child of God cannot quit. His zeal is not born of ignorance but of love for Christ and cherishing a right relationship with him. We know that our every effort to stop sinning is doomed to fail, but we cannot and will not give up the battle (James 4:17; Cor. 16:13; Eph. 6:13-14).

When we find the enemy has bested us, out-run and hid from us, we see a woman has come out to meet us in the way. She has a message for us. She is the church, and her message is the gospel. She says come and see the enemy that you have been pursuing. She takes us into her house and shows us our enemy, dead, a nail through his temples held fast to the floor. Our enemy is dead, and we didn't kill him. She has slain the enemy, being in Christ when he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. The serpent's head is crushed (Is. 22:22-24; Col. 2:14-15).

Isn't this our case? In this world we struggle with our sin. We continuously battle every day only to find the war is not finished. We find that sin has eluded us, and we set out to do it in. And when we are at the end of the trail, we are brought into God's house, and by the message of the gospel see that the enemy is dead, and the victory belongs to another. The life of the child of God is a paradoxical enigma. Because sin is finished, he seeks to finish it. Though he knows he cannot finish it, he knows it is finished. He does not do what he does to be righteous but because he is righteous. He is dead to sin and spends his life *reckoning* it to be so. After pursuing the enemy and finding him dead, we find that it is truly good news.

THANKSGIVING

1, Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying,

2, Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves.

3, Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel.

4, LORD, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water.

5, The mountains melted from before the LORD, even that Sinai from before the LORD God of Israel.

6, In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travelers walked through byways.

7, The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel.

8, They chose new gods; then was war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?

9, My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the LORD.

10, Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way.

11, They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel: then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates.

12, Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam.

13, Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the LORD made me have dominion over the mighty.

14, Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against Amalek; after thee, Benjamin, among thy people; out of Machir came down governors, and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer.

15, And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart.

16, Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart.

17, Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the sea shore, and abode in his breaches.

18, Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeopardated their lives unto the death in the high places of the field.

19, The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money.

20, They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.

21, The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength.

22, Then were the horsehoofs broken by the means of the pransings, the pransings of their mighty ones.

23, Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty.

24, Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent.

25, he asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish.

26, She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples.

27, At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell down dead.

28, The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots?

29, Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself,

30, Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey; to every man a damsel or two; to Sisera a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers colours of needlework, of divers colours of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil?

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

Judges 5

This entire chapter is a song of praise and thanksgiving for the victory that God gave Israel over Sisera and the cruel king Jabin. As we viewed this in the last lesson, we saw that it pictured our victory over sin. That victory, though sought and followed by ourself, was found to be wholly a victory accomplished by the death of Christ. When we are made to see the truth concerning how our sin was put away, that the victory belongs to Christ and not us, there is nothing left for us but to offer the sacrifice of praise (Heb. 13:15). It is called a sacrifice because though we fight against sin and pursue it in order to destroy it, we have nothing to do with its demise. The Lord alone deserves glory because he accomplished the work, and nothing may honestly proceed from our lips but thanksgiving.

This is the song of Deborah, a song which she both composed and sang (v. 1). Her name suggests “order” and she sets things in order in the matter of who is to be praised

for the victory. Martin Lloyd Jones said the thing he loved most about the gospel was that it set things in proper order.

The first thing in the order of propriety is the praise of God for his greatness. He has and will avenge his elect and that speedily. He is the God of means, and in the day of his power, his people willingly offer themselves to his service (v. 2; Ps. 110). The declaration of his greatness is to all people. Here it is direct to kings and princes of the earth whose kingdoms are derived, whose power to rule comes from the Lord of glory. They, in their greatness, are but paltry pismires in the hand of the Almighty. Deborah speaks the heart of every believer. I will praise God and not the minute monarchs and magistrates of temporal kingdoms.

We give thanks unto the Lord, not only for who he is but also specifically for what he has done for us. This is the reason for our spiritual understanding (1 Cor. 2:12). In verses 4-5, the Lord's great works, especially in his battles for his people, are declared (Deut. 33:2). The language is the poetry of unmitigated power (Hab. 3). The Lord, by himself, put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (Matt. 27:50-53). When he cried with aloud voice "It is finished," the veil in the temple was rent in twain, the earth quaked, shook. Rocks split in two and the dead were raised to walk among men.

Setting things in order also requires rehearsal of the description of the condition of the people when the Lord delivered them. It demands the truth about their awful condition. Christ did not come into the world to save the righteous. The first indications of their condition were they were extremely poor and in ever present danger from thieves and robbers (vv. 6-7a). Shamgar is mentioned here. We saw

in the last lesson that he slew 600 Philistines with an ox goad. Jewish history tells us these Philistines were highwaymen, thieves that robbed travelers and citizens that used the roadways. They were so successful in their criminal endeavors that people stayed off the streets and resorted to their house for safety. This effectively prevented them from any commerce such a buying food or plying their trade. Shamgar's efforts were well intended but they did not finish the job. The people were fearful and destitute. This is an apt description of the spiritual condition of the Lord's elect as they are in nature—spiritually bankrupt and fearful for want of bread. They were idolaters, choosing new gods and were defenseless. Their new gods could not save them. Their new kings did nothing but oppress them.

It was not until the Lord raised up a deliverer that they were set free (v. 7b). Deborah, the poet-prophetess whom God made to be a mother to Israel, was the caretaker, advisor and counselor of Israel. She had a heart for the people. As a mother, her interest was in the welfare and health of her children. As leader and war counselor, she advised Barak in the way of obedience to the commands of God. She loved her people and blessed the Lord for them (v. 9).

Beginning with verse 9 and ending in verse 13, Deborah encourages the governors and princes of the people to declare the righteous acts (the gospel) of the Lord in the deliverance of his people. Our Lord has redeemed his people by his blood and has made them kings and priests unto God (v. 13). This is the heart language of thanksgiving uttered by those whom God has graciously saved (Ps. 40:8-10).

“Suffer a sinner whose heart overflows,
Loving his Savior to tell what he knows.
Once more to tell it would I embrace,
I'm only a sinner saved by grace.”

In the following verses 14-23, Deborah praises those who were with her in the battle, reproves those who were negligent and even curses some of them. Martin Luther said that if a soldier of Christ was not engaged precisely where the battle was presently ongoing, he was not fit to be called a soldier of the cross. Deborah praises Ephraim, Benjamin, Zebulun, Naphtali (v. 18), Issachar and Barak for joining her in the battle against Sisera (14-15a,). Jael, who nailed Sisera's head to the floor, is particularly praised (vv. 24-27). Sisera is said to have bowed down, but as is always the case of the infidel, he was made to bow down by the hand of the instrument of God—Jael. The believer is engaged against the enemies of the cross as well as the enemies within. It is a never-ending war in an army from which there is no discharge. The Father will honor those who seek to honor the Lord.

Those who are rebuked and cursed represent a true picture of those who are at ease in Zion, those who leave the battle to another. Rueben who had sworn to leave the other side of Jordan to join in every battle stayed at home (v. 15c). They did so under the guise of “really weighing the matter at hand.” Their divisions were, to them, great thoughts of the heart. They were thoughtful Christians who felt it important to pray about doing what they had promised to do and what

God had commanded, as if the command was subject to prayer.

The first phrase of verse 16 has a two-fold application.

The first is that Rueben had a great number of sheep and if they went to battle then the sheep would be left without a shepherd. Such concern was not honest. It only proved they loved their sheep more than they loved Israel. The bleating of the sheep (their livelihood) drowned out the cries of Israel.

Secondly, I think these words of the poet and prophetess are spoken in sarcasm. Their heart thoughts, their debates and councils, their division was of no more intellectual value or worthy of notice than the bleating of sheep. Their musings were little more than animal noises. Gilead, Dan and Asher stayed home and took care of business. They had put their hand to the plow and turned back, and they were without excuse for what they did. Meroz (v.23), a local village near Kishon, was cursed bitterly (curse, cursing or curse upon curse) because they simply refused to help the people of God fight against Sisera.

In verses 28-30 we have the record of Sisera's mother bewailing his late return, but believing all the while, he would be victorious. Is this not a picture of religion, ever willing to discount the Word of God, explain it away, come up with inventions that exalt and praise the works of men, believing what they give birth to will finally win the day. Will they not, even after the battle is over and their hero dead, defend their position to the end (Matt. 7).

But the truth remains—the truth that permeates every line of Holy writ. The Lord will save his people by putting an

end to sin. He will save his people, avenge his elect and bring his people to rest in what he has done (v. 31).

ONCE AGAIN

1, And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.

2, And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds.

3, And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them;

4, And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass.

5, For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it.

6, And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD.

7, And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites,

8, That the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage;

9, And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land;

10, And I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice.

Judges 6:1-10

Once again, another chapter in the life of the children of Israel begins with the declaration that they did evil in the sight of the Lord, and are delivered into the hands of the enemy. They have been at peace for forty years, and after the death of Deborah and Barak, they fall into gross idolatry. The end result is also the same. When the terror of the enemy grows to be intolerable, Israel cries unto the Lord and he sends them a deliverer.

It is wearisome to see the people of God follow the same pattern over and over again, and it is easy to wonder if they will ever learn. For the answer to that question we have but to glimpse at our own heart and our own experience. Experience, it is said, is the best teacher, and that may be so, but the fact is we are poor students else we would not continue to repeat our mistakes. One man said the definition of insanity is to repeat the same mistake over and over again, and expect a different result. Our depravity brings us to the same place, and though we operate under a different covenant, idolatry is not far from any of us. For Israel, the Midianites came from without. For us, the Midianites reside

in our bosom, and they pillage, rob and destroy with every opportunity that presents itself.

I read a quote once that went something like this. "Under the Old covenant the blessing of God was prosperity and under the New Covenant the blessing of God is adversity." That is a true statement, because it is through much tribulation that we enter the kingdom. The repetitions of the Old Testament are for our benefit. They are pictures and typifications of the life of the child of God. They are continuous warnings to take heed that when we think we stand, we fall. They remind us the special status of Israel among all the inhabitants of the earth had nothing to do with their own merit or want thereof, but entirely to the election of grace. They remind us the mercy of God is abundant and longsuffering to a stiff-necked and gainsaying people. They remind us of what we are by nature and are a looking glass reflecting our wickedness. They remind us the dire straits of our existence are opportunities for God's grace.

One man said, "Man's extremities are God's opportunities" (Deut. 32:36). The Old Testament patterns confront us with the fact we are always in need of the Savior. Our dependence upon Christ never decreases. The difference between the old and the new is that the New Testament believer is, through adversity, not occasionally but continually driven to the savior. As we see these abundant redundancies, let us embrace the teaching and pray God we learn some lessons. We never experience forty years of peace. On the one hand, we experience a continual peace, because Christ has established peace for us by the blood of his cross. On the other hand, the old man wars against our knowledge

of this peace continually, and his Midianite hordes serve to keep us fleeing to Christ.

Will we ever learn? If learning means we find ourselves less dependent upon Christ, pray God we never learn. If we learn at all, we learn there is nothing for our help but Christ. The best learning would be that we would leave off the doomed efforts of our flesh and fly to Christ more quickly. However, most of us must admit we have not learned that lesson well, even though our experiences are manifold.

In this chapter we are introduced to one of the great heroes of the faith. His name is Gideon and he is a savior of Israel, a man of strength and valor. We will look more at this man beginning next lesson. For now I want us to consider the first ten verses of this chapter looking for the gospel.

The first thing to note is that when we speak of Israel, we are *not* speaking about unbelievers. Though their life reveals much unbelief, they represent the believer. I think sometimes we would like to put their behavior as indicative of the Old Covenant, but we cannot deny their attitudes and character being a true reflection of our own. It is Paul the Apostle, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit who said, "Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death." Tell me, if you can, the difference of Paul's cry unto God and that of the Israelites who, destitute and in utter poverty, cry unto the Lord for deliverance. I know we have been told that a Christian has somehow risen above all the enticements of the flesh, and a part of us believes it. The children did evil in God's sight. Though God remembers their sin no more, they yet do evil, and the result of that evil is they must be halted in their course and brought to call upon

God. We cannot blame anyone for our evil but ourselves, and we cannot blame anyone but God for our deliverance.

The unbelievers in this passage are the Midianites. They are worshippers of Baal. They are idolaters and there is, at the time of this trouble, little if any difference in the religious practices of the Midianites and the Israelites. The only discernable difference is that one held the other in terror. The true difference was covenantal. The Israelites, though at this time were worshipping Baal, were the chosen people of the one true God. They differed from the enemy because of election.

The Midianites were Bedouin tribesmen who were cruel and ruthless. Their war was a war of interdiction (v. 3). They cut off their enemy's supply line. They came at the time of harvest and pillaged the fields of the Israelites. In times of plowing and seed time, they gave the Israelites no trouble, but when the wheat was ripe, the corn had eared and the ewes had lambed, they came suddenly and ripped from the people all they had labored for. "For when they shall say, *Peace* and *safety*; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." So great were the assaults against the people they fled to the mountains, hid in caves and planted secret gardens. They would tend their gardens at night hoping not to be seen. But the Midianites were nothing if not clever. They laid in wait until the people were ready to harvest, until the people could see the fruit of their labor, imagining how it would taste and how it would satisfy their hunger; then the Midianites descended on them like a plague of locust and took everything they thought they had (v. 4-5).

These Midianites were instruments in the hand of God. In their renowned cruelty and blood lust, their wrath praised God, and the rest he restrained. The Israelites in the midst of their idolatry were seeking by their labor to sustain themselves. It was their idolatry of serving a god who could not save that made them to depend upon themselves. Idolatry requires the work and merit of men. Even when the efforts are thwarted and the fruit is unrealized, the efforts are secreted. The labor goes on in the caverns of the depraved heart under the cover of darkness in hopes of finally saving self (John 3:18-21).

It would seem the destruction wrought by the enemy would immediately bring about a cry for mercy. The old man is obstinate and will seek to merit acceptable fruit even if it must be done covertly.

Finally, for the child of God, there is an end to this particular rope, this trial. When there is nothing left but God, the believer will cry unto God. And God, who is plenteous in mercy, whose ear is inclined to the cries of his children, always answers in mercy.

There is a method of grace. Before the Savior delivers the wayward child, God sends his word (v. 8). Note the prophet is not named. The reason for this is that it is not the preacher that is important. If men were silent Christ could make the stones to cry out. Preachers are expendable items. They are but sinners saved by grace whom God has prepared to serve a particular function in the body of Christ. They come on the scene and then evaporate in a moment. It is the message that is important. It is the word that is power. It is

not “thus sayeth the man” but rather “thus sayeth the LORD God” (v. 8).

The message is manifold. It is the message of a *finished* work (vv. 8-9), an *accomplished* salvation. Notice, “I brought”— “I delivered”— “I drave”— “I gave.” It is the message of deliverance “out of the hand of the Egyptians— from the house of bondage,” from sin, law, Satan and self. It is a message of *free* grace, “I *gave* you their land.” It is a message of victory. “I drave all that oppressed you.” It is a message of divine revelation (v. 10), “I said unto you, I am the LORD your God.” It is a message of singularity, “fear not (revere not, be not in awe of, worship, love, serve not) the gods of the Amorites.” It is a message of conviction, “ye have not obeyed my voice.”

These repetitious actions of Israel remind us of our own proclivity to try to sustain ourselves by the flesh. They remind us of the utter futility of the power of our flesh to accomplish any facet of our salvation. They remind us we need continuous deliverance. They remind us our hope is in God alone. They remind us our enemies serve our God for our good. They remind us our depravity does not prevent God's mercy. They remind us that when we call on God, we will find him right where we left him. Finally, they remind us we need to hear the gospel over, and over, and over again. Praise him for his faithful witness, that blessed *gospel* that put everything in its proper order.

MEEKNESS

11, And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.

12, And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.

13, And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

14, And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?

15, And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.

16, And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.

17, And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me.

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

19, And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it.

20, And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so.

21, Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight.

22, And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O LORD God! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face.

23, And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die.

24, Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it Jehovahshalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

25, And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old,

and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it:

26, And build an altar unto the LORD thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down.

27, Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the LORD had said unto him: and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night.

28, And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built.

29, And they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they enquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing.

30, Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it.

31, And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar.

32, Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar.

33, Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel.

34, But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him.

35, And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.

36, And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said,

37, Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said.

38, And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water.

39, And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew.

40, And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

Judges 6:11-40

In this passage we see the selection and appointment of Gideon as judge and savior of Israel. When the angel, the messenger of God, approaches Gideon, we find him to differ in no way from the rest of his tribe. Though there is no indication he was an idolater, there is ample reason to believe his entire family was involved in the worship of Baal. As for Gideon, he is behaving in the *same fear* as the rest of Israel. Being under the terror of the Midianites, he is threshing the grain of his secret garden, hiding his actions so the Midianites will not discover and rob his family of their sustenance (v. 11).

When the angel speaks to him, he does so in a manner that will under gird Gideon for the monumental task set before him (v. 12; Joshua 1:5-7). Whether he had been proved in battle is not known. It is generally held that the words of the angel were not merely words of encouragement but both a promise and an imbueing of the characteristics described. If it was not so before this moment, Gideon was now a man who the LORD was with and immediately infused with might and valor. One man said, "God's callings were God's enablings." Before God puts you to the work for which you are ordained, he equips you for that specific work (Eph. 2:10). Our function in the church of God is by God's prerogative, by his appointment and will not be accomplished by the strength of the flesh but by the Spirit of his might; "The LORD is with thee."

Although the Lord is with us and we have been given faith, because we are sinners and plagued with the frailty of humanity, we often act in timidity upon the promise of God.

We often feel as if we are a victim of circumstance rather than participant in the grand design of providence. This common weakness makes us curse second causes and even doubt the promise of God. The words Gideon speaks in verse 13 must be seen in light of the response of the angel in verse 14. The mercy of our God is wondrous.

Here we have a man declaring the task he has been assigned seems foolish to him, because the same LORD, who is supposedly with him, has seemingly abandoned Israel. Gideon is even now hiding from the Midianites and Israel is in captivity to them. The miracles performed to deliver Israel from Egypt are painfully absent from view. The question in Gideon's mind is, why should he believe the LORD is with him to deliver Israel when the Lord has not delivered Israel from the Midianites up to this day.

Several things play into the mindset of Gideon.

First, when the believer is in the midst of of trial, it is next to impossible to deal with anything but the immediate problem.

Secondly, as in the case of Gideon, the reason for the trial, Israel's disobedience, is lost in the calamity of tribulation.

Thirdly, the big picture of providence is difficult to see when all around there is nothing but ruin and decay. Gideon's very human response to his circumstance is *not* an object of the angel's rebuke. In verse 14, the identity of the Angel is revealed. "The *LORD* looked upon him" and simply renewed the promise. Christ promised he would never leave his people, and in the midst of their greatest trial he comes to them with oil and wine (Acts 27:23-25).

So, several things will be considered in this chapter in the lessons to come. I want us to look at what I believe to be a wonderful characteristic of Gideon's personality.

Gideon is a meek man. The believer, being the frail vessel he is, often appears to doubt the promise of God when, in truth, he is doubtful that he is worthy to be considered to do anything for God. Whether it is Moses crying, "I cannot speak," or Paul crying, "who is sufficient for the things," or Barak saying to Deborah, "If you do not go with me, I will not go," or Sarah laughing at the prospect of her old body bearing a child, the believer is constantly humbled by the thought that he would be used of God for his grand purpose.

Meekness, at its heart, is a true sense of unworthiness and a reasonable doubt that God is really speaking to one who is of such insignificance. We live in a day when men brag about God talking to them and telling them to do things. In scripture however, I find when God speaks to men, they without exception are in doubt that God would actually speak to them or that it is truly God who speaks to them (v. 17). It was common to ask for a sign in the Old Testament. The Word of God was not fully revealed at that time.

Even in the days of the earthly ministry of our Lord and his apostles, the message was accompanied with signs and wonders as means of authentication. Since the Word of God has been completed, the need for these things has passed away (1 Cor. 13:8-10). The seeking of signs and the display of wonders are relegated to Satan and his beastly followers in these last days (2 Thess. 2:7-10; Rev. 12:3, 13:13-14). God does not speak in signs in these days. If he speaks, it is by and through his word, spiritually to the heart of his people

through the unseen faith he has given. Gideon asks for a sign, because he cannot imagine that God is actually speaking to *him*.

In the face of this great promise, Gideon declares his unworthiness (v. 15; Eph. 3:8). Part of this must surely be attributed to the struggle of the spirit and the flesh. Part of meekness is the spiritual understanding of our impotence. The flesh, however, addresses *any* task with the notion that the accomplishment of it is up to the flesh. Meekness says I am incapable, but the Lord is able. The old man says I am incapable but it's up to me. Again, we see the patience of the LORD (v. 16).

The sign Gideon seeks is that the Lord would not leave him (v. 18). A better sign could not be sought. Gideon seeks fellowship. He desires to make the LORD a meal and the Lord graciously condescends to wait for Gideon to cook him a meal. Gideon is not here acting as a priest preparing a sacrifice but as a host welcoming a guest. Having prepared the meal, he brings it to the Lord. The Lord does not eat it but tells Gideon to put the flesh and the bread on a rock and pour the broth over the meal. Then the Lord took his staff and touched the sodden meal, and fire came out of the rock and consumed it and immediately the Lord disappeared. Gideon had gotten his sign.

The sign was that the one who spoke with him was none other than the Lord. To Gideon's perception, this sign meant death. No man can see God and live. "Alas" (v. 22) is an expression of fear and pain. Miraculously he had seen the face of God and yet lived. He had seen the fullness of the Godhead bodily. The miracle of faith is clearly seen in verse

23. The Lord has disappeared and yet speaks to him. The Lord speaks to him, and when he speaks to him, he speaks peace to his heart (John 14:27; Eph. 2:14; 6:15; Jud. 6:24).

Toward the end of the chapter we again see the meekness of Gideon. Though he has seen the LORD, built an altar unto him and obeyed the Lord in gathering an army to defeat the Midianites, he was still a frail creature of the dust. I here folks today speak of “casting a fleece” by which they mean they will act if they have a sign from God. The believer has another word for casting a fleece. He calls it prayer. The sign will always be an answer to prayer, and you may not recognize it as such, because the answer may not be what you desired. Why? Because we know not for what we ought to pray.

I knew a man once who suspected his wife was having an affair and he didn't want to believe it. As he and his wife lay down to sleep one night, he asked the Lord to let him know one way or another. While the words flowed from his heart, his wife, in her sleep, rolled over to him, flopped an arm across his chest and whispered the name of her lover. The Lord answered his prayer in spades.

In vv. 36-40, God condescends to show his meek servant two signs. Gideon asks the Lord to send dew only upon the fleece with none upon the surrounding ground and the Lord does so. Then Gideon asks for the sign to be repeated in reverse. So, the Lord sends the dew to the ground surrounding the fleece, but the fleece remained dry. The chapter ends with these signs. God has graciously proven himself to his child.

The spiritual significances of these signs are many. I have read and heard many sermons on the subject and most of them were blessed gospel. I want us to consider just two things that to me teach the heart of these signs.

First this teaches the singular object of God's dealings. Whether the dew fell on the fleece or on the ground the single difference in both instances was the fleece. The fleece was wool, indicative of sheep. All things occur according to season and purpose. Whether it's dry or wet, the dew falls in regard to the fleece, and "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to purpose." All things in human history are about the sheep of God's flock (John 10:26-27; 2 Tim. 2:10).

Secondly the wet and the dry of the fleece teach of the Old and New Covenants. Under the Old Covenant, the dew of heaven, the Word of God, the doctrine of God fell only on Israel. When our Lord came in the volume of the book to do the will of God, he took away the first and established the second. The dew falls upon the world of the gentiles and the Israel is left high and dry (Ps. 149:4).

DAY OF DESTRUCTION

25, And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it:

26, And build an altar unto the LORD thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down.

27, Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the LORD had said unto him: and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night.

28, And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built.

29, And they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they enquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing.

30, Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it.

31, And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar.

32, Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar.

Judges 6:25-32

This is the record of the Lord directing Gideon to take two bullocks and make an offering of one of them to the Lord. The offering was to be made upon the rock where he had made a meal for the Lord in a previous part of this chapter (vv. 16-24). The Lord has pronounced peace to Gideon and now assigns him the task common to all believers. The Lord directs him not only make a burnt offering, but first, he is to tear down the altar of Baal and cut down the groves. The wood from the groves is to be used to make the fire for the burnt offerings. This is also an account of the pagan's reaction to the destruction of their god and the reasonable response of Gideon's father to their lust for the blood of Gideon.

Before we consider these things looking for the gospel, there are a few things needing to be addressed.

The first is, the text clearly declares there were two bullocks taken but only the second one was offered. The question arises, "Why two bullocks, and if only the second was offered, what happened to the first?" Though the Bible does not give us an answer, it is generally held by those who

recorded early Jewish history that the first bullock was not sacrificed to God because it had been designated by Gideon's father as a sacrifice to Baal. This being the case, Gideon would have not used that which was to be used in false religion as an offering to the true and living God. Even if the Jewish historians are incorrect, their assessment is a truth born throughout the Word of God and follows the strict command of God concerning mixture of truth and error. The elements of the world and the ways of the world are not to be used in the worship of the true God.

Those who had embraced the doctrine of Christianity in early Rome, but were nominal Christians at best, found that incorporating the pagan practices of Rome into so called Christian worship removed the threat of Rome against them. It worked, but those who refused to give in to pagan practices continued to be persecuted by Rome and even by the newly designed Christo-pagan church. Throughout history, those who refused to incorporate the world into true worship have felt the sting of those who have compromised the truth with political correctness for the sake of false peace. The second bullock and not the first was offered, because God allowed no mixture.

The second thing we need to address is Baal and the groves. It was common to build a grove of trees around a sight of pagan worship. This served to beautify the area, but the more reasonable use was to hide the practices of worship that went on inside the surrounding stand of trees. The groves here referred to may not have been groves at all. There is a general belief among Jewish writers that the groves were rather a wooden statue to Ashtaroth. They hold

this for two reasons. One is that the worship of Baal and Ashtaroah often were found in proximity to one another (Judges 2:13). The second reason is that freshly cut trees would not make a good fire for a burnt offering. It was common to use dry, seasoned wood, and the broken pieces of a chopped-up goddess would suffice for fuel. This could well represent the wood, hay and stubble devoured by the divine fire of the truth (Jeremiah 23:29). Suffice it to say that according to the commandment of God all traces of paganism were to be destroyed.

The offering and the manner of it is very interesting (v. 26). Gideon is not a priest under the Old Covenant, but he here acts as a priest in preparation of the altar and the sacrifice. Gideon and his actions are indicative of the New Testament believer. They are *all* priests, a royal priesthood offering sacrifices to God acceptable by Jesus Christ. Also, there was a *place* designated by God where offerings were to be made. The tabernacle was not here. This altar and sacrifice were made outside the designated place of Old Testament worship, but all this was done at the command of God.

In a plain and wonderful picture, our Lord sets forth the believer, the minister of the gospel standing in the face of a pagan world. What is he to do? Declare the gospel. How do you tear down the idols of false religion? Declare the gospel. First you build an altar (Ex. 20:24-26; Heb. 13:10). Christ is our altar. The altar is to be built upon this Rock (Matt. 16:18). Christ and his word are our Rock (Is. 32:1-2). He is the stone the builders refused whom God has made the head of the corner.

This is to be done in an orderly manner, because God is a God of order (2 Sam. 23:5; Ps. 37:23). Christ is the way the truth and the life. The gospel is preached in singularity without pomp or fanfare so that men, if they hear, will glorify God alone (Jer.9:23-24). The sacrifice is a burnt offering signifying God has accepted the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of the people. The burnt offering's savor rises from the altar as a sweet-smelling savor unto God. The *sacrifice* is the *second* bullock, because the first was designated for an offering that could save no one nor put away sin. "He taketh away the first that he might establish the second." The gospel is a declaration of the second revealed covenant, the eternal covenant of grace. It is the record of the Old Covenant being fulfilled and set aside, of the law being satisfied and all the elect fully and freely redeemed by the effectual blood of the second sacrifice. The preaching of the gospel is also a declaration that the enemy has been put down. The gospel is declared on the sight of the slain false deities.

The worshippers of false gods who live by the gods of their imagination do not take kindly to the revelation that their entire hope has been destroyed (vv. 28-30). The minister of the gospel has no need to employ any other thing but the truth to raise the hackles of false religion. When the God of scripture is declared, false religion hears that its puny deity is thrown down. I find their reaction interestingly revealing. They wanted blood to appease their anger. It sounds as if the god they invented was but a veiled representation of their own sense of self-deity.

They want blood to atone for the slaying of the one they worshipped. They wanted blood to defend their ersatz god. If you have to defend your god, then it is hardly worth worshipping. Their response also reveals they know and believe that their god is imminently powerless. Does not false religion declare its god in such a way? I saw a church sign on Hwy. 19 that said, "God's power is unlimited, won't you let him work for you." Evidently, that god's power has at least one limitation, the willingness of his creature to allow him to operate. If you can let him work for you, then who is the employer in that scenario? How is that silly slogan any different from the response of the pagans in our text to the destruction of their hand-crafted idol.

The response of the believer is so very reasonable (vv. 31-32). If Baal is really God, why do you have to do his bidding? Why do you need to plead for him if he is God? If he is God and wants Gideon dead, he can kill Gideon himself. Does your god need saving? How can he help you if he cannot defend himself against one man? Sad god this! In the past, I have been criticized for mocking this fake god whose hands are tied, who has no hands, eyes, mouth or feet but those of his creatures, who must be allowed to work for men. But I stand in good company (1 Kings 18:26-27). The preacher of the gospel does not waste his time trying to entice men to help out God. He declares the gospel and prays God to show up and make himself known (1 Kings 18:36-37; Ps. 115; Is. 44:9-20; 45:20).

FOR GLORY

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

2, And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.

Judges 7:1-2

This chapter is very familiar to most believers. It is the account of the Lord whittling down the size of Gideon's army from 32,000 to three hundred to do battle with 100,000 Midianites. The manner in which the battle is fought is reminiscent of Jericho, because the enemy is routed with *lamps* or torches, *empty vessels* and the blowing of *trumpets*. Preceding the victory there is a guarantee of the victory that comes as a dream to one of Gideon's men. The dream is about a loaf of barley rolling down the hill and landing on the main tent of the enemy. From this dream, Gideon is encouraged to do battle.

We will look at the particulars of this chapter in the weeks to come, but in this lesson, I want us to consider the overriding theme of this passage. *God is jealous for his salvation. He will not give any glory for the deliverance of his*

people to anyone but himself. Every aspect of this battle, and the waging of it, proclaims the glory of God in the salvation of the elect.

In the first verse we see Gideon identified by his newly given name. Jerubbaal. This name means, “Let Baal plead for himself” (Jud. 6:32). This name is a mocking reminder that a single man, at the direction of God Almighty, destroyed the hopes of the pagans. His name has come to mean “the enemy of Baal.”

The Lord has providentially brought Gideon’s troop to encamp at the well of Harod, the name of which means “fear and trembling.” Some say this refers to the fear struck in the hearts of the Midianites when the battle was finally engaged. Verse 3, I believe, declares that it is many of the Israelites who were afraid. In the overall picture, the name of the place simply refers to the providential beginning of the means by which God pares down the size of the army. At the place of fear and trembling, those 22,000 who were afraid to fight were allowed to return to their homes. The fact the Lord did not rebuke these men further suggests the place of encampment (Harod—Fear and trembling) was a means to the appointed end.

Sometimes when I am reading the scripture a passage just seems to leap out at me. As I was studying this chapter, the last phrase of verse two proved such a passage. I continued to work on other things in this chapter, but my mind kept coming back to these words. Our Lord told Gideon the number of the army was too great for *him* to give them victory over the Midianites. This idea flies in the face of the natural art of war. But “God’s thoughts are higher than the

thoughts of men.” “There is a way that seemeth right unto man but the ways thereof are the ways of death.” With God, less is more.

The reason the Lord gives for whittling down the army is that if they won the victory, which was sure in that the Lord had promised, they would “vaunt themselves against the Lord and say mine own hand hath saved me.” The word “vaunt” means “glorify.” If the army won the battle by many, they would glorify themselves and not God. They would rob God of the glory due only to him. This tells us something about the character of man. He is more than ready to take credit for the work of God. Man, by nature, is a glory hound. It takes an act of sovereign grace to bring him to the place where he acknowledges God and gives him glory.

Every religion, save one, gives men at least partial glory in their own salvation or betterment. The problem is the true God allows for no such thing. This is not merely a matter of degrees. The fact is, man as he is described in the Word of God, has no ground on which he can glory in himself. Spiritually he is in such a complete lost estate, utterly ruined, vile and a sure future resident of hell, that all God has to do to assure his future residence is to leave him alone. The simple fact is, if God does not intervene, man will of himself perish in his sin. What aspect of such an existence in sin can ever be glorious?

Part of the depravity of man is the delusion that he deserves some sort of acknowledgement, as if he played a role in his own salvation. He is ever willing to vaunt himself against God. This passage teaches that glorying in one's self is not merely an error of thought. It is against God. Has God

promised salvation by his power alone? Then glory for it may never be attributed to another. For anyone else to claim self-glory is to attack God. The truth of depravity is utter impotency and ruin. The chief attribute of depravity is pride.

This bent of man to claim glory is never done in a vacuum. The Lord declares those who glory in themselves are not able to stay quiet about it. They say it. The fact is that one cannot be silent in what he glories in. Those who glory in God, like Elihu, are full of the matter and will burst if they speak not. Those who have been redeemed by God say so (Ps. 107:2). Likewise, those who glory in themselves, in their will, in the power to save themselves cannot be silent. Swaggart roars, "The final deciding factor in man's salvation is his freewill!" I cannot count the times that the response I received after mentioning election or predestination has been, "I believe in whosoever will." One false preacher says the will of man releases the effectual power of the blood of Christ. Such men glory in these things against God and cannot but shout it to the rooftops. "Where a man's treasure is, there shall his heart be also."

The reason for reducing the number of the army was to keep Israel from glorying in themselves. If God did not reduce it, if Israel was not stripped of all its power, then they would claim to be their own savior. The wording of the last phrase is important in the understanding of *vainglory*. The employment of the words "mine own hand" is nothing less than self-deification. Men believe that God saves, but many mean by that statement that *they* are God (Is. 52:10; 53:1; Ps. 17:7; 20:6). The *hand* is representative of power to save. This why our Lord said, "If thy right hand cause thee to

offend, cut it off.” Faith in Christ is the machete that severs man's hand of self-salvation. Salvation is a momentous thing that involves every attribute of God, even the employment of his entire heart and soul (Jer. 32:41). Our Lord declared this to Job in Job 40:14 (exp. 6-13).

Finally, this reduction of troops teaches us that salvation, the great salvation wrought by Christ, is to men a small thing. Men do not care for small things. David said, “Despise not the day of small things.” The destruction of mankind was by one man—Adam. The salvation of the elect is by one man—Christ. The smallest and the most ignoble of the earth made up the nation of God. God calls his sheep “a little flock.” Goliath was slain by one young man without the aid of armor or weapons of war. Twelve men with the gospel was said to turn the world upside down. Before God delivers his people, he strips them of all hope but Christ (Job 37:7).

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. However, salvation has been reduced to a decision, a walk down an aisle, a simple plan, and after that deal is done, religion spends the rest of its interest and energy on bigger things such as self-help, practical holiness or venting their venom against what they call social evil. They translate numbers to power. They have little use for those few hours on Calvary in the which salvation, righteousness, justification, sanctification and redemption was accomplished. They make sin, the destroyer of worlds, to be anything that lowers self-esteem. One TV preacher actually said that he does not speak about sin, because it makes people feel bad about themselves. Another said that he does not speak about

justification, sanctification or righteousness, because people are not interested in those things anymore.

People who have diminished the value of God's salvation in their mind say things like, "There is more to preach than Christ" or "There is more in the Bible than Christ, things for men and women to do, a righteousness to be worked out and a holiness to improve upon." But God has taken the double-edged sword of truth and trimmed away all the notions of men. He has sliced away human righteousness, cut off man's will, severed man's wisdom, pierced man's goodness and slain his carnal hope. God's salvation is a doctrine of *reduction*. Like the small manna, he has made his salvation to be one thing—his Son. No man can say, "Mine own hand hath saved me." All glory belongs to God, "who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose in grace, which was given us in Christ before the world began."

"And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me."

PROVIDENCE AND BARLEY

9, And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand.

10, But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host:

11, And thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host.

12, And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude.

13, And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along.

14, And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host.

15, And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he

worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian.

Judges 7:9-15

At the time this portion of scripture takes place, the Lord has reduced the number of Gideon's Army from 32,000 down to 300 and promised unqualified victory against the Midianites (v. 7). At this time, it is also apparent that Gideon's fame had preceded him, probably by word of mouth concerning his destruction of Baal and Ashtaroth (v. 14). The Lord had called Gideon a mighty man of valor, and by now had promised the victory several times and granted Gideon's desire for a sign with the fleece. Yet, Gideon is a sinner and plagued with the doubts and fears that accompany the business of believing God.

In vv. 9-10 we see the mercy of God toward his people. Though the Word of God is sure, and the victory is secured, man is continually in a state of insecurity. But God does not hold men responsible to accomplish what he has promised. What he has promised, he will perform. Though Gideon did not doubt God's ability, he still was fully aware of his own. Did God pour out his wrath on Gideon? Did God rebuke Gideon? No! In verse 10 God assured Gideon that he understood the weakness of human flesh (Ps 103:14). What grace and mercy is this! If you are still afraid, remember that God has ordered providence for your benefit (vv. 10-11).

This is a wondrous thing. God directs Gideon to sneak into the camp of the enemy and listen to what they say, and that will give him strength and encouragement for the battle.

Who “they” are is not left to conjecture. The steps of Gideon were led to a spot where a Midianite had been awakened from a dream and was discussing his dream with a fellow soldier. When Gideon heard the man tell of his dream and the response of this fellow, Gideon was strengthened for the battle (v. 15).

In this episode, the sovereign providence of God, his divine control of all men and all events, shines as the Sun.

God first gave this worshipper of Baal this dream and awakened him to tell it at the exact time when he and Gideon's path would cross in earshot of one another. Dreams are chaotic events, fragments of past present and even future. There is rarely any order to them as far as we can determine. But God plants *this* dream in *this* man's mind. God touches the particular brain cells that fire the specific synapses that bring about this dream (Ps. 139:4). This man *must* dream *this* dream at this *exact* time, because God will have this enemy encourage his servant.

Secondly this dream was so ordered that the dreamer was both willing and able to recount it. Often when we awake, the substance of our dreams fade with the entrance of the morning light. More often than not, if we do remember our dreams, they are hardly worthy of repeating. From the sense of the language used, it seems this man was burdened by this dream and *had* to tell someone about it. And he tells it out at the time of *ordination*, when the steps of Gideon and Phurah covertly draw near. Though we may not be able to understand and there may not be an interpreter to tell us what is going on around us, we can be sure of this, nothing comes our way by accident. Nothing! All things that meet us

in this life, even our dreams or the dreams of our enemies are for the glory of God and for our God. God is in the details and we know “all things work together for good.”

This strange dream brought great comfort to the heart of Gideon. It was a dream, a small thing, a trifle to men, but it girded Gideon for the battle. The world around you considers the gospel as a trifling thing. It is foolish to them, but to you who believe, the gospel is the very thing that encourages you. With all that is going on, with the enemy camped at the door, great in number and power, it seems a small thing that the children of God would rest and be comforted by words, mere words spoken by a sinner like them. “Despise not the day of small things.” A dream about a cake of barley rolling down upon a tent was assurance to Gideon.

It was no small thing that the enemy's dream was a dream of defeat and not victory. I have said for many years that the enemies of the gospel operate out of fear. Those whose religion is against the grace of God are as afraid of grace as the believer is afraid of bondage. Their fear of grace is based in the fear that their works and will might count for nothing. The dream of this enemy was not based in logic or the equation of human ability. He was in the midst of an army that was as the sand on the seashore, yet a cake of barley was his emotional and military undoing. Most gospel churches are *little* barley cakes, but the enemy would feel safe only if they did not exist. In the end, the gospel will put them to flight. “Fear not, little flock, for it is the Father's pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

The dream and its interpretation teach us a great deal about divine providence. We are not left to our imaginations

as to the meaning of the barley cake and the tent. The interpretation is the meaning of the dream. Barley was poor man's food. Generally, it was used to feed dogs or cattle and not men. Barley, when eaten by men, was an indication of poverty. When we think of the word "cake," we generally think of a roll or a loaf of fine risen bread. The word here signifies a "shadow" or something of little substance. This is the manner of barley cakes. They were beaten out into a fine meal and pressed out very thin, like a tortilla or a long piece of crust. They were baked quickly on heated stones.

This was not a great loaf of bread but a wispy flat cake. This also aligns with the dream and its interpretation. The word "rolling" indicates turning this way and that and giving the idea of floating on the wind. Thus, the interpretation of the appearance of a sword in midair would not be hard to perceive.

Where the barley cake landed is significant. It landed on the principle tent (praetorium), the tent that housed the General of the army or the prince of the Midianites, and utterly destroyed it. To the enemy, the fact that it was a cake of barley meant the poor barley-eating Jews would be their demise. The interpretation was that this cake was the sword of Gideon and meant the battle was already won. No doubt this refers to the word of the Lord, the gospel, which is a clear declaration that any effort of the enemy is futile, because the prince of their world is cut off.

This teaches that God is a God of means and the means that he employs are insignificant to men but designed to give all glory to himself (1 Cor. 1:26-30). This is the way of God (7:2; Is. 40:29; Ps. 8:2). It was said of the apostles, twelve

unlearned men, that they turned the world upside down. Deborah and Jael, who in Eastern culture were no more than men's property, defeated the host of Jabin. The Lord smote the Philistines with a farmer wielding an ox-goad. The Lord delivered the elect and defeated the enemy with a despised and rejected man of sorrows.

The little flock of God shall prevail, equipped only with the gospel; the enemy sees the gospel as poor man's bread and indeed it is. God has called his preachers sons of thunder; religion sees things differently. Numbers, wealth and influence, they believe, will trump the ramblings of a few stammering lips and other tongues. When men say there is more to preach than Christ, they mean *they* have more than Christ. More than Christ is no Christ at all. When men say that salvation is more than grace, they are saying they have more than grace. The tendency of everyone is to respond with a better, bigger and more effectual argument. Resist the temptation. It is the barley cake that destroys the enemy. It is the barley cake that reveals the error. It does so because Christ has finished the work. The sword of the Lord is all we need, and it is the only effectual message. Do not despair of your insignificance. Remember the words of Paul; "When I am weak, then I am strong."

When Gideon heard the interpretation of the dream, he was ready to go to battle. He was encouraged to *believe* what the Lord had *promised*. The result of the interpretation was that Gideon worshipped God. When God breaks open the gospel for his people, they have the same reaction. They worship God. They also have the message of assurance (v. 15). He didn't say, "Arise and let's see if we can do this," or

“Let's see how things turn out,” or “Let's put feet to our prayer.” Arise and believe! His message was the message of the absolute. “Arise, for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian.”

Poor man's bread has won the day.

GOSPEL GLORY

16, And he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers.

17, And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do.

18, When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.

19, So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands.

20, And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.

21, And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled.

22, And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to

Bethshittah in Zererath, and to the border of Abelmeholah, unto Tabbath.

Judges 7:16-22

These verses are the report of the fulfillment of the dream of the loaf of barley tumbling into the camp of the enemy and destroying it. In this passage we see a detailed account of the battle and are reminded of the words of the Lord to Zerubbabel. When the Lord told Zerubbabel that he would have the task of building the temple, the Lord said the task would be accomplished “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord of hosts.”

The Lord has promised victory and assured it with the providential dream given to the enemy. The weapons of this warfare are trumpets, empty pitchers, lamps or torches within the pitchers and a single phrase to be shouted. These hardly seem to be munitions of warfare, but neither does the idea of thinning down an army of 32,000 to three hundred men to battle an army of overwhelming numbers. The Lord's thoughts are not the thoughts of men. If he is with his people, two can make thousands to flee.

The battle plan was simple. Gideon divided his troops into 3 companies, stationing them at advantageous places. Each soldier, when given the order, was to blow his trumpet, take the torch out of the vessel where its light was hidden from view, cast the vessel to the ground, breaking it and then they were to shout, “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon.” The result of that battle was the people of God were victorious, and the glory of the victory belongs to the Lord.

This passage, this battle is a wonderful picture of Christ and his church doing battle with the forces of evil in this world and especially those in our own hearts. The elements employed in this battle are the elements the church employs under the leadership of Christ. With victory assured we go into the world and assault the gates of hell with weapons that cannot be used in the powers of the flesh, yet the gates of hell shall not prevail against us.

First, we have a leader, a captain (Is. 55:4). He is the captain of our salvation. His credentials are impeccable. He has all power and he is the very wisdom of God. He shall not fail. The remarkable thing about this captain is that he does not sit behind the lines and give "orders from headquarters." The first word out of his mouth is "Look on me." No better order could be given to a soldier than to watch his captain (Heb. 12:1-2). He stands in the line of fire. He never says, "Do as I say and not what I do." He says, "Do what I do" (v.17; John 13:15; Luke 10:37). He leads us in this war and we merely do what he does.

If you look at the ministry of Christ in this world, he carried no weapon but the sword of truth, yet none could stay his hand. He moved freely among his enemies, and they could lay no hand upon him until he gave them leave to do so. He steps into the fray first, and we his church, follow his lead. With him as our leader, the battle is won and the victory is ours. We do not use cleverly devised means and inventions of men to cause our enemies to allow us to win. We stay fast on the heels of our forerunner who entered for us, and as he is our forerunner, we most assuredly must arrive also.

The first weapon he issues to his people is a *trumpet*. The trumpet is used to call to war, to the feast, to announce the Day of Atonement and the beginning of Jubilee. All these are elements of our calling and that which we call men to do. Our call is not effectual. We, through the gospel, call upon men and women to repent and believe, announcing the war is won, that atonement has been made, and the acceptable year of the Lord is at hand. It is a sound, a noise, a clarion call. As I said, our call is general and of itself is not effectual. Though it is not effectual, it is essential because God has chosen through the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. The Holy Spirit makes the same general call given from us, for all men to repent and believe, effectual to the elect. It remains a wondrous mystery, but our task is simple. When the Captain blows His trumpet, we are to do as he does.

The second weapon is the *torch*. It is light, which pictures both the written and the living Word. The Psalmist said the entrance of the *word* of God gives light and that it is a light unto our path. Christ himself is the light of the world, the light that shineth in a dark place until the daystar arises in your heart. Light is what God commands to shine in the heart of men to reveal the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Light dispels darkness and discloses all things. That night on the field of battle, the captain and his army entered into the darkness. But before the night was spent, the battlefield shone with effulgent light. The light strikes fear in the heart of the enemy, because he cannot hide from it (John 3:19-20). This is not due to *our* ability to shine the light but entirely based upon *God's* ability to command the light and

afflict the mind and the heart men. We can't scare anybody. Our weapons seem useless to the world. They look at us and snicker. But God can disperse a mighty army with a thought, a dream of a cake of barley, a trumpet or a torch.

Thirdly, the torches are hidden from view in earthen vessels. These earthen vessels are clay pots and they represent the church, made up of vessels of Adamic clay. It is into these insignificant pots that our Lord has invested the light of the world. They have no glory. They are common utensils. God has chosen the foolish, base, weak and empty to confound the great and the mighty. This assures us, all that takes place in the salvation of a sinner and his use in the preaching of the gospel is of grace and grace alone.

The Lord has put the glorious gospel into earthen pots for the purpose of his glory (2 Cor. 4:6-7). The gospel, however, is not to remain hidden in the vessels. Our Lord spoke in this kind of language. "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 5:14-16). We need to continually rehearse in our minds that we are nothing but dirt pots (Gal. 6:3; 1 Cor. 2:2-5).

These dirt pots were to be cast to the ground and broken. For the benefit of the battle here recorded, this would create a loud noise immediately followed by a great light and would further serve to frighten the enemy. This is, however, a true representation of those who are used of God to bring the

gospel. The gospel is in them but is truly dispensed from them when they are cast to the ground and broken (Is. 66:1-2; Ps. 51:17). The Lord has fixed it so that the gospel—Christ—has preeminence. He must increase and we must decrease (1 Cor. 3:4-7; 15:10; Eph.3:8).

Finally, we have a singular word (V. 20). The believer declares “the sword of the Lord and of Gideon.” This phrase has changed slightly from the original interpretation of the dream (v. 14). The significance of this change is twofold. The original language reads “the sword of the Lord, of Gideon.” Spiritually this is a declaration of the title Christ earned by his righteous death. Because he was obedient unto death, he was given a name above every name and declared to be Lord over all. Our savior, our deliverer is LORD. This also applies to the gospel. What we preach is God’s gospel, but it is also our gospel (2 Thess.2:14).

The wonder of our gospel is its singularity. The phrase is cryptic. It is not even a sentence. It makes no sense except to those who use it and those in whose hearts God strikes fear. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. But the gospel is not a theological discourse. The gospel is not “many things.” The gospel is not a pie chart that men can divide according to their particular conviction or disposition. It is *one* thing! It is Christ! It is not a sentence but a singular subject. To the world it is foolishness. To the religious it is a stumbling block. “To them that are called, both Jews and Greeks it is the power and wisdom of God.” Foolish men say there must be more; there must be explanation; there must be evidence; there must be works. But the cast down and broken dirt pot spills out the light, and the message is

cryptic—"The sword of the Lord and of Gideon"—Christ and him crucified. The simplicity and singularity of the message sends the enemy fleeing and screaming while the believer stands in his place (v. 21). Scripture says, "A fool fleeth when no man pursueth" (Romans 1:14-17).

BY GRACE

1, And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply.

2, And he said unto them, What have I done now in comparison of you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?

3, God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that.

Judges 8:1-3

In this passage is the record of Gideon, still in pursuit of the Midianites, crossing the river Jordan and being met by Ephraim who is unhappy. Gideon, when he meets Ephraim, sees the heads of Oreb and Zeeb, former princes of Midian, taken by the troops of Ephraim (7:24-25). The names of these two pate-less princes are significant. Jewish history suggests that “Oreb” and “Zeeb” were nicknames which spoke to their character rather than their family name.

Oreb means “raven” and Zeeb means “wolf.” “Raven” is both a noun and a verb. The verb describes a voracious appetite. The noun is the largest member of the crow family and is known for its hunger for flesh. Our word “ravens” and “ravenous” are derived from the word “raven.” Oreb got

his nickname because he was a ruthless killer, devouring his enemies with ravenous passion.

Wolf describes a canine of insatiable appetite and is a skillful predator. This nickname is also a noun and a verb. The noun is the animal and the verb means to “eat greedily or voraciously.” Zeeb was a skillful, hungry hunter of his prey. It is interesting to note that our Lord uses these two words to describe the nature of false prophets in Matthew 7:15. “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”

Ephraim's possession of the heads of Oreb and Zeeb points to the fact that he is, as Gideon, graced by God. We know the victory afforded Gideon and his 300 men came by grace and was of the Lord—who did battle for them. It would seem that such a victory would warm the heart of every Israelite, but such is not the case.

When Gideon returns from this victory he is met, not with praise, but chiding. Ephraim lit into Gideon when he came across the river. His anger and jealousy, though directed toward Gideon, was actually anger against God. It was God who whittled down Gideon's army from 32,000 to three hundred. He did so because he knew the heart of man and that Israel would desire glory for the victory if they won by such a large fighting force. But this, as all victory in battle, must be attributed to the power and grace of God (7:2).

Ephraim's response to the victory of Gideon, though his own army had taken the heads of Oreb and Zeeb, proves the wisdom of God. There can be but one reason for Ephraim's reaction; wounded pride. Ephraim's name was not going to

be on the trophy, and this vexed him sorely (v. 1). Gideon's response is a jewel of graciousness (vv. 2-3). He, in effect, says that he and his victories are not even to be compared to the honor due Ephraim. Ephraim's pride being stroked, and his jealousy assuaged is further proof that God's paring down of the army was pure wisdom.

Ephraim was satisfied by Gideon's response because it meant to Ephraim that Gideon knew his place. Gideon was of the tribe of Manasseh. Manasseh and Ephraim were brothers, sons of Joseph. Manasseh was the firstborn, but it was Ephraim who received the blessing of the firstborn when Jacob crossed his hands when giving the blessing (Gen. 48:9-20). Manasseh indeed knew his place and his words prove he understood that Ephraim was the firstborn and gave him due honor.

From the beginning, Ephraim is a picture of one blessed by grace. For him to be accounted as the firstborn meant that his blessing superseded the law. "The elder shall serve the younger" is a picture of the Old Covenant serving the new and the blessing attending the new. Ephraim's entire life was a display of the grace of God. If you read the book of Hosea it becomes evident that salvation, the blessing of God, must be by grace. God, before either of the children had done good or evil, that the purpose of election might stand, chose, ordained that the elder should serve the younger. Would you understand grace? Turn to Hosea (4:17; 5:3; 7:1, 8, 11; 8:9, 11; 9, 3, 11, 13, 16; 10:6; 11:8-9; 12:1, 8, 14; 14:4-8). This is grace.

The history of Ephraim in relation to Manasseh is an interesting one. Ephraim often exhibited a trait that can best

be described as “pride of grace.” I know those two words do not belong together, but they nonetheless exist and must be guarded against by those who have been blessed of grace.

It appears that Ephraim, by his attitude toward Manasseh was never quite comfortable with his brother receiving *any* honor. In our text, as a well as the incident of Shibboleth and Sibboleth, Ephraim seems jealous when Gideon and Japheth (Manasseh) are honored. Grace does not equate to entitlement. Yet Ephraim, though blessed of God, did not seem to be able to take it when his brother was blessed. It seems odd but, truth be told, such sin can easily rise to the surface of the hearts of those who are blessed of grace. It ought not be so, but it is.

Our depravity is real. My wife Debbie said to me recently, “Some preacher said something you said in your message last week.” She was rejoicing as if she had never heard it. Rather than rejoicing myself, I couldn't keep from saying, “I preached that last week.” While the words were in my mouth, I began to taste the bitterness and shame of my depravity. I am so thankful the Lord said, “O Ephraim, how shall I let thee go.” Ephraim, since he was blessed, felt he was entitled to share in everyone else's blessing also. We are ever reminded of our utter ruin. Would to God that we could be as Gideon and willingly take the lower seat being glad to honor our brethren above our selves. Alas, it seems we are more Ephraim than Gideon, but if we are not yet convinced, this should serve to convince that our salvation, our blessing is all of grace.

This odious nature of entitlement within us can go in another direction. Sometimes we feel that if we suffer, then

our brethren ought to suffer also. At the bottom of this thinking is jealousy, because we being blessed, should have it better than we do. In the least, our brethren should not escape what *we* have to endure (John 21:18-21). Thank God for his great grace.

Though we might not wish to own this truth for ourselves, the Word of God is replete with warnings and admonishings about this very thing. When God warns us, it means that a true and real problem exists (1 Cor 8:2; Gal. 6:1-3). Why do you think God says what he says in 1 Cor. 4:7? There would be no need of such an admonition if it were not in us to look at what we have received as if we had somehow merited it (Jer. 9:23-24; 2 Cor 10:17-18).

When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he addressed them in a way that assures us of *our* need to be diligent in nurturing a proper attitude concerning what we have received by grace (Phil. 2:1-4).

What we know, who we know, what we understand, where we are, and what we shall be is all completely and entirely of the grace of God. Let us pray that the Ephraim in us will be subdued by Grace and we would, as Gideon, gladly take our place and own our station as being all of grace.

“By the grace of God, I am what I am.”

BE NOT DECEIVED

4, And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing them.

5, And he said unto the men of Succoth, Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me; for they be faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian.

6, And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?

7, And Gideon said, Therefore when the LORD hath delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into mine hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers.

8, And he went up thence to Penuel, and spake unto them likewise: and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered him.

9, And he spake also unto the men of Penuel, saying, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower.

10, Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor, and their hosts with them, about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of all the hosts of the children of the east: for there fell an hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword.

11, And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host: for the host was secure.

12, And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host.

13, And Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle before the sun was up,

14, And caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and enquired of him: and he described unto him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, even threescore and seventeen men.

15, And he came unto the men of Succoth, and said, Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, with whom ye did upbraid me, saying, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thy men that are weary?

16, And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth.

17, And he beat down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city.

18, Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor? And they answered, As thou art, so were they; each one resembled the children of a king.

19, And he said, They were my brethren, even the sons of my mother: as the LORD liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you.

20, And he said unto Jether his firstborn, Up, and slay them. But the youth drew not his sword: for he feared, because he was yet a youth.

21, Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, Rise thou, and fall upon us: for as the man is, so is his strength. And Gideon arose, and slew Zebah and Zalmunna, and took away the ornaments that were on their camels' necks.

22, Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian.

23, And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you.

Judges 8:4-23

In the eyes of God, it is no small matter when his people are treated poorly. It is a personal affront to him when those who profess to be his people do not care for the household of faith (Gal. 6:6-10; Mat. 18). This communication of faith is the love of God operating in the brethren (1 John 3:15-18). This communication is the resulting action of God given faith (James 2:14-17). The lack of these things proves the absence of spiritual life and love for Christ (Matt. 25:31-46).

The proof of this is seen in the treatment rendered toward Gideon by the men of Succoth and Penuel. These tribes were Israelites by descent, but it is evident they cared little for the man whom God had appointed as the leader, judge and deliverer of Israel and likewise for the God who

appointed him. This is indicative of false professors who do not choose God when put to the test. Instead these false professors chose to wait and see how things turn out, in effect declaring their service for God is based on circumstance. Worthy of note also is that Succoth and Penuel play an important part in the history of Israel.

Succoth was the first acre of freedom soil the Israelites lit upon after being delivered from Egypt by blood and wrath. Succoth means “booth” or “tabernacle” and refers to the booths erected by the Israelites when fleeing from Pharaoh. The feast of the tabernacles is a commemoration of the initial taste of freedom after years of slavery. It was also at Succoth that the Lord began to lead the people with the pillars of cloud and fire. This deliverance was commemorated every year, but it is obvious the men of Succoth had forgotten their God and his salvation, evidenced by their ill treatment of Gideon when he asked them for bread. Our Lord does not ask his people for bread, but his people are often in need. To refuse them or to hold out on them in order to see how things turn out is to reveal your want and lack of love for Christ.

Penuel was the place where Jacob wrestled with Christ and had his hip put out of joint. Penuel means, “facing God” and was a basis for the name Jacob gave the brook Jabbok when he called it Peniel or “I have seen the face of God.” Penuel was the place where Israel got its name. The entire heritage of the men of Penuel, that they were Israelites, was founded upon this location from which they took their name. The believer does not count on historical occasions when God delivers him, but he is remiss and loses encouragement

if he forgets them. In times of trial, we often recall when God had previously delivered us, and it brings comfort to our souls.

The men of Penuel had forgotten the *face* of God. They had forgotten their identity and they cared not for the deliverer. This would be synonymous with the believer forgetting Calvary. We disdain such a thought, but we have but to remember when opportunities arose for us to be of service to God's children, we found excuse not to. At that moment we forgot Calvary, because had we remembered we would have been compelled to aid in the relief of our brother or sister. Calvary is where we got our identity.

This episode is set forth in 4 points; the *need*, the *response* and the *two consequences*.

First, in verse 4-5 we see the *need*. Gideon and his army were weary from pursuing two Midianite kings named Zebah and Zalmunna. Both their names mean “deprived of protection.” There is also an intimation their names mean “deprived of sacrifice.” In either interpretation it is clear their doom is sealed. They are without the protection of the sacrifice so they must face God in wrath and justice. The description of the army of Gideon is an appropriate description of the church of the living God. She is weary. She is faint yet she is pursuing. She goes into the world looking for the sheep and assaulting the gates of hell with the sword of the Lord. She is faint in herself but never gives up for her strength is in the Lord. Her need is simple. She needs bread. She needs Christ and his gospel. It is her food. Note well the trust of the church, though misplaced. She does not seek help from the Midianites (the world) but from those who she

believes to be her brethren. The church takes men at their word when they profess to know Christ. Gideon comes to those whose very names suggest they are children, though they prove otherwise.

Second, the *response* of the princes of Succoth is parroted by the men of Penuel (vv. 6, 8). Their response is a true example of unbelief. They reacted to what they had seen rather than what God had promised. They looked at this weary and faint army of three hundred and remembered that they had just seen Zebah and Zalmunna pass over the river before them with 15,000 men. To them, the odds were not in Gideon's favor. Unbelief walks by sight and not by faith. The fact they refused Gideon bread, and the reason they gave for doing so, reveals they were leaving all their options open. Faith does not deal in options. Faith obeys God (Eph. 4:4-6). To refuse these men bread was an affront to all that was holy and good. They held back to see who was going to be the victor.

Faith demands that we care for the brethren even if they face what it seems to be an overpowering enemy. Unbelief waits for the dust to clear. Faith gives bread. These men did not believe God. That is the crux of the matter. They were much like those in the wilderness who wanted to make themselves a captain to take them back to Egypt. They forgot that their feet were in the promised land. They forgot that God had kept every promise he had made. In truth they were ready to go back under the horrible treatment of the Midianites rather than face the possibility that supporting the gospel would cost them everything. Feeding Gideon and his army, to them, was a price they were unwilling to pay.

They had the name and the heritage of Israelites, but they proved they did not believe God. They did not have the love of God in them. They had no faith because they had no works, and they actually despised the Savior.

Thirdly, the first *consequence* of their actions was that it cost them their lives. Gideon brutalized them with thorn bushes. Some suggest that after he flayed them, he covered them with thorns and ran over them with carts. At Penuel, Gideon tore down their tower representing their refuge and slew the men of the city. He did so because these men would not feed his army (vv. 7, 9). Thorns and briars are indicative of the cares of the world that choke out the word of the gospel. God is the only high tower of his people. The gain of the world is the loss of the soul. Be not deceived, those who name the name of Christ, will be handled in wrath if they refuse to have compassion on the children of God. When opportunity arises, do good to the household of faith. The consequence of not doing so is horrible. In Matthew 25 our Lord makes it clear that there will be hell to pay.

After Gideon had captured and killed Zebah and Zalmunna and had finished Succoth and Penuel, there was a second *consequence*. In verse 22, the people of Israel desire Gideon to be their king. This seems a natural response of the people, but it was actually a revelation of their depravity. If we look at it from a spiritual point of view, it is a picture of when we find out what Christ has done for us. We desire him and gladly own him as our King. However, this desire expressed by the people was actually blasphemy. The time of the Judges was a time of freethinking. By that I mean, God was not in men's thoughts (Judges 21:25).

Earthly kings are not to be the desire of Israel. It is one of the things that uniquely separate the people of God from the rest of humanity. The desire for a visible, human king reveals that the people seek to be more like the world than to separate from it. The remarkable thing about the true church is that it has no hierarchy. It has no natural leader. The pastors as well as the congregation are under one head and he is King Jesus. Though they obey the laws of the land because God has ordained those laws for their good, they have no king but Jesus, and they do not desire one. The pastor rules only as a clarion, a mouthpiece of the King. Gideon refused to be their king, because he was not and could never be their king. The Lord shall rule over you.

As we go on through the history of Israel, we will see this desire for an earthly king to be a driving force among them until God gives them their desires and sends leanness to their souls (1 Sam. 8:4-7). The mark of the false church is their need of a man to rule them. They need a hierarchy. They need a government other than God. Baptists have often taken the opposite course and opted for congregational rule. Neither is Biblical. Christ is the head, the only head of the church (Is. 33:22; 9:6-7).

GIDEON'S END

24, And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.)

25, And they answered, We will willingly give them. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey.

26, And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold; beside ornaments, and collars, and purple raiment that was on the kings of Midian, and beside the chains that were about their camels' necks.

27, And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house.

28, Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more. And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon.

29, And Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house.

30, And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives.

31, And his concubine that was in Shechem, she also bare him a son, whose name he called Abimelech.

32, And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age, and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

33, And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baalberith their god.

34, And the children of Israel remembered not the LORD their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side:

35, Neither shewed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had shewed unto Israel.

Judges 8:24-35

This is the account of the end of Gideon's course as judge of Israel. The campaign against Midian is over. The Lord has given great victory to Gideon and his small three hundred man army. Those of Israel who refused to feed and care for his soldiers he has slain, and he destroyed their symbols of power. His victory was such that the people desired to make him their king, which he, being a man of God, refused. Midian is finished. That people will no longer trouble Israel (v. 28). Gideon as judge and deliverer of the people is a type of our Lord Jesus Christ (Is. 33:22). As Christ is, Gideon was a man of valor, a man of war, a deliverer and judge. He refused to be made king even as our Lord did in John 6:15,

26. As Christ did when he finished his work, Gideon went home to rest and served in the capacity as judge, interceding on behalf of the people until his death. After his victory, the people were at rest for forty years. After Christ's victory over sin and death, his people rest eternally.

There is no type that is a perfect representation of Christ. Gideon was a man, and the very best of men are still but men. Our Lord was a man, the only perfect man, and thus is the measure of true humanity. Gideon was a man, an imperfect man, and thus is the measure of fallen and sinful men. Many things about Gideon are against type. After 40 years, when Gideon died, the people of Israel returned to the worship of Baal, particularly the Shechemite version of the false god named Baal-berith. God has fixed it so his *elect* will never forsake him (Jer. 32:40).

Christ is the husband of one wife, his bride, the church. Gideon had many wives and at least one concubine who bare him a son named Abimelech. This practice of many of the Lord's chosen leaders does not fit the type of Christ, though some may try to say it does because Christ's bride is made up of a number that no man can number. In the New Testament the principle is clear. Not every historical practice of the Old Testament, practiced under the Old Covenant is declared an example to follow. If multiplicity of wives is an example, it is an example not to follow by the results it produces.

Whether with Abraham, Solomon or Gideon, the end is never well. There is no place in scripture where a favorable result of this practice is recorded. Interestingly in the case of both Abraham and Gideon, their affection ran to the son

born of their half-wives (Ishmael and Abimelech, and both proved a snare to the family). Our Lord, in the gospel of Matthew, intimates that these things happen because of the hardness of men hearts. In the cases of Ishmael and Abimelech, both became men and a people who lived a life of presuming entitlement. They believed they were owed privilege.

The continual theme of the book of Judges is the mercy of God in sending the people of Israel a deliverer in their hour of greatest trial. Sadly, the theme is also that of the depravity of fallen man. Every time the God-sent deliverer died, the immediate response of the people was to plunge headlong into idolatry. The remarkable thing is that in each instance there was no process, no stages of declension, no slowly slipping into ruin. It was an immediate result as if they had been waiting with bated breath to be rid of the man whom God had sent them (v. 33). Thank God that our intercessor “ever liveth,” and he has given us a new heart and mind that causes us to mind the things of the spirit and not the things of the flesh. This is a reminder for us to look to Christ and keep ourselves in the love of God with our eyes fixed on him who sits at the right hand of the Father. We must take heed lest when we think we stand, we fall. What is in the heart of the pagan worshippers of Israel is likewise in our hearts by nature.

The reason the children of Israel returned to idolatry is declared in v. 34. This same thing is played out over and over again. Generally, the wording is the same. They did not forget God altogether. History tells us that though the people turned to idolatry, it was not a wholesale abandonment of

the practices of Judaism. They incorporated the worship of Baal with the worship set forth in the law. This mixture was strictly prohibited by God and is yet prohibited in this day (1 Kings 18:21; 2 Cor. 6:14-18).

Idolatry in this day, in what is called Christendom, is the worship of the creature more than the creator. The worship is a mixture. Men speak of God but deny the power thereof and turn the truth of God into a lie, worshiping the creature more than the creator. According to this mixture, the full weight of salvation ultimately finds its efficacy in the will of man and not God. Even predestination and purpose has become the talk of the day. People speak of everyone having a purpose and calling in the universe, but their reasoning is fraught with error.

They aver their purpose to be out there in limbo, but *they* must find it and *use* it well. Such a belief makes null and void the very definition of *purpose*. So, purpose in the universe, like salvation, is in the hands of men. One cannot be the captain of one's destiny. That would make destiny a totally empty principle. If it is *destiny* by definition, you can have nothing to do with the outcome. This idea is a bastardization of the fact that all men do have purpose, but it is the destiny of some to serve the demonstration of God's wrath and others the demonstration of God's mercy and grace (1 Sam. 2:25; Romans 9:21-23).

They forgot God in the capacity of deliverer. They forgot the salvation of the Lord. There is only one reason to forget God in this manner. We forget God as savior when we feel no need of him. Forty years of good living just might make you forget the hole of the pit from which you were digged. Thank

the Lord that he keeps his people in a state of need; otherwise they would forget the One who has delivered them (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

Verse 35 reveals a basic truth about idolatry. The love the people once felt for Gideon, the honor they once desired to give, and did give him, has turned to hate. This is the nature of human love. It is kind of like the old Eagle's song, "If you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with." But we don't apply to the Eagle's for spiritual counsel. The Word of God states this principle very clearly (Matt. 6:19-24). When the Israelites turned to Baal they did so because they hated God.

I want to draw your attention to one other thing. In vv. 24-27 we have the account of something Gideon did that ensnared his house and led Israel into further idolatry. He requested and received the earrings of their prey. They were the earrings of the Ishmaelites. This immediately presents the matter of "the flesh" and "the spirit." These earrings were the possession of the flesh. The principle of forbidden mixture is plain. Why Gideon did this is not known. The fact he did it and the result of him doing it reveals the act, no matter the motive, to have been wrong and not indicative of one who trusts God (Gen. 14:21-23).

The weight of the pagan oblation amounted to over 53 pounds of gold. With this bounty, Gideon manufactured a golden ephod and placed it in his city of Ophrah. He did not take it to Shiloh where God met with his people but took it home where he continued to judge the people. But it would be wrong to read a sinister plot into his actions, and he was still listed with the faithful in Hebrews 11. Some Jewish

historians have said that he made this ephod as a memorial to God for the numerous victories which God gave him. But this is not the normal thing used to memorialize victories.

Usually a monument of stone was erected for such purposes. The fact that it is an ephod must be interpreted that it had to do with the priesthood. Remember that Gideon had made an offering to God which had been consumed by fire. Perhaps because of this, he was taking the office of priest to himself but in a clandestine manner, far away from Shiloh. Whether Gideon wore the ephod or not, the manufacture of it, and it being put in the place where he judged Israel certainly is suspect.

Some say the ephod might have been an oracle that was consulted in the judgment of spiritual matters. This was against the means ordained by God which was the Urim and the Thummim that resided in the breastplate of the high priest and was the sole decider of spiritual matters. The priesthood did not pertain to the house of Manasseh. Whatever the history of this ephod was is not known. We only have before us the two things that clearly define the effect of Gideon's actions. The ephod became a snare to the house of Gideon, because like the brazen serpent that Hezekiah ground to dust, the people began to worship the ephod. The light in them became darkness and how great was that darkness; they whored after the ephod. They made it a god.

Two more things.

First, if you can see something, it is not of faith. No matter who manufactures it or even if the motive for doing so may not be sinister, the end result will be paganism, because

it brings something into the view of the single eye. Religion is replete with icons, pictures, beads, baubles and all manner of contraband and paraphernalia that men believe serve a good purpose. They are nothing more than false gods, idols that will never lead to faith in Christ.

Secondly, the error of Gideon and the idolatry does not alter the promise of God (v. 28). Salvation is by grace. Glory to his name!

THE WAGES OF SIN

1, And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem unto his mother's brethren, and communed with them, and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying,

2, Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, Whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal, which are threescore and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you? remember also that I am your bone and your flesh.

3, And his mother's brethren spake of him in the ears of all the men of Shechem all these words: and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech; for they said, he is our brother.

4, And they gave him threescore and ten pieces of silver out of the house of Baalberith, wherewith Abimelech hired vain and light persons, which followed him.

5, And he went unto his father's house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, being threescore and ten persons, upon one stone: notwithstanding yet Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left; for he hid himself.

6, And all the men of Shechem gathered together, and all the house of Millo, and went, and made Abimelech king, by the plain of the pillar that was in Shechem.

7, And when they told it to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice, and cried, and said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you.

8, The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us.

9, But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?

10, And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us.

11, But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees?

12, Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us.

13, And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?

14, Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us.

15, And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.

16, Now therefore, if ye have done truly and sincerely, in that ye have made Abimelech king, and if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house,

and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands;

17, (For my father fought for you, and adventured his life far, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian:

18, And ye are risen up against my father's house this day, and have slain his sons, threescore and ten persons, upon one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother;)

19, If ye then have dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you:

20, But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech.

21, And Jotham ran away, and fled, and went to Beer, and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother.

22, When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel,

23, Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech:

24, That the cruelty done to the threescore and ten sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood be laid upon Abimelech their brother, which slew them; and upon the men of Shechem, which aided him in the killing of his brethren.

25, And the men of Shechem set liers in wait for him in the top of the mountains, and they robbed all that came along that way by them: and it was told Abimelech.

26, And Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brethren, and went over to Shechem: and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him.

27, And they went out into the fields, and gathered their vineyards, and trode the grapes, and made merry, and went into the house of their god, and did eat and drink, and cursed Abimelech.

28, And Gaal the son of Ebed said, Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? is not he the son of Jerubbaal? and Zebul his officer? serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem: for why should we serve him?

29, And would to God this people were under my hand! then would I remove Abimelech. And he said to Abimelech, Increase thine army, and come out.

30, And when Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled.

31, And he sent messengers unto Abimelech privily, saying, Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his brethren be come to Shechem; and, behold, they fortify the city against thee.

32, Now therefore up by night, thou and the people that is with thee, and lie in wait in the field:

33, And it shall be, that in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, thou shalt rise early, and set upon the city: and, behold, when he and the people that is with

him come out against thee, then mayest thou do to them as thou shalt find occasion.

34, And Abimelech rose up, and all the people that were with him, by night, and they laid wait against Shechem in four companies.

35, And Gaal the son of Ebed went out, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and Abimelech rose up, and the people that were with him, from lying in wait.

36, And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, Behold, there come people down from the top of the mountains. And Zebul said unto him, Thou seest the shadow of the mountains as if they were men.

37, And Gaal spake again and said, See there come people down by the middle of the land, and another company come along by the plain of Meonenim.

38, Then said Zebul unto him, Where is now thy mouth, wherewith thou saidst, Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him? is not this the people that thou hast despised? go out, I pray now, and fight with them.

39, And Gaal went out before the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech.

40, And Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him, and many were overthrown and wounded, even unto the entering of the gate.

41, And Abimelech dwelt at Arumah: and Zebul thrust out Gaal and his brethren, that they should not dwell in Shechem.

42, And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people went out into the field; and they told Abimelech.

43, And he took the people, and divided them into three companies, and laid wait in the field, and looked, and, behold, the people were come forth out of the city; and he rose up against them, and smote them.

44, And Abimelech, and the company that was with him, rushed forward, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and the two other companies ran upon all the people that were in the fields, and slew them.

45, And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt.

46, And when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard that, they entered into an hold of the house of the god Berith.

47, And it was told Abimelech, that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together.

48, And Abimelech gat him up to mount Zalmon, he and all the people that were with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand, and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it, and laid it on his shoulder, and said unto the people that were with

him, What ye have seen me do, make haste, and do as I have done.

49, And all the people likewise cut down every man his bough, and followed Abimelech, and put them to the hold, and set the hold on fire upon them; so that all the men of the tower of Shechem died also, about a thousand men and women.

50, Then went Abimelech to Thebez, and encamped against Thebez, and took it.

51, But there was a strong tower within the city, and thither fled all the men and women, and all they of the city, and shut it to them, and gat them up to the top of the tower.

52, And Abimelech came unto the tower, and fought against it, and went hard unto the door of the tower to burn it with fire.

53, And a certain woman cast a piece of a millstone upon Abimelech's head, and all to brake his skull.

54, Then he called hastily unto the young man his armourbearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him. And his young man thrust him through, and he died.

55, And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed every man unto his place.

56, Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren:

57, And all the evil of the men of Shechem did God render upon their heads: and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.

Judges 9

This is the record of the treachery of Abimelech, the illegitimate son of Gideon born to Gideon's Shechemite concubine. The story might be entitled "Be sure your sins will find you out," or "The wages of sin is death." It is unnecessary to approach this record expositionally because it is a singular narrative. The record runs that Abimelech, discounting the words of his father (8:23), sets about to make himself king of the Shechemites. By this time, after the passing of Gideon, the people had wholeheartedly embraced the worship of Baal, and the concept that Jehovah alone was the ruler of his people had long been forgotten and set aside. Their allegiance firmly set on Baal, the memory of what Gideon did to Baal and Ashtaroth was no longer a pleasant memory to them.

Like the rest of Israel, their real desire was for a king to rule over them, and Abimelech was just the man for the job. Knowing this desire, Abimelech set before them a logical proposition (v. 2). There is no indication that the sons of Gideon had any design to rule over them, but the fact they hated Gideon and his memory played well into their malice. Also, the argument that Abimelech was a Shechemite, like them, made it easy to agree with him. They immediately went to the wealth of their god to finance the overthrow of the house of Gideon (v. 7).

With the money, Abimelech hired a bunch of hooligans to do the dirty deed, and using them, he slew every son of Gideon save one, the youngest, Jotham. He slew and then stacked them up like cordwood on one stone. In all probability the stone on which they were stacked was in close proximity to the altar Gideon had built and named Jehovah-shalom or “the LORD send peace.” After they had done their multiple homicides, they gathered at the house of Millo. While they were there, the only son they had failed to kill stood on top of Mt. Gerizim and prophesied of their ultimate failure and ruin (vv. 7-20).

The olive tree, the fig tree and the vine (vv. 8-15) refer to Gideon whom these had asked to rule over them but were refused. The bramble (a product of Eden's curse by the fall) is Abimelech whom they chose to be their king.

Abimelech's rule did not last long before the Shechemites were ready for a coup d'état. They were made angry and villainous by an evil spirit sent into their hearts from the Lord. Gaal, the son of Ebed, came to the Shechemites, got them rip-roaring drunk and put them all to cursing Abimelech and his mother. He then set in order a plot to kill Abimelech. The plot backfired, because Abimelech was made aware, and Gaal and his company were routed.

Gaal and his company hid in a temple of Baal, and Abimelech burned it to the ground with them inside killing upwards of 1000 people. Then Abimelech went after Thebez, a town that harbored more of his enemies, and wreaked havoc there causing the people to flee to a strong tower. While Abimelech was trying to knock down the door, a woman took a piece of millstone, threw it from the top of the

tower and fractured Abimelech's skull. Not wanting to be remembered as being slain by a woman, Abimelech had his men kill him. That strategy failed because centuries later his name was remembered as an ersatz warrior slain by a woman (2 Sam. 11:21). Jotham's prophecy was fulfilled and Abimelech's reign was recalled in infamy (vv. 56-57).

There is a great deal for us in this chapter.

1. It is no surprise that depraved men and their religion would gladly finance an endeavor that would assure the Lord Jehovah would not rule over them. Judas was given 30 pieces of silver to assure that the legal religionists would free themselves from the Lord Jesus Christ. Depraved men want a king, but not the absolute ruler of the universe. Abimelech was wholly suitable to be their king, because centuries later the men that embraced the same religion cried "Away with him, we have no king but Caesar."

When it comes down to where the rubber hits the road, every effort of religion, every penny of the billions spent on anything other than the gospel of sovereign grace is an effort to dethrone the true king and worship the creature more than the creator. The efforts of religion are designed to exalt and honor man and the scripture bears this out in spades (2 Thess. 2:3-4). The horrid promise made by the serpent to Eve in the garden is still the driving force behind the religion of humanity. The willingness of humanity to find, exalt and follow a man rather than Christ is the defining nature of the depraved heart. The fool has said in his heart "No God for me."

2. Though the schemes of religion meet with some success, and it often appears that they might have wiped out

the last remnant of God's people, when the last two witnesses seem to lie dead in the street, God has *not* left us without a witness. The Word of God yet discerns the thoughts and intents of men's hearts and surely points out the horrible end of all who oppose the Lord. At the house of Millo (to be satisfied) their end will prove most unsatisfactory. There is yet one left of the house of the deliverer who, like Ehud, has a "message from God."

Jotham, the youngest son, is not dead but lives and declares the works of the Lord (vv. 23-24; 1 Sam. 2:24-25). Jotham's name designated him to be a preacher of the truth. His name means "Jehovah is perfect" or "Jehovah is righteous." What a difference between the bramble under whose shadow the Shechemites hide and the true and real King of kings. Their thorny king will be consumed as wood, hay and stubble. His sinister plots and vile plans will come to naught, but Jehovah Jesus the savior of his people is perfect. He shall save his people from their sins—He shall declare from his cross, "It is finished" ("perfect;" Deut. 32:4).

Like Haman, Abimelech will be hoisted on his own petard and hanged from the gallows he built for another. He who is perfect shall perfectly prevail. He shall perfectly save everyone for whom he died. Those who will not have Christ reign over them will find that even in their evil plans, they are being herded to the slaughterhouse by the perfect one—Jehovah is perfect.

It is interesting to note that Jotham stood upon Mt. Gerizim to declare the word of the Lord (Deut. 11:29). That mount was designated as the mount of blessing for Israel. The words of Jotham are cursings upon Shechem and his

vain, light cohorts, but they are a *blessing to true* Israel, the Israel of God. “Let the potsherds of the earth strive with the potsherds of the earth but woe unto him that striveth with his Maker.” The flock may seem diminished at any given time, even decimated, but God, Jehovah “the perfect,” will have his man stand on Mt. Zion and declare that no weapon formed against his people shall prosper.

3. Finally I want us to look at the last episode in the sorry existence of Abimelech. This is found in vv. 50-53. I see in these few verses a picture of the church in the world under the assault of the forces of hell. The word Thebez means “conspicuous” but comes from an ancient root that means “fine linen, bleached white as by a fuller” (Mal. 3:1-4). The children of God reside in Christ who is made unto them righteous. When the enemy attacks they take refuge in a strong tower (Ps. 61:3; Prov. 18:10). The tower in which they took refuge was a high tower (Ps. 18:2; 144:2). Upon entering the tower, they shut the door and shut the enemy out (Rev. 21:27).

The heroine of this story is a *certain* woman. That certain woman is the church, the bride of Christ. She will be declared victorious, conquering now and still to conquer, as she stands with her bridegroom, the Lord of glory (Rev. 6:2; 15:2). Her weapon was a piece of stone, a rock, a piece of millstone. Christ is that stone. He is the Rock (Mark 9:42; Matthew 21; 42-44). That stone is the gospel, Christ and him crucified. That rock always hits the mark. It landed on the head of Abimelech and crushed his head (v. 53; Genesis 3:15; Hab. 3:13; Rom. 16:20).

Jehovah is perfect.

TOLA AND JAIR

1, And after Abimelech there arose to defend Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in mount Ephraim.

2, And he judged Israel twenty and three years, and died, and was buried in Shamir.

3, And after him arose Jair, a Gileadite, and judged Israel twenty and two years.

4, And he had thirty sons that rode on thirty ass colts, and they had thirty cities, which are called Havothjair unto this day, which are in the land of Gilead.

5, And Jair died, and was buried in Camon.

Judges 10:1-5

This is the record of two men of Israel, Tola and Jair, who judged Israel consecutively for about 45 years. Their terms as judges followed the cruel escapades of Abimelech. Although there is not much that is historically revealed, we know this account is inspired and “these things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” Perhaps, because of the brevity of the account, the six commentators of whom I enquired looked at these passages only in their historical context. My first thought was to do the same since the remainder of the chapter is fleshed out in greater detail and seemed more conducive to preaching.

Two words caused me to stop, ponder and look for Christ in this context. The first word is translated “defend” in verse 1. The Hebrew word is “save.” That word immediately points us to Christ who came into the world to seek and to *save* that which was lost. Though Tola was a judge of Israel (v. 2), he is first described as the savior of Israel.

The second word is his name, Tola. I learned this word early on my career and if memory serves, I preached a message about this word here in Cherokee and at a conference at Ashland, Ky in 1979 or 1980. My text at the time was Psalm 22:6. The words of Psalm 22 are a record of the words of our Lord from the cross. In Psalm 22:6, he uses the word “tola” to describe himself in identification with the elect, being made sin for them. The word means “worm” or “maggot.” Also, the word is often translated as “scarlet” or “crimson,” as in Isaiah 1:18, describing our sins and the punishment that is due them—“blood.”

This word “tola” first speaks of Christ in his condescension to be identified with the likes of us. No human mind can plumb the depth of the humiliation of our Lord in making himself of no reputation, in order to be our suffering substitute. Even today, it remains the mystery that is without controversy, “God manifest in the flesh” descending to the depths of coming in the likeness of sinful flesh to the final blow of being made sin for his people. He did not take upon himself the nature of angels but rather the seed of Abraham.

Tola is a “worm” but not just any worm, a specific worm, a unique worm, a worm that served a particular function and by that function saved his children. The specific worm

named is the “coccus ilicis,” a female grub or scarlet worm. Henry Morris in his book “Biblical Basis for Modern Science” said, “When the female of the scarlet worm species was ready to give birth to her young, she would attach her body to the trunk of a tree, fixing herself so firmly and permanently that she would never leave again. The eggs deposited beneath her body were thus protected until the larvae were hatched and able to enter their own life cycle. As the mother died, the crimson fluid stained her body and the surrounding wood. From the dead bodies of such female scarlet worms, the commercial scarlet dyes of antiquity were extracted.”

What a picture this gives of Christ, dying on the tree, shedding his precious blood that he might “bring many sons unto glory!” He died for us that we would live through him! There is no way to deal with this but to proclaim the glorious truth of it and bow in reverent adoration at the wondrous fact of it. Our Lord takes this lowly title to himself to teach us the distance he traveled in his condescension, even to the depths of hell, to bear the name of “worm,” to lead captivity captive and give gifts to men.

Tola is the son of *Puah* which means “splendid.” Splendid means “shining” and is a description of God and his Son and the gospel. Out of Zion, our God hath *shined*. God has commanded the light of the gospel to *shine* in our hearts to reveal the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This word “splendid,” in time past, almost exclusively related to things that were outside the realm of man. One of the synonyms of splendid is the word “sublime” which at one time was never used except in reference to spiritual beauty or beauty born of creation at the hand of God.

I once heard a man's lecture about rational society's bent to removing from language all references to God. He related the story of a psychological experiment done in the 1930s during the time which men like to call "the age of reason." At that time, socialism was taking hold in Europe and in the minds of many Americans, and part of that thinking was that God was the invention of those who oppressed the lower classes.

The experiment was to take two young boys of different social status and record their attitudes toward different things. Their hypothesis was that these young boys would prove that socialism was a part of the natural thinking of the lower working class. Part of the experiment was to have the two boys describe a beautiful sunset. The young man of the higher social status described the sunset as "breathtaking." The young man from the lower social status described the sunset as "sublime." This caused the researchers to cease their study without publishing, because that poor young man, with one word, had brought God into the equation.

The researchers could not prove their theory of socialism being a natural thought process of the poor, because the young mind of that poor boy had immediately run to God to describe the sunset. Thereafter, words like "sublime" and "splendid" began to disappear from psychological writing and media in general. But here is the word for us in this text, a *sublime* description of God and his Son, the *splendid* "coccus ilicis."

This glorious lineage goes yet farther. Tola's grandfather's name is Dodo. His name means "beloved." It takes no stretch of the imagination to see this speaks of Christ of whom the

Father said, "This is my beloved Son." We, because of the *beloved savior*, the *splendid worm*, are accepted in the *beloved*.

One more name is here before us. Issachar means "bowed under two burdens" and designates one who bears this name to be a "servant." Christ is the *servant* of the Most High, who thought it not robbery to be equal with God yet made himself to be a servant and was obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross (1 John 3:5).

The next Judge mentioned is Jair. His lineage is not addressed but his progeny is. He is from Gilead which means "the place of rocks" and speaks of the balm in Gilead which we know refers to Christ. He was of the half tribe of Manasseh on the other side of the Jordan. His name means "he enlightens." There can be no doubt about this picture. Christ alone is the *light* of the world, the key of *knowledge*. It is he who reveals the Father. It is he that lightens every man that cometh into the world and discloses him for what he is.

Jair is described as the father of many. Christ is the everlasting father. He as savior has brought many sons to glory. "As many as received him gave he the privilege to become the sons of God." Jair's sons are representative of the elect, the priesthood, the church. The beasts they rode upon speak of honor, even nobility. This honor and nobility is derived by virtue of proceeding from their father. Their vital connection with their father is the singular source of their honor (Ezekiel 16:14; Coll. 1:12; Rev. 5:10).

This nobility and honor is the New Testament description of the saints, the lively priesthood of the believer (1 Peter 2:5-10). Not only are the sons men of honor and nobility, they

each have a city of their own. They have a designated place of function in the economy of God (1 Kings 6:7; Romans 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:27). So, in these two men, Tola and Jair we have a beautiful, sublime representation of Christ and his church.

There is only one more thing stated about these men. Their placement as judges in Israel is spoken of in a somewhat unique manner. Each of them is said to have *arose*. Were it not for the place where Jair was buried (v. 5), this might be no more than a reference to their appearance by God's appointment. However, "Camon" means "raised" or "risen." Sweet gospel this! Christ was *delivered* for our transgression and *raised* for our justification.

In this historically limited description of these two men is the spiritual proclamation of the *shining, sublime, beloved, worm*, our God and *Savior*, who by his death saved his people, bore up under the burden of their sin, *died* and *rose* from the grave, *enlightened* everyone for whom he died, made them all *kings* and *priests*, giving each an honorable *function* in his body.

History is his story!

GREAT MERCY

6, And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served not him.

7, And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon.

8, And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel: eighteen years, all the children of Israel that were on the other side Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead.

9, Moreover the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore distressed.

10, And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim.

11, And the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Did not I deliver you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines?

12, The Zidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did oppress you; and ye cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hand.

13, Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more.

14, Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.

15, And the children of Israel said unto the LORD, We have sinned: do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day.

16, And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD: and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.

Judges 10:6-16

Once again, we are confronted in these verses with the depravity of human nature. After Jair dies, the people go headlong into idolatry. This not only reminds us of what we are but particularly of what we are without Christ and what we are under the control of works religion. The Old Covenant was a conditional covenant in its temporal aspect (2 Chron. 7:14). Spiritually, it pointed to Christ and his work, but only the remnant, according to the election of grace, were given faith to look to the substance rather than the shadow. The rest were assigned to depict the end of religion without Christ. For the believer, the spiritual lesson here teaches the danger of looking away from Christ, the uselessness of works

religion and the merciful love of God toward his elect. Only the elect can look at the Old Covenant and use it lawfully.

Only those who have been given life and faith in Christ can see the built-in failure of any religious system that governs, or endeavors to govern its adherents by laws outside them. The law of the Old Covenant was written on stones and served as a definer of sin, an assigner of guilt and an exactor of punishment. It operated in the realm of death (1 Cor. 15:56). Under those principles any government, religious or not is doomed to failure.

The New Covenant's realm of operation is within the heart, in the inward man and is the principle of life. Being an inward principle of life, its behavior is toward life. It is not involved with or motivated by fear of judgment but rather is motivated by the things pertaining to godliness and life (Heb. 10:15-16; Jer. 31:33). The blessings of the New Covenant have nothing to do with the behavior or obedience of the elect. The blessings come to the elect exclusively, because of the behavior and obedience of Christ. Some, especially those who seek to live by the Old Covenant, hold that such adherence to grace would lead to sin. They do so because they believe that grace, like the law, is an outward rather than an inward government. They hold grace and mercy as a reward of behavior which is a bastardization of the Old Covenant.

The believer looks at the elements and history of the behavior of those under the Old Covenant and sees that a conditional covenant cannot serve him for good and can only reveal his shame and unbelief. By contrast, even though the believer knows he cannot operate under such a covenant, he

sees that such knowledge eventuates in him being driven to Christ, seeking mercy. Then comfort is found in the Old Covenant by the believer, because he sees that God shows mercy to penitent sinners, because God brings sinners to repentance. The Old Covenant can never serve as a way of life, but if we have been given eyes to see, it can serve to teach of the glory of the New Covenant. These elements are clearly declared in the passage before us.

Several things:

1. Any time and every time a person takes his eyes off Christ, it is always to turn to another god (v. 6). Forsaking God is not done in a vacuum. One forsakes God for an idol. There are but two religions. There is Christ and there is idolatry. Because of natural love and affection, we may seek to accept some other inclusive view, but in doing so, we do no good for anyone. If Christ is not all of religion, then he is none of religion. If Christ is not all of religion, then all that is left is idolatry. No one can serve two masters. That is not an admonition, it is the declaration of an absolute. Read v. 6. Notice the phrases “served Baalim,” and “forsook the Lord and served him not.”

2. In vv. 7-9 we clearly see the nature of the conditional covenant. Disobedience brings about the result of removal of blessing and its attendant judgments. In this we also see spiritually the providential dealing of God on behalf of the elect. It is reasonable to look at this language and think in terms of reaction. It is difficult to be a creature living primarily in a reactive state to perceive or even imagine a being that *never* reacts. Even in this and other instances when God *appears* to react, it only serves to show that

creatures will not operate favorably under anything that is conditioned upon their actions. The creature's actions, though their own and born of their consummate depravity, do not fall outside the pale of sovereignly controlled providence. To see this, we have only to look at the answer of God when his oppressed people cry out to him for deliverance. He reminds them of the many former deliverances he has accomplished for them (vv. 11-13; Joshua 23:11-13).

The 18 or so years that the Israelites suffered under the Philistines, and the threat they now faced from the Ammonites, must be viewed in light of the other times they have been delivered and the circumstances which brought it about. All deliverances must be viewed in light of the primary deliverance from Egypt. In verse 7 it says that God "sold them." This selling appears to be a reaction to their idolatry, but as with all things, it involves a much grander scheme (Deut. 31:16-21). As we see, these promises have come to pass in our text. Why? Look at Genesis 15:13-16. It reads, "And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.

One of the definitions of the word "sold" is to give over to death. Why God does what he does is *his* way. He takes council with no one. "His ways are past finding out."

Evidence that all of this is his doing is seen in the result it always produces in the elect (Is. 45; 5-8; Amos 3:6; Lk. 13:1-5). The children of God cry for salvation, and they sue for mercy. This is not the result of natural judgment but spiritual chastisement. The elect, the small remnant, cry for mercy.

3. It is clear from the text that religion has no regard for its own. False religion will kill and eat its own if its purpose is served. The Philistines, these Ammonites are oppressing the very ones who have forsaken the true and living God and have joined in with the gods of their own pagan worship (compare v. 6 with 10-11). The result is that the pagan joiners are now the targets of their fellow worshippers. I cannot say that I know, but this may be the beginning of denominational religion. It certainly seems the end of it.

4. The words of God in verse 14 reveal the utter idiocy of idolatry. Idolatry is insanity and requires the suspension of all rational thought. I have listened to and read the works of men who call themselves theologians while embracing that salvation is finally and ultimately dependent on the will of man. They speak of God in grandiose terms but finally reduce him to be the puppet of mortals. Somewhere in the decrepit recesses of their depraved minds, they cease to be intelligent beings and slip into the dark void of emotionalism, sentimentalism and willing stupidity. If they have embraced the gods of man's invention, why do they call on the true God when they are in trouble? If the god they worship can't cut the mustard, what makes them serve him to begin with.

There is simply no rational explanation for serving and worshipping a god who supposedly owns everything but

cannot control his property or help those who worship him. I have long since ceased trying to explain this non-reasoning and instead adopted the example of God in this text. If you're in trouble and your god can't save you unless you "allow" or "let" him, you had better let him do it right away. The trouble is that when faced with imminent danger, language is reduced to a minimum. A cry for help is never preceded by words such as "let" or "allow." Ignorance knows no bounds. Depravity knows no depths (Is. 44:9-20).

5. There is confession and then there is confession. The initial confession of sin is reasonable and is surely sincere (v. 10). The words of God that follow certainly suggests their confession was lacking. Perhaps the children of Israel remembered the times they had done this before and been delivered time and time again. Perhaps they felt that confession guaranteed deliverance. Perhaps they felt that confession obligated God to show mercy. After God derided them and sarcastically bid them to cry to their own gods, their second confession took on an entirely different tone. The words of God shut them up completely to sovereign mercy.

The second confession (v. 15) not only sought deliverance but confessed that God was not obligated to give it, and if he chose not to deliver, they would only be getting what they deserved. The confession was real, because they put away the strange God's from among them (16a). Any confession or profession should be accepted on face value. However, a profession that does not turn from idolatry, by discounting

and disowning everything born of truth, to faith in Christ is suspect. Paul said he knew the Thessalonians were elect, because they turned from their idols to serve the living God (1 Thess.1:9).

6. Finally, we see the reason that God shows mercy. It is not because of their confession. It is because he has compassion on his people. Mercy flows from his heart, not our acts. The text says God's "soul was grieved for the misery of Israel" (v. 16). The magnitude of this language is amazing to me. Most consider God to be dispassionate, and many theologians refuse to assign emotion to God. But the God we know is Christ, and he is full of grace and truth. He reveals through Ezekiel, "And they that escape of you shall remember me among the nations whither they shall be carried captives, because I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and with their eyes, which go a whoring after their idols: and they shall lothe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations" (Eze. 6:9). We would shudder to say such things of God were they not the words of his own mouth. He is more merciful than men are ready to even imagine. He delights in mercy. Compare Ezekiel 6:9 with Hebrews 2:16-18; 4:14-16 then Mark 5:19.

Thank God that he is merciful (Micah 7:18-20).

JEPHTHAH

1, Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah.

2, And Gilead's wife bare him sons; and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman.

3, Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and went out with him.

4, And it came to pass in process of time, that the children of Ammon made war against Israel.

5, And it was so, that when the children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob:

6, And they said unto Jephthah, Come, and be our captain, that we may fight with the children of Ammon.

7, And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?

8, And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Therefore we turn again to thee now, that thou mayest go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

9, And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the LORD deliver them before me, shall I be your head?

10, And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words.

11, Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the LORD in Mizpeh.

12, And Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land?

13, And the king of the children of Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land, when they came up out of Egypt, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now therefore restore those lands again peaceably.

14, And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon:

15, And said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah, Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon:

16, But when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red sea, and came to Kadesh;

17, Then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land: but the king of Edom would not hearken thereto. And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab: but he would not consent: and Israel abode in Kadesh.

18, Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, but came not within the border of Moab: for Arnon was the border of Moab.

19, And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place.

20, But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel.

21, And the LORD God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them: so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country.

22, And they possessed all the coasts of the Amorites, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto Jordan.

23, So now the LORD God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, and shouldest thou possess it?

24, Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever the LORD our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess.

25, And now art thou any thing better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? did he ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against them,

26, While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aroer and her towns, and in all the cities that be along by the coasts of Arnon, three hundred years? why therefore did ye not recover them within that time?

27, Wherefore I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me: the LORD the Judge be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon.

28, Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him.

29, Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon.

Judges 11:1-29

This chapter is the introduction of one of the most intriguing characters in scripture. He is listed among the heroes of faith in Hebrews chapter 11. Many of the commentators dwell a great deal on the strange vow that Jephthah made and what it really meant (11:30-31). The first thing that

came out of the door of his house was his daughter and according to his vow he had to offer her to the Lord. We will look at that when we get to it, but I mention it now because Jephthah and his life are much more than a blessed revelation of Christ. Jephthah, or at least his necessity, is introduced in the last verses of chapter 10 (vv. 17-18). Chapter 11 gives us a brief history of Jephthah relating to the circumstances of his birth (v.1). Then comes the plea of the Gileadites for Jephthah to do battle for them with their promise to make him head over their house.

The circumstances of Jephthah's birth are not ideal. Evidently, Gilead had a concubine before he was married who bore him this son whom he named. There is no doubt that Gilead counted Jephthah to be his true son, though he was born of a harlot (v. 1c). The fact that our Lord inspired the writer to call the mother of Jephthah a harlot is important on many levels. The first thing is, the Lord loves, saves and uses not those who are necessarily esteemed by society but has chosen the foolish and despised of the world to reveal his grace. After Gilead married a *wife*, the children of their union rejected Jephthah, because he was the son of a harlot. The circumstances of one's birth are of no significance to God though they are often significant to men.

Throughout scripture, our Lord used the most unlikely and honored them among men. Rahab the harlot is an example of this. She was greatly honored by the Lord even to be the one who bore the lineage of Christ. Although Mary was not a harlot, one can say the natural lineage of Christ involves both a harlot named Rahab and a gentile named Ruth. In this sense, Jephthah is a type of Christ.

The harlot is also a picture of the bride of Christ as represented by both Rahab and Gomer, the wife of Hosea. Harlots play a prominent role among the children of God in scripture. It was not the ladies of society but the ladies of the evening that were drawn to Christ and served him faithfully, Mary Magdalene being a prime example. Jephthah is here a picture of Christ in that he is “the stone that the builders refused” that has become the head of the corner. Another manner in which Jephthah is a type of Christ is that, “He came unto his own and his own received him not.”

Jephthah is the savior anointed by the Lord, and though rejected because of human pride, God will have his people cry out to his anointed for salvation. Not only that, he will make them willing to own his anointed as their head in the day of his power. There is a saying that goes, “Desperate times call for desperate measures.” One man said, “Sinners only call upon Christ from the end of their rope.” Everyone who came to Christ for help came out of great need (the leper, the Syrophenician woman, blind Bartimaeus, the woman with the issue of blood). The song says, “Let not conscience make you linger, nor of fitness fondly dream; all the fitness he requireth is to feel your need of him.” Men naturally reject Christ until God manipulates their lives to the point they *must* have him.

Chapter 11 is the answer to the question and the oath of the people and princes of Gilead (10:18). They will get what they asked and be made to honor their vow. After they rejected Jephthah and he fled from their company, the word reveals that Jephthah went to a place called Tob where he gathered unto him a troop of vain men. We should not

understand *vain* to mean these were men of conceit, but rather they were empty in the sense of having nothing, poor and needy. We have a scriptural illustration of this in the life of David as he fled from Saul and hid in the cave Adullam (1 Sam. 22:1-2). The outcast, the poor, the rejected and the pariah aligned with David, and likewise, the same kind of folk joined with Jephthah. This is certainly a picture of those who are drawn to Christ—publicans, sinners and those who are poor and needy. This is also a picture of the course of the gospel. The Jews refused it and it was turned to the Gentiles (Acts 13).

Verse 4-6 of chapter 11 pick up where chapter 10:17-18 leave off. The Gileadites, the brethren who rejected Jephthah, now have *need* of this mighty man of valor. Had they felt they had sufficient to do the job, they would have never called for Jephthah. Likewise, it is the sad case of humanity. If you think you can make it without Christ, you will not seek him. If you believe you have even a bit of righteousness, you will not seek another righteousness. If you feel no need of deliverance, you will have none. If you are the Lord's, you will be brought to the place and drawn by the Father to cry, "Lord save me, or I perish." Once the Christ rejecting sinner is providentially brought to the end of his hope, he will own that he must have him whom he formerly rejected (vv. 7-8; John 7:3-5).

Verses 9-10 is the record of the children declaring that Jephthah is their captain and their head. We know that Christ is Lord by sovereign right and wondrous accomplishment, but it is also true that every blood bought sinner will gladly own him as such.

In verse 11, Jephthah utters these vows of the people before the Lord. What a picture this is of Christ as he was set to do business with God concerning the sin of his people. Jephthah did not ask for this job. When declaring his priesthood in Hebrews 5, it is said of the Lord that he did glorify himself to be High Priest but was called of God. In contemplation of the task before him, Jephthah told all of it to the Lord. When our Lord was about to go to the cross to save his people, he poured out his soul unto God the Father (John 12:27-33; John 17:1-4).

What follows in verses 12-28 is the declaration of Jephthah that the war the Ammonites have waged against Gilead is unjust (v. 27). The Ammonites war to get what they have already lost, because of their unjust treatment of the Lord's people. In refusing to help Israel at these various times, the Lord had defeated them and given their land to his people.

The Ammonites have neither right nor warrant to pursue this course, because they find themselves fighting against the Judge of all the earth. The mark of the infidel is that he refuses to give up what he has already lost. Adam lost his rights to the world when he sinned against God, but we soon find one of his sons seeking to regain that which was lost by the work of his hands. Cain felt his laborious endeavors would be sufficient to be accepted by God. Beneath that thinking is the notion that he had a right to the approval of God.

Religion preaches that men have a right to salvation and all they have to do is claim it. The Lord, the Judge alone has the rights to what he owns, and he will not give up those

rights. If men seek to make the work of God the domain of men, they have set themselves in battle array against the very God who owns everything. The glory of God in the salvation of his people is tied in the ownership of these lands. These lands belong to the people by promise and further by the fact that he overthrew the inhabitants by *his* power.

God's overthrow was not arbitrary. In each of these instances these people were given opportunity to honor God by caring for his people, but they made a wretched choice and have no grounds upon which to claim that the land was theirs. This promised land belongs to the people of God by divine edict and sovereign accomplishment, and it is given to whom he will (Dan. 4:17, 25, 32; Lk. 12:32). Salvation is a matter of eternal promise and accomplishment (Rev. 13:8). Those who seek to have it based on *their claim* or to take it by *their will*, find themselves potsherds striving against their maker, and they will not prevail.

The reason is declared in verse 29. The God of Heaven has anointed a deliverer. Although the Spirit was upon Jephthah according to measure, and upon Christ without measure, he is the same Spirit, and where the Spirit is, there is liberty, because there is victory. Remember, Christ and his church are one body with him as the captain and the head. The body operates in the same Spirit as the head (John 3:34; 1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 1:19-20; 4:4-7).

To God be the glory!

JEPHTHAH'S VOW

29, Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon.

30, And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands,

31, Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD'S, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.

32, So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands.

33, And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.

34, And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.

35, And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them

that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back.

36, And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon.

37, And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows.

38, And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains.

39, And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel,

40, That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

Judges 11:29-40

This is one of those recorded bits of history in the Word of God to which there is no clear and defining resolution given. The vow of Jephthah, and how the vow was carried out has been the subject of many theological treatises and still remains a subject of conjecture and debate. I believe the Lord is deliberately vague concerning exactly how the vow

was carried out, but this is merely my take on the passage and thus should be held to bear only the weight of a poor sinner's notion. Before we look at some possibilities, there are some things that *are* written concerning this.

As to the *vow*, if a man made one, he was bound by law to fulfill it (Ecc. 5:2-6). That he made the vow in the first place reveals the frailty of humanity, even of one who has the Spirit of the Lord upon him. But he did vow a vow unto the Lord, and by the law was unable to take it back (v. 35d; Ps. 66:13).

We see also that the daughter vowed to honor her father's vow for the glory of the Lord. Under the law *she* might have been relieved from *her* vow, because a father *could* forgive a vow made by his daughter (Num. 30:5). However, releasing her from the vow she made would still not release him from his.

There *was* an avenue that was available to him where he might have both honored his vow and kept his daughter from being that which was offered. If a female is the object of a vow, *she* may be redeemed from the vow for thirty pieces of silver (Lev. 27:2-4; 29). Why this avenue was not pursued is part of the vagueness of this passage. Remember that it is the glory of the Lord to conceal a thing as much as it is the glory of the King to reveal it (Prov. 25:2).

I think it reasonable to assume that Jephthah intended to offer *someone* rather than *something* since it is improbable that an animal or an inanimate object would come out of his house to meet him upon his return. Perhaps he was thinking of Abraham when he offered up Isaac, but that too, seems not to fit the scenario, because he rent his clothes when his

daughter came out to meet him with dancing and timbrels. I think it is safe to say that though he intended to offer someone, he did not consider that it might be his only child.

Under the Old Covenant, human sacrifice was prohibited yet Jephthah seemed ready to go against the law when he made the vow to offer one from his household. Knowing something about human nature, I think Jephthah's vow was, in his mind, a kind of grand gesture desiring to have God know that he meant business.

This ought to teach us all a lesson. Jephthah's vow was *not* like Gideon seeking a sign. Jephthah tried to strike a bargain with God, and that is a fool's game ("A soul winner's bargain"). God does not do deals. He desires nothing that you have. There is no barter. You have nothing he wants. He does not require you to give in trade for what he has *promised*. Salvation is not obtained at a swap meet or in a flea market. Jephthah had the promise of victory but sought to square it with God as if the promise was conditioned upon him giving something back to God.

The vow that Jephthah made was to offer whoever came out to meet him as a burnt offering. A burnt offering is designed to appease God for sin. This again strikes an odd chord. God, having given Jephthah his Spirit, had communed with him and promised to win the battle for him indicating that God was *already* appeased for him. A proper offering would have been a peace offering, an offering of praise and thanksgiving. This is revealing in that human nature generally feels that man can do something to appease God, but the only true offering a man can make is the

offering of praise and thanksgiving by the one who has already appeased God for him (Heb. 13:15; I Peter 2:5).

The paying of the vow is what seems so vague. Did Jephthah kill his daughter as some say? Did he offer her to God in perpetual virginity as others say? Did he, as still others say, assure her perpetual virginity by killing her, and as it were, killing two birds with one stone? The answer is that we cannot know the answer for sure.

The fact that she bewailed her virginity for two months tends to support the intimation that the performance of the vow was to make her a kind of Nun. This is supported by the word "lament" in verse 40. The word could mean the daughters of Jerusalem went to her graveside for a 4 day vigil each year, or as your marginal reading relates, it could mean they went 4 days each year to talk with her, catch her up on the latest news and rehearse to her what was going on in the rest of her tribe. Again, the answer is rather vague. Perpetual virginity was a curse to a Jewish woman, because it removed the possibility of her bearing the Messiah which was the hope of every Jewish woman. It was the hope of Eve at the birth of Cain when she said, "I have gotten *the* man from the Lord." She was referring to Genesis 3:15

We speak of Christ and his church in such terms (of vagueness) when we refer to the Old Testament types. Christ and his church are shrouded in mystery in the Old Testament and can only be seen and understood by the eye of faith. We know what this passage speaks of. Of that there can be no doubt (John 5:39; Luke: 24:27; 44-45). It is indeed the vagueness of the passage which makes us to know there is no explanation of it in the events that take place. It is the

vagueness that causes us to seek more, to search it out and meditate upon it.

In this passage is the story of the *salvation of the church*. Jephthah is seen as the Father offering his only child. That she is female, rather than male, does not diminish the value of the offering to the father. She is his only child and he vows to offer his only begotten.

The fact that he could have redeemed her for thirty pieces of silver is important. This was the amount the legalists paid Judas to betray Christ. This was what Christ was worth to religion. However, the value to God was incomprehensible to men. Men give little for Christ, because they hold him and his salvation to be of little value. They buy him for the price of a woman or the price of a slave. Their currency is their free will, or their decision, or their assumed merit. But to the Father he is of such value that his one sacrifice perfected all the church forever (Psa. 49:6-8). The church is of such value to the father that he did not redeem her with corruptible things such as silver or gold but with the precious blood of his only begotten Son.

Also, she was offered by *vow*. Does not this take us to the realms of eternity when Christ, because of the eternal covenant of grace, was made the surety of that better covenant and by the blood of the eternal covenant purchased the redemption of his people? You and I are saved because of a *vow made by the Father*. He said, "I will be their God and they shall be my people," and again, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, because he shall save his people from their sins." She also pictures Christ in that she was willing to die in order that the Father might be honored, and his vow be

fulfilled. Christ was a voluntary substitute for the glory of the Father that he might be just and justifier.

Jephthah's daughter is likewise a beautiful picture of the church. She pictures the church because she is willing to give up all, even her life, in order to honor the Father. One man said, "The first place you go after meeting Christ is to the graveyard to bury everything." Is this not the language, the oath and the sentiment of Paul when he considered what he was in the flesh (Phil. 3:4-9; Ps. 73:23-26)?

The vagueness of the passage in *not* clearly declaring how the vow was fulfilled, whether in death or in perpetual virginity, is in truth an exact representation of the church of God. It is the vagueness that makes clear what is meant by the entire episode.

First of all, the church died with Christ. This is the plain teaching of the New Testament (Rom. 6:6-11; Rom. 8:36; Gal. 2:19-20; 6:14; Col. 2:20; 3:1-4; Rev. 14:13). When Christ offered himself to God, when his soul was made an offering for sin, the church was in him and suffered the same death that he suffered in the eyes of God.

Secondly, the church is a perpetual virgin. This refers to her purity as the bride of Christ by the imputation of the very righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:27; Rev. 14:4).

Praise God for full salvation.

PRIDE

1, And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward, and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee? we will burn thine house upon thee with fire.

2, And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at great strife with the children of Ammon; and when I called you, ye delivered me not out of their hands.

3, And when I saw that ye delivered me not, I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon, and the LORD delivered them into my hand: wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day, to fight against me?

4, Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim: and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites.

5, And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay;

6, Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to

pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.

Judges 12:1-6

In these few verses is a wealth of gospel truth. The *two words* that result in the death of 42,000 people carry an evident weight in that the cost of human life was *enormous*. The evolution of language has turned these words “shibboleth” and “sibboleth” into a kind of “he said, she said” or “you say tomato, I say tomahto” kind of thing.

Today it means little more than a difference of opinion or a dialectical distinction. In either case, it is an assertion that what is being said does not really matter. Such was not the case at the time these words were uttered. The words mean the same thing. There is no difference in definition (flowing river or swift stream). The entire matter rests in the pronunciation of the word “shibboleth” and there is much more to it than a distinction in dialect.

It is true that the Ephraimites pronounced the words differently than those of the tribe of Manasseh, much like a northern versus southern accent. It is also true that over a period of time it had become a matter of dialect and the difference proved a costly one. It is also clear that the Ephraimites did not pronounce the word differently because of a speech impediment. Their pronunciation of the word, and the *way* they pronounced it, was a *choice*, and that choice was born of bitter rivalry. Ephraim and Manasseh were brothers, both sons of Joseph. Manasseh was the firstborn but was deprived of that right when Jacob switched

his hands in blessing the boys, giving Ephraim the birthright of the firstborn.

In every case where this took place in scripture, the spiritual significance was never considered by the ones involved. Cain was the firstborn and killed Abel. Abel was accepted by God and Cain was not. The history of both is that Cain was silenced in history and Abel, being dead, yet speaks. Jacob was the second born but Esau, the elder, was made to serve the younger. The difference was the definitive demonstration of the electing love of God. Manasseh was made to serve Ephraim, yet it was the tribe of Ephraim that suffered great loss. In each case there are spiritual lessons to be learned.

In every case the first lesson to be learned is that election is God's doing and does not fit the scheme of natural law or supposed entitlement (Luke 4). Another lesson learned is that of the Old and the New Covenant. The elder serves the younger (Gal. 3:18-25; Heb. 10:9). Another lesson in reference to Jephthah is, "the stone that the builders refused, the same is become the head of the corner."

In the case of Ephraim, we have the principle of "pride of place." There is a psychology and pathology involved here. Ephraim was the one who was blessed. He has the birthright. However, he could not rejoice in the exaltation of his brother. There is no indication in the word that Manasseh was bitter, but there is ample evidence that Ephraim felt that since he was blessed nothing good should ever be attributed to Manasseh. It appears Ephraim was envious of anything Manasseh did by which he received just recognition. It is as if Ephraim felt that because he was

blessed no one else should be. Ephraim was also jealous of Manasseh.

The difference between envy and jealousy is that envy is the result of one believing that another has something he does not deserve and is born of the notion that the envious one *does* deserve it. Jealousy is also born of a sense of entitlement, but it is accompanied with the notion that the person “having” diminishes the one who does not. This is the response of the natural realm to giving one child significance above another and prompted the wisdom of the old preacher to address the truth. He said, “A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle” (Prov. 18:19), and “A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Prov. 17:17), and again, “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24).

These words are wondrously reversed when we leave the natural and consider the spiritual. Jesus Christ, in spite of our numerous failures and provocations, is our elder brother, the firstborn of many brethren, a brother born to adversity, and he is a friend that loveth at all times and sticketh closer than a brother (Heb. 2:11). We need not assume the pride that plagued Ephraim is removed from us when we are converted. Our Lord teaches us to guard against this pride (1 Cor. 4:7; 8:2; Gal. 6:3; Jer. 9:23-24).

Ephraim's response to Jephthah's victory is a pattern of pride, envy and jealousy (Judges 8:1; 12:1). This is a lesson in the nature of false religion. Christ died 20 centuries ago and secured the salvation of the elect. When men assert they

have a part in salvation by their will, decision or works, they are accusing Christ of not allowing them to have a part in their salvation. The source of this is pride.

Verses 1-3 makes it plain the Ephraimites were out for blood. They came to put Jephthah and the Gileadites out of business. Though they had been asked to assist and refused to do so, they were now incensed that they could not share in the glory. They would not allow those who they deemed inferior to have such glory (v. 4). Their anger was against the LORD, but unable to get to him, they designed to destroy his instrument. “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you” (1 Jn. 3:13).

Jephthah is forced to defend himself and his people. It is apparent the battle did not fare well for the Ephraimites, because those that were asked to say “Shibboleth” were said to be those that escaped (v. 5). Whether 42,000 were killed at shibboleth or the number refers to the entire course of the battle, it is clear the ones who were asked to say the word were no longer in danger of the battle. They were, for all practical purposes, safe. In so far as they knew, they had escaped (1 Thes. 5:2).

Their sense of safety and pride was their downfall. Their actions and attitude are so indicative of natural faith and religion. Since they had been blessed with escape, they felt no further attention was needed for life. They felt they had

life, and all was well (Ecc. 8:11; 2 Pet. 3:3-10). They were not victorious, but they were not scared, and they were safe. Only a *little* river remained to be crossed.

Religion has convinced men they are safe. Men have been inundated with the notion that God loves them, that Christ died for them, and no matter how we might negate the affect of this false doctrine, any reasonable person who hears this often enough feels no threat from God whatsoever. These religionists have been blessed and there is really nothing left to worry about. They have but one little river to cross, and when the time is right, when they've done everything else they wanted to do, they will gain eternal life and avoid Hell by believing—no sweat!

That little river, that shibboleth, is a raging torrent and requires them to do what they are naturally unable to do and what they are not naturally willing to do—pass from death to life. That little river is *life* (Ps. 46:4). The Ephraimites think they have it but will soon discover that inability and unwillingness will show they are dead.

Their life was in the hands of the one whom they refused (whom God has exalted), the one who they despised and refused to acknowledge. They would not have Jephthah as their savior, but he was most surely their *only* hope. He alone devised and executed the means of their future. They proved by their insolence that they “would not have this man reign over them.” They not only refuse life, they refused the only place where life is (John 5:39-40; Romans 9:15-16; John 14:6).

Jephthah, knowing the Ephraimites despised everything about the Gileadites, came up with a test that would prove

whether the Ephraimites were alive or dead. The gospel does that. It proves life or death (2 Cor. 2:14-17).

When the Ephraimites approached the river, they were asked if they were Ephraimites. If they said “no,” they were then asked to say “*Shibboleth*.” When they instead said “*Sibboleth*,” it cost them their life. Notice that for the sake of what they *thought* was life, they were willing to deny their source of pride, the blessing of the firstborn. Notice also there was no question they would deny their inheritance. There is no allowance for even a *possible* affirmative answer. Pride is an obstinate and intractable thing.

Jephthah knew they would not say *Shibboleth*, because that was the way that Manasseh said it, and to Ephraim, nothing that Manasseh did or said was of *value*. The way Ephraim pronounced it was the *right way* and they would not *stoop* to the level of the son of a whore to frame the word correctly. After all, it meant the same thing, but *theirs* was the *correct* pronunciation— “*Sibboleth*.”

The words “he *could not* frame to pronounce it” can also be read “he *did not* or *would not* frame to pronounce it.” Both are true and they have *nothing* to do with dialect. *Pride* so afflicted their heart they could not bring themselves to pronounce it, and pride also caused them to *refuse* to pronounce it right. Pride was the source of their inability and unwillingness. Men cannot and will not come to Christ for life.

Despise not the day of small things. The difference is one letter. The letter “h” was the difference between life and death. This letter is significant. It is somewhat defined by the manner in which it is pronounced. “H” is not so much

pronounced as it is *breathed*. When it stands alone as a letter, it is pronounced as “h.” When it is used in a word, it is not pronounced, it is *breathed* (*ruach*). The Hebrew letter “h” is doubled in the name Jehovah (JHVH).

God *breathed* life into Adam. The life he breathed was the *neshama* or the ability to rehearse and repeat what is heard. This life is only spoken of in reference to human beings and never animals. Animals have breath and life but not life that *responds* to God in intelligible language, or words.

However, the letter “h” signifies *life*, but in the sense of *breath*. In Abram being made Abraham and Sarai being made Sarah, that letter signified the covenant God made with them in reference to Christ—the seed—who is life. “H” signified God being their life by Christ. That “h” was fruitfulness of life to Abram and Sarai (compare Genesis 2:7 with John 20:19-22). God was adding *his* name to Abram, and he became Abraham. That letter “h” and the Ephraimites refusal to say it revealed they were *breathless*. They had no life in them, and they cared for nothing but their own selves. It cost them dearly.

Sinful pride, the mother of self-righteousness, will prevent you from saying Shibboleth. Pray God will make you willing in the day of his power and breath life into your dead frame. Unless he does you will remain in your obstinate state, because you cannot do otherwise. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots” (Dan 7:6)? “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18).

(See Jer. 13:23; Joh. 6:65.)

ATTRIBUTES

8, And after him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel.

9, And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters, whom he sent abroad, and took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years.

10, Then died Ibzan, and was buried at Bethlehem.

11, And after him Elon, a Zebulonite, judged Israel; and he judged Israel ten years.

12, And Elon the Zebulonite died, and was buried in Aijalon in the country of Zebulun.

13, And after him Abdon the son of Hillel, a Pirathonite, judged Israel.

14, And he had forty sons and thirty nephews, that rode on threescore and ten ass colts: and he judged Israel eight years.

15, And Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died, and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the mount of the Amalekites.

Judges 12:8-15

After the death of Jephthah, we have recorded for us the account of three judges; Iban, Elon and Abdon. Including the years that Jephthah judged Israel, we have the declaration that Israel was at peace for 31 years. Though, as we have seen, much is recorded of the deeds of Jephthah, little more than a cursory description is given of these other Judges.

Some things we do know about these men. First, we know they were all typical of Christ, because they were Judges and deliverers of Israel (Is. 33:22). We are also given an account of two of the Judges progenies and the fact that their children took mates from abroad, relating to the inclusion of the gentiles in the body of Christ. We also observe that many rode on the colts of asses, this being a declaration of honor, integrity and royalty (Zech. 9:9). Other than these facts, little is recorded, except that they judged Israel.

It is reasonable when little is covered of a subject to think that it is a little subject. However, this is the Word of God and God's revelation of himself to his people. Every word is given by inspiration and is profitable. If God saw fit to include these three men in the historical account of the deliverance of his people, it is incumbent upon us to consider what is said about them. When deeds are not the subject addressed then these men must represent something else about Christ other than, or descriptive of his work.

To say they are Judges is the declaration of the work they performed. The fact their work was successful is indicated in that Israel was at peace and protected during their tenure of 25 years. Christ made peace by the blood of his cross and no weapon formed against his people shall prosper during his tenure as King and Lord. Since that tenure is eternal and controlled by him who is Lord over all, his elect are eternally secure. When we consider Christ and his work, part of that consideration is about who he is. That which gives his work value is his character and attributes. In this case it takes a *trinity* of Judges to speak to the character

and attributes of our blessed Lord in whom dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

A great deal of instruction and doctrine concerning Christ is revealed in the *names* of these three judges, their *lineage* and their *location*. Everything about them points to a particular attribute of Christ.

The first judge named is Ibzan, and he is from Bethlehem (vv. 8-10). We are immediately brought to think of Christ with the mention of the town of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matt. 2:6; rule = “feed”—Bethlehem = “house of bread”—Christ the bread of heaven). *Ibzan* means “whiteness.”

There are several applications here. The first is obvious. “Whiteness” refers to righteousness and this is an essential attribute of Christ. So much so, that he is that righteousness declared in the book of Romans to be the end of the law, the righteousness imputed to his people and the righteousness to which the legalists would not submit (Romans 10:1-4).

“Whiteness” may also refer to what our Lord became when he hung on the Cross. He was made sin for his people. This word *Ibzan* can also mean “tin” which is a metal used to describe sin and dross (Isaiah 1:25). This may also refer to the effect of our Lord's sacrifice in putting away sin and pronouncing the leprous sinner clean (Is. 1:18). Christ is our righteousness who was made sin for us, and by his willing obedience we were made righteous (Rom. 5:19).

The next Judge mentioned is Elon (vv. 11-12). He was of the tribe of Zebulun. The Zebulonites were *seafarers*. The sea was their haven, which is representative of the dominion of Christ. Seas are often representative of nations in scripture and are likewise a representation of the universality of

Christ's rule and the extent of his dominion (Ps. 135:5-6). He is not any port in a storm; he is every port in every storm. Elon means "mighty." It is derived from the name of a great tree called a Terebinth. The word can also mean "ram" as a ram for sacrifice and a ram died red for ceremony. This is a beautiful and scriptural picture of Christ (Gen. 22:8-13; Isaiah 63:1-4; Zeph. 3:13-17). Christ is the almighty Savior, who trod the winepress of the wrath of God alone. He is the Lamb of God upon the throne of Glory.

The final Judge mentioned in this passage is Abdon (vv. 13-15). His name means "servile" and can refer to a *servant* of God. The entire Gospel of Mark was written to designate Christ as the servant of God (Is. 42:1; Job 1:8; Matt. 4:10; Phil. 2:8-12). Christ is the servant of the most high. Abdon is the son of Hillel. Hillel means "praising" and it is derived from a word whose definitions include "glory," "renown" and "shining." All these speak of the deity of Christ.

Eternal *praise* fell upon the ears of the Son of God. Angelic hosts praised God at his birth into the world. The singular offering of the believer in his priesthood is that of praise born of thanksgiving (Heb. 13:15). Glory belongs to Christ, because he finished the work he was given and by that work perfected forever them that were sanctified. The description of Christ in Hebrews 1 describes him as *shining* (Heb. 1:3a; Hab. 3:2-4; Ps. 50:2; Is. 9:2; Ezek. 43:2; Mk. 9:2-3). Christ is the *glorious* servant of God, revealing the glory of God (2 Cor 4:6).

The final thing revealed about Abdon is that he was a Pirathonite or from a place called Pirathon. This word means

“princely” or “prince” (Is. 9:6; Dan. 9:24-26a; Acts 3:15; 5:31; Rev. 1:5).

These three judges and the seemingly small description given, yet teach us of Christ our righteousness, of his substitution, his sovereign rule, his sacrifice of blood, his might to save, his glory, and his royal dignity of Prince-hood.

Of the scriptures our Lord said, “They are they which testify of me.”

SAMSON THE NAZARITE

1, And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.

2, And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not.

3, And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son.

4, Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing:

5, For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.

Judges 13:1-5

This chapter begins, as do all the chapters, after the death of a judge. Once again, Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. While the judge lives, having delivered the people, the people are at peace. Thank God our Judge and savior lives forever, and because he will never die, his people will possess a peace that passes understanding.

What follows in the next four verses is the record of the promise to Manoah's wife of the birth of Samson, one of the

most beloved and intriguing characters in all of holy writ. We will return to these verses in our next study, but because Samson was to be consecrated as a Nazarite, I thought it might do us well to revisit exactly what it meant to be a Nazarite. Look at Numbers 6:1-21. It reads as follows:

1, And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

2, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the LORD:

3, he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried.

4, All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk.

5, All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.

6, All the days that he separateth himself unto the LORD he shall come at no dead body.

7, He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die: because the consecration of his God is upon his head.

8, All the days of his separation he is holy unto the LORD.

9, And if any man die very suddenly by him, and he hath defiled the head of his consecration; then he shall shave his head in the day of his cleansing, on the seventh day shall he shave it.

10, And on the eighth day he shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons, to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation:

11, And the priest shall offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, and make an atonement for him, for that he sinned by the dead, and shall hallow his head that same day.

12, And he shall consecrate unto the LORD the days of his separation, and shall bring a lamb of the first year for a trespass offering: but the days that were before shall be lost, because his separation was defiled.

13, And this is the law of the Nazarite, when the days of his separation are fulfilled: he shall be brought unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation:

14, And he shall offer his offering unto the LORD, one he lamb of the first year without blemish for a burnt offering, and one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish for a sin offering, and one ram without blemish for peace offerings,

15, And a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mingled with oil, and wafers of unleavened

bread anointed with oil, and their meat offering, and their drink offerings.

16, And the priest shall bring them before the LORD, and shall offer his sin offering, and his burnt offering:

17, And he shall offer the ram for a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the LORD, with the basket of unleavened bread: the priest shall offer also his meat offering, and his drink offering.

18, And the Nazarite shall shave the head of his separation at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall take the hair of the head of his separation, and put it in the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offerings.

19, And the priest shall take the sodden shoulder of the ram, and one unleavened cake out of the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and shall put them upon the hands of the Nazarite, after the hair of his separation is shaven:

20, And the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before the LORD: this is holy for the priest, with the wave breast and heave shoulder: and after that the Nazarite may drink wine.

This passage from the book of Numbers deals with the consecration of the Nazarite. There were different kinds of Nazarites in the scripture. Samuel was a Nazarite from birth and continued to be all the days of his life. He was designated as such by his mother Hannah. Samson was appointed to the life of the Nazarite by God. Other Jews,

because this oath belonged only to the Jews and not the Gentiles, could vow the Nazarite vow for any length of time. He or she could take the Nazarite vow for a day, a week, a year or for their full life. Manoah's wife was directed to be a Nazarite for the length of her pregnancy (Jud. 13:4 of our text). The Nazarite for *life* is the type dealt with on the record of Samson.

This was a personal vow and was to be kept precisely according to the precepts which God laid down. During the time which the person vowed to “separate himself unto the Lord,” he was not to drink anything that contained alcohol, or any product derived from alcohol. He was not to eat fruit from a vine. He was not to cut his hair for the duration of the separation. Also, he was not to have anything to do with the dead. Unlike the priest, who was obliged to refrain from funerals except for his immediate family, the Nazarite, during the time of his separation, was not allowed even to attend the funeral of his own father (Num. 6:7).

As this was a voluntary vow, it therefore declares the vow to have nothing to do with acceptance before God, but rather had to do with inclination, love and consecration. The book of Numbers has a great deal to do with how what we *do* affects our relationship with God. The Nazarite made a voluntary vow to abstain from alcohol, cutting the hair and refraining from proximity to the dead for the duration of the separation. This spoke of dedication and consecration of the life to God, evidenced by living in a manner that was different from the rest of humanity. His life was a life of separation. He devoted himself to God.

If the Nazarite came into contact with a dead body, even by accident, he was bound by his oath to start all over again. If he had vowed to be a Nazarite for a year and on the 364th day a man dropped dead beside him, he was bound, after offering the proper sacrifices and shaving his head, to start all over again and separate himself to the Lord for the full time of the original vow. This is seen in Num. 6:12 in the last phrase, “But the days that were before shall be lost, because his separation was defiled.”

This may seem harsh, but it is full of practical teaching. It is a life lesson, if you will. Although you, as a child of God by grace, have made no Nazarite vow, nor could you, you have nonetheless voluntarily vowed allegiance to Christ. You have voluntarily separated from that which is opposed to the gospel, refusing to touch the unclean thing (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1). You have been separated to the gospel by God himself (Romans 1:1). You have voluntarily given up any approach to God by the law, which is analogous with touching no dead thing (Romans 7:3-4; 8:2; 1 Cor. 15:55-57; Gal. 5:1-4). If it is not done voluntarily, it is of no value at all. Your life belongs to God. You are bought with a price; you are not your own. Remember well, what is done cannot be undone (Job. 14:4). Many have failed, faltered and think they can undo it. Sin always brings forth death—always (Jam. 1:14-15).

In truth, all that was done before we fell is lost. There is no use in trying to regain it; shave your head; look to Christ and start all over. “Forgetting those things that are behind, press on to the prize of the high calling of God in Christ” (Phi. 3:13).

The day after the Nazarite made his offerings and shaved his head he was renewed in his vow. His hair might not get as long as it was before he fell, but length of the hair had nothing to do with it, only that no razor touch it. If it is just short bristly stubble, you are still a Nazarite. The world around you will know that you have failed. Most assuredly they will remember the fall and discount everything before it. So, agree with thine adversary and start all over again.

The moment you do you are fully established. Many a life has been ruined by living in the past. It is lost. Do not spend yourself in the pursuit of a remedy for it. However, be reminded again. This is not about God's relationship with you, but yours with him. Is this not the beauty of grace! No matter how horribly we fail or how careless we've been, our standing before God is based on nothing we do or don't do but wholly on the merits of Christ. It is not the person that is defiled. It is his vow of separation that is defiled (v. 12). We can start all over!

The Nazarite was a type of Christ. This is the real heart of the passage and is pictured throughout the life of Samson. Christ was *not* a Nazarite. He drank wine, touched the dead and raised them up. He made no such vow. He was a Nazarene. Whether he had long hair or not is of little value. The word *Nazarite* and *Nazarene* both come from the word *nezer* which means "crown." The significance of the uncut hair was that it represented an unblemished crown. Our Lord wears the unblemished crown of perfect priest and king (Zech. 6:12-13; Rev. 19:11-16; Exodus 28:36-38; 29:6 [crown-nezer]). Oh, blessed Nazarene, my king, my Great High Priest and my Prince of Peace!

Nezer also means “separated.” He separated himself unto the service and honor of his Father (Luke 2:41-49; John 8:29; Isaiah 53:10; Luke 9:35; Hebrews 10:1-10). He pleased the father in his life and his death. He *kept* his vow as sacrifice, as surety, as intercessor and the fulfiller of the law. He never had to shave his head, because he was innately holy, separated to God, among sinners yet without sin.

His crown was never tarnished. His glory never dimmed. He upholds his vow even today, and he ever lives to make intercession for us.

This is the meaning of the vow of the Nazarite.

SAMSON

1, And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.

2, And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not.

3, And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son.

4, Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing:

5, For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.

6, Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name:

7, But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death.

8, Then Manoah intreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.

9, And God hearkened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field: but Manoah her husband was not with her.

10, And the woman made haste, and ran, and shewed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the other day.

11, And Manoah arose, and went after his wife, and came to the man, and said unto him, Art thou the man that spakest unto the woman? And he said, I am.

12, And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?

13, And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware.

14, She may not eat of any thing that cometh of the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing: all that I commanded her let her observe.

15, And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee.

16, And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread:

and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the LORD. For Manoah knew not that he was an angel of the LORD.

17, And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour?

18, And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?

19, So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD: and the angel did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on.

20, For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground.

21, But the angel of the LORD did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was an angel of the LORD.

22, And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God.

23, But his wife said unto him, If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these.

24, And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him.

25, And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

Judges 13

The record of the birth of Samson is the story of an encounter with God. Manoah's wife was barren. In verses 2 and 3 her condition is doubled. She is said not only to be barren but she is also described as one who “barest not.” This means that she could not now, nor had she ever been able to bare a child. This preciseness of language is to teach us that if she is was ever to bare child, it must be by supernatural power. That which proceeds from her womb will be by the grace of God alone.

There are a number of great men born to barren women in scripture. Men such as Isaac, Jacob, Samuel, John the Baptist, as well as Samson, were born by the power of God overcoming the impotency of the flesh. In every case they are an example or type of the supernatural work of the new birth (John 1:12-13). It is the Word of God, the promise of God, that brings dead men to life in Christ (1 Peter 1:23-25; James 1:18). Samson was born according to the promise of God (2-4, 24). Manoah's wife was the archetype of the women of the Old Covenant. Her desire to bare a child was inextricably tied to the hope of every Jewish woman to bring forth the Messiah into the world, to be saved in childbearing, because the Savior was to be the seed of woman.

This record of Manoah and his wife is the revelation of what salvation is. The first thing declared of this woman was that she was *barren*. This is an apt description of every son

and daughter of Adam. They can produce nothing. There is nothing in them or about them that can undo their malady or change their station. Man has nothing in him or about him that can or will move him one iota toward God. Religion has tried to make this not to be so, but the Word of God still stands.

Man is utterly ruined. He was not slightly injured in the fall—he was killed. He is spiritually dead, and soon his flesh will follow. Everything about him designed to worship God in the original creation has been fouled. Man has neither power, will nor inclination to seek God. Man is not special, he is vile. By nature, he is at enmity with God. He is ignorant of his condition and deluded to think himself otherwise. He is described not as something unique but as common as dirt. Man is a worm, a maggot on a dunghill. His heart is the seat of all evil and depravity. He is said to drink iniquity like water. It is said that God is not in all his thoughts. He has openly declared there is no God for him. He is a stench in the nostrils of God.

Man can no more change his corruption than the Ethiopian can change the color of his skin or a leopard change his spots. He is said to be nothing and less than nothing, a liar and a lie, vanity and lighter than vanity. His supposed righteousness is smoke in God's nose. He reeks of filth and rot. His mind, will, emotions, heart and conscience are defiled before God. He is condemned and awaiting execution by the holy law of God. The only fruit he bears is dead works before God. He is barren and barest not (Romans 3:10-18).

Nothing short of an act of the one who has power over death can do anything for him. He is not able by employment of anything he is born with to raise himself above his natural birth. Man is dead, plumb dead, graveyard dead, twice dead and plucked up by the roots, and dead men can do nothing. Manoah's wife was barren and what could she do about it? Nothing! This is you, and this is me as we are born into the world (Romans 8:5-8).

So great is our ruin that no one but God can do anything about it, and nothing we can do can incline him to do so. We are shut up to Grace! If we are to bear fruit unto God, it must be by his good pleasure and his sovereign ordination. If we produce, we must be made alive and that by God's choice and prerogative (John 5:21; 15:16, 19; Ps. 65:4).

Manoah's wife was confronted by Christ. This is a pre-incarnate Christophany. Christ often appeared visibly to his people in the Old Testament but in our day, he appears in a singular way. He appears to the heart, through God given faith, by the Holy spirit through the preached word and a singular message (John 16:8-14). If you see Christ, you will see what you are, who he is and what he has done for you. Mark well that salvation is the revelation of Christ by the gospel. No man will believe until he has *heard* the truth, and no man will hear except by a *preacher* whom God has sent. The Lord has left the mechanics of it to mystery, but the message and the means is clear (Romans 10:13-17). Christ speaks through his word and that alone (Is. 8:20).

Manoah and his wife first thought this was an angel of the Lord, a created being, a messenger of God. They, having heard the glad tidings he brought, desired the angel to stay

with them until they had prepared an offering for him (v. 15). This is the common desire of all who meet Christ. They want him to stay with them. In those blessed moments when you experience the presence of the Lord, you feel as if this is where you want to be forever. However, if that fellowship is to be, there must first be an understanding of *who* he is (v. 16).

He is not an angel and therefore is not to be worshipped. If he is to be worshipped, he must first be acknowledged as God. Sacrifice is Godward. Our Lord's words to Manoah were simple. If you offer a burnt offering to me, then you are saying that I am the LORD (Jehovah Jesus). This kind of language was often employed by our Lord. When the rich young ruler came to Christ to enquire of him, he called our Lord "good master." Our Lord said, "Why do you call me good, there is none good but God." In other words, "If I'm good, I'm God."

The next words out of Manoah's mouth are the heart of every believer. "What's your name?" The great desire and interest of the believer is to know Christ, to know him personally. At this time in the scheme of God, the Messiah was only known prophetically, but at the introduction of the New Covenant, everyone from the greatest to the least in his kingdom would know him (Jer. 31:33-34). Even the believer who knows Christ makes it his life's endeavor to learn of Christ, to know him more and to know him better, to know as he is known. Notice why Manoah desired to know his name. He wanted to *honor* him, to give him glory for the great things he had done (v. 17).

Our Lord's answer is full of mercy and light. He said, my name is secret (margin, "wonderful"). That name, that blessed name, is full of wonder. That name is "above every name." "At that name every knee shall bow." The believer knows that name as the promised sovereign Savior (Is. 9:6; Matt. 1:21). The believer knows that name; it is the believer's righteousness (Jer. 23:5-6; 33:15-16). The believer knows that name as the consolation and peace of the soul (SOS 1:3; See Is. 42:8).

When Manoah had prepared the sacrifice, the Lord did wondrously. He ascended in the flame of the fire, making it impossible to wonder who he was any longer. His ascension assured the acceptance of the sacrifice. When he had purged our sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. Now Manoah and his wife were sure of who this angel was. It was the LORD Jehovah (vv. 20-21).

The wording of verse 21 is interesting. This is a pure example of faith. The fact is, anything you can see is of no lasting help. The word "then" declares what they knew once they could no longer see. We walk by faith and not by sight. Believing envelopes the now, the future and the past. Faith sees all only by believing what God has said in his word.

Knowing he had seen God, Manoah feared for his life. Generally speaking, this is the first response of the revelation of Christ to the believer. I know that in this day men seem to have no fear of God. Every believer in this life and in scripture knows that to see Christ is accompanied with the knowledge that he, personally, is worthy of nothing but death. To see Christ by faith is to know that you are dead, and your life is hid with God in Christ. Job abhorred himself

when he saw; Isaiah condemned himself when he saw; Peter said, “depart from me, I am evil;” John fell at his feet as a dead man.

Manoah's wife had been given understanding. She knew they were safe and gives the following reasons why. She knew she had seen the Lord in grace. She told her husband that they would not die, because the Lord had accepted the sacrifice (v. 23). This is sweet understanding. If the Lord has accepted the sacrifice, then those for whom the sacrifice was made are eternally safe (Romans 8:33-34). If the Lord reveals himself to you, all is well (John 14:5-90). And if the Lord has taught you, then all is well (John 6:45; 1 John 5:20).

Finally, what the Lord has promised, he will perform.

24, And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him.

25, And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

THE WIFE

1, And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines.

2, And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife.

3, Then his father and his mother said unto him, Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well.

4, But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.

5, Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnath, and came to the vineyards of Timnath: and, behold, a young lion roared against him.

6, And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand: but he told not his father or his mother what he had done.

7, And he went down, and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well.

8, And after a time he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcase of the lion: and, behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion.

9, And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat: but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcase of the lion.

10, So his father went down unto the woman: and Samson made there a feast; for so used the young men to do.

11, And it came to pass, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him.

12, And Samson said unto them, I will now put forth a riddle unto you: if ye can certainly declare it me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty sheets and thirty change of garments:

13, But if ye cannot declare it me, then shall ye give me thirty sheets and thirty change of garments. And they said unto him, Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it.

14, And he said unto them, Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness. And they could not in three days expound the riddle.

15, And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they said unto Samson's wife, Entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn

thee and thy father's house with fire: have ye called us to take that we have? is it not so?

16, And Samson's wife wept before him, and said, Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not: thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told it me. And he said unto her, Behold, I have not told it my father nor my mother, and shall I tell it thee?

17, And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, because she lay sore upon him: and she told the riddle to the children of her people.

18, And the men of the city said unto him on the seventh day before the sun went down, What is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion? And he said unto them, If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle.

19, And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle. And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father's house.

20, But Samson's wife was given to his companion, whom he had used as his friend.

Judges 14

This chapter is the record of Samson taking a bride from among the Philistines. His mother having some sense of his future named him Samson, which speaks of strength and

power. He was a Nazarite from the womb, separated from the womb for the service of God. Even in his childhood he was a type of Christ (cf. Num. 13:24-25; Luke 2:40, 52). The Spirit of the Lord was upon Samson and is usually revealed in great feats of strength. In fact, his name has come to be synonymous with power and vigor. His name is of singular distinction. Having that distinctiveness and being a judge and deliverer of Israel, he again pictures Christ whose name is above every name and *the* Savior of his people.

Samson's taking a wife among the Philistines relates to Christ seeking a bride among the Gentiles. The response of Samson's parents to his desire to have a bride outside of the Israelites is much like the response of the Jews in the days of our Lord. Though the Jews did not receive him as Messiah, they were incensed at him for his dealings with the Gentiles (Luke 4). It is often the nature of privilege to reject a thing while at the same time wish no one else to have it.

What the parents of Samson did not know was what Samson was doing was by the leading of God's Spirit. It was of the LORD (v. 4). They had no understanding of all this being done in the process of the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines. Though we know that God is working in all things, we cannot know the particular manner he has designed to meet the ends he has appointed. We are merely observers of providence. We are not analysts.

A right understanding of this would relieve a lot of anxiety in this life. It might even cause us to cease from cursing second causes. The LORD has never vacated his throne of sovereign rule. For sinners who have believed from the beginning of time that they could fix their problems, it is

almost impossible for us not to go to the fig leaves instead of trusting the LORD.

Samson's parents were not unreasonable in their reticence concerning his choice of a wife. His bride was of the enemies of Israel. Though she was not of the seven nations in which God had forbidden mixture and marriage, she was nonetheless a pagan, a gentile and a worshipper of strange gods. She is precisely like the bride of Christ (Eph. 2:11-12). Our Lord will have mercy and not sacrifice; he came not to call the righteous but to bring sinners to repentance.

There are several things that capture the interest in Samson's choice.

First, he chose her because she pleased him. We have a hint as to why in verse 7. He spoke with her, communicated with her, and evidently there was kinship. Our Lord said, "My sheep hear my voice and they follow me." She will prove, *humanly speaking*, a most unfavorable choice, because she will betray him for *fear* of her *life*. Before you discount her altogether, remember how often it is difficult to hold up the banner of Christ in the midst of unbelieving acquaintances and relatives. Remember that Simon Peter betrayed the Lord three times for *fear* of his *life*. When it comes to where the rubber meets the road, *humanly speaking*, *religiously speaking*, the bride the Lord has chosen is the off-scouring of the universe.

Secondly, we learn the bride that Samson chose was *not the pretty one* in her family (15:2). The reason he chose her had to do with him (2 Tim. 1:9). The fact she was not the pretty one alludes to the truth that her comeliness was

derived by relationship to Samson (Ezek. 16:14; 1 Cor. 1:26-31).

Thirdly and most importantly, she was actually the bride that *God* chose for Samson. This entire episode would eventuate in the deliverance of Israel from her captors and its religion, but the salvation of the elect is at the same time the destruction of the world and its wisdom.

On his way to visit his bride, a lion attacks Samson. The record says the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson, and he made short work of the lion. The lion, though king of the beasts, was handled by Samson as it were a baby goat. He used no weapon. He, *by himself*, destroyed the lion. This is a picture of what our Lord did on Calvary. Satan is called a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8). Our Lord by himself took on the king of beasts, and as king of kings, he made a short work in the earth. He cast out the prince of this world.

Before Samson took his bride, he slew the lion. Although this was a great feat and worthy of note, because the Lord saw fit to record it for us, Samson did not tell his parents about it. Here again he pictures our Lord who often, after he had healed men bid them to tell no one.

Some time later Samson returned to Timnath. The length of time is not stated, but it was enough time for the flesh of the lion to have been consumed, for there was nothing left but the skeleton. When Samson turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, he found a beehive had formed in the carcass. Samson retrieved the honey, ate it and fed his parents as well. The lesson here is a plain. Though the world would not think anything good could be found in the carcass

of the dead, this teaches us that the sweet nectar of grace is found from the carcass of Satan.

Though men thought it for evil, the Lord meant it for good. The malice and hatred of Satan is worked for the good of God's children and the glory of their sovereign. The Lord has defeated the lion, and we his children reap the benefit of that slaying. The graces and mercies we receive are as honey and the honeycomb. Likewise, as Samson gave unto his mother and father to eat, everyone who has tasted the grace of God delights to give it to others that they also may be partakers.

When Samson's father went down to the woman's house to seal the deal, Samson made ready the marriage feast. As he was making the feast, thirty men arrived. This was the custom of the day, and these men were, in this day, called the friends of the groom.

The matter of the riddle put forth to them is the subject of great conjecture among Bible scholars and many ideas are declared. John Gill said that Samson did this to entertain them. Robert Hawker said he didn't know why save that it certainly had to do with Christ. I am no scholar, and that is evident when I dare to speak. However, sometime the result of a thing is the only way to find the reason for it. This is surely true if the Lord is in control of all things. Since God has set the world and all things on a specific, unchangeable course, the result of anything is the defining of the intent of the thing. If it turns out *this* way, then what came to pass is the way it was supposed to turn out and therefore was the intent of it.

I have been accused over the years of using predestination as a kind of Ockham's Razor, or as the simplest and therefore most reasonable explanation for everything. I make no apology for this. The Lord works all things after the council of his own will. The intricacies are not really my business. I could not understand them anyway. The reason for this riddle is found in the result it produced. It produced the designed result (v. 4, v. 19).

Samson gave the riddle, because he was to be the deliverer of Israel. He spoke the riddle because he sought occasion against the Philistines. He spoke a riddle because it was not given unto the Philistines to know the kingdom of God. They think because they have *an* answer, they have *the* answer. The fact is they do not even know the question. By their treachery and terrorism, they gained the world and lost their souls; they angered the savior of Israel, and for them, there can be no good result. They, in their wickedness, fulfilled the purpose of God. "The wrath of man shall praise him, the rest he will restrain."

In the life of Samson, the Lord outlines the glory of the salvation of the elect. This is the theme of all scripture. This is the crimson thread that runs through every page of the word. To the world and its religion, it is a riddle they think they have the answer to, but this mystery will be their judge in the last day (John 12:48).

KNOWN YET UNKNOWN

18, And the men of the city said unto him on the seventh day before the sun went down, What is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion? And he said unto them, If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle.

Judges 14:18

The Lord told us that the deceitfulness of false doctrine is such an efficient counterfeit that if it were possible it would deceive the very elect. This tells us the deceivers of false religion must of necessity use Bible language, and they are themselves deceived. They are described as having a form of godliness (2 Tim. 3:4-8), refusing to glorify God as God (Romans 1:21) and wresting scripture to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:17). They are said to search the scriptures thinking they have eternal life (John 5:39). They are called scoffers who are willingly ignorant that God is a God of judgment (2 Pet 3:5).

Such is the state of religion, the religion of man as it has been from the beginning. The three lies that permeate religion are: 1) God loves everyone, 2) Christ died for everyone, and 3) man's salvation is finally contingent upon the positive exercise of his free will. However, religion does not operate in a vacuum. They use the Bible to prove their point and quote scripture liberally to set forth their doctrines. They know scripture. They use the Bible. They seek to live in a manner that suggests they are righteous.

They know, yet they do not know. This is the dilemma we face as we endeavor to preach the gospel. We do not deal with open infidels but with men and woman who profess to know the truth and profess to love Christ. I have no doubt many of them are the elect who, as the people of God, will be called out of Babylon at the last day. I say this because it is my personal experience. I believed as they did for many years and were it not for the grace of God would do so today. I thank God that he stripped me of my false hope, cast me into the dust and gave me a hunger for Christ. During that time, before revelation, I knew some things. I believed the Bible was true and truly the Word of God. I believed Christ was man's only hope. I believed he was both God and man. I believed I was saved. I knew, yet I didn't know.

As I considered this record of Samson putting forth this riddle and how the men of Timnath came to know the answer, I saw this to be a picture of false religion. The difference is subtle but deadly. It is the difference between knowing *about* Christ and *knowing* Christ. Scripture is clear. Eternal life is *knowing* the true and living God, even Jesus Christ who he had sent (Joh 17:3; 1 Joh. 5:21). The believer knows Christ by grace, by revelation and by personal experience. The religious know and give mental assent to facts *about* him.

The only believer in this entire scenario is Samson. It was he who slew the lion and later tasted the honey. It was he who put forth the riddle that ultimately brought an end to his former wife and occasioned the destruction of the enemies of God and the deliverance of the elect.

The first thing to ask is why was the truth of Samson's deeds put forth in the form of a riddle? To some degree this pictures the gospel. To those who do not have God given faith, the gospel is an enigma wrapped in a riddle and shrouded in a mystery. Man cannot understand it but by revelation (Matt. 11:25-27; 1 Cor. 2:14-15). You who believe know from experience that those to whom you tell the gospel often say they just *cannot* see it that way. They cannot believe it anymore than they can believe that $2+2=5$. They, as we all, are born with a warped sense of our own ability thinking that we on some level possess a comparative righteousness. We believe we can reform and improve our life, and we often do as we mature and grow in natural wisdom. We simply are unable to understand that improvement of our earthly existence has nothing to do with salvation or anything spiritual.

Salvation is known experientially by the gracious revelation of God. Samson had experienced the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit had strengthened him for the task at hand. He alone had slain the lion, and he alone had feasted on the honey from the carcass. His parents had tasted the sweetness, but they did not know from whence it came or how it had come to be. The way this honey was attained was a mystery. The parents had benefited from what Samson had done in secret. This pictured the three hours of darkness on the cross when of Lord underwent the hell due his people. To this day, it remains a mystery but we have been given faith to believe and receive the benefits of what dark wonder transpired there. It is the singular answer to how a man can be just with God.

Samson fought the battle and slew the beast. His parents had no part in the battle, but some time later reaped the benefits of his great victory. Samson's parents had a vital, familial relationship with him who, unbeknownst to them, had fought the battle. What they received was the grace that followed. What Christ did in satisfying God's justice and putting the roaring lion out of business is a wondrous mystery. Martin Luther described it as "God forsaking God, how can it be." Nonetheless, we receive the sweetness by grace through faith, because we are the eternal family of God.

Samson's wife and the men of Timnath are pictures of false religion and false hope. Samson's wife who later proves a false wife, because she is given to another, pictures the false church. She will do whatever is necessary to save herself. The false church is all about the false church. She seeks the answer not for the glory of Christ but for her own self-perpetuation. Her motive for existence is the continuation of her existence. We have but to look and listen to what churches boast of in this day. They openly laud their numbers as indicative of their salvation and spirituality. They preach a personal righteousness as the way of acceptance with God. They do what they do in the name of Christ, but their message, messengers, methods and music are designed to exalt man. They seek to know the riddle only to avoid death. They thrive on emotion and tears believing that emotions are spiritual (vv. 16-17; Num. 14:1-4; Mal. 2:13).

The men of Timnath likewise seek to know the riddle. They do so, not for fear of death but for fear of loss (v. 15). It

is evident that such as they are care nothing for anyone else. They are willing to kill Samson's wife to ensure *they lose nothing*.

They want to win, but even more, they don't want to lose. They, in effect, gained the world, built bigger barns and lost their souls. The clothing they received covered them, but it was not from the riches of Samson. From then on, they were clothed in the garments of the slain enemies of God. They wore the robes of the dead men of Ashkelon. Ashkelon means, "in the fire of infamy, I am weighed." The men of Timnath were weighed in the balance and found wanting.

Behind all this was the purpose of God. By all of this Samson found occasion against the Philistines (1 Sam. 2:25). Babylon is doomed. She will not find repentance though she seeks it with tears. She may try every trick, but understanding the mystery belongs to God and those to whom he will reveal it.

These knew the answer, but they didn't know the purpose behind it. They in fact knew *about* the riddle. They could quote the facts but had no idea what it meant. Religion knows the historical facts about Christ. They believe the facts. I know some things about Abe Lincoln, but I don't know Lincoln. These men of Timnath knew that honey was sweet and the lion was strong, but they did not slay the lion or taste the honey, and they had no idea the one who put forth the riddle did so for their ruin (Is. 28:9-13; 2 Peter 2:9). The Word of God is not heard with impunity (1 Cor. 2:14-17; Ezek. 33:30-33).

Religion is ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. They know *about* things they don't *know*.

THE SAVIOR'S WORK

1, But it came to pass within a while after, in the time of wheat harvest, that Samson visited his wife with a kid; and he said, I will go in to my wife into the chamber. But her father would not suffer him to go in.

2, And her father said, I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her; therefore I gave her to thy companion: is not her younger sister fairer than she? take her, I pray thee, instead of her.

3, And Samson said concerning them, Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure.

4, And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails.

5, And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives.

6, Then the Philistines said, Who hath done this? And they answered, Samson, the son in law of the Timnite, because he had taken his wife, and given her to his companion. And the Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire.

7, And Samson said unto them, Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease.

8, And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter: and he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam.

9, Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi.

10, And the men of Judah said, Why are ye come up against us? And they answered, To bind Samson are we come up, to do to him as he hath done to us.

11, Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? what is this that thou hast done unto us? And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them.

12, And they said unto him, We are come down to bind thee, that we may deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines. And Samson said unto them, Swear unto me, that ye will not fall upon me yourselves.

13, And they spake unto him, saying, No; but we will bind thee fast, and deliver thee into their hand: but surely we will not kill thee. And they bound him with two new cords, and brought him up from the rock.

14, And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands.

15, And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith.

16, And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men.

17, And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking, that he cast away the jawbone out of his hand, and called that place Ramathlehi.

18, And he was sore athirst, and called on the LORD, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?

19, But God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: wherefore he called the name thereof Enhakkore, which is in Lehi unto this day.

20, And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

Judges 15

This is the account of Samson taking vengeance against the Philistines, because his father-in law had given his wife to a friend. The account runs that Samson, after his initial anger for his wife's trickery in giving the answer of the riddle to the Philistines subsides, takes a kid (symbolic of a royal feast) to his wife's apartment to make peace and restore the fellowship of their marriage. Upon his arrival he finds his

wife has been given to a friend, and his father-in-law tries to give him his wife's younger sister.

This type of incest was common among the Philistines but was prohibited by God (Lev. 18; 3, 18). Samson being under divine commission to find occasion against the Philistines takes this as an opportunity to avenge the children of Israel (v. 3). His words imply a reasonable justification in the terror he is about to bring upon the Philistines (vv. 4-5). In an effort to appease Samson, the Philistines burned his wife and her father alive (v. 6; Jud. 14:15). This tactic did not work with Samson, and he severely abused the Philistines (vv. 7-8). After the Philistines recovered from the whooping, they came to Judah to bind and kill Samson (v. 9-10).

The men of Judah, in fear of their life, willingly bind Samson and freely deliver him into the hands of the Philistines (vv. 11-12). Samson *agrees* to be bound on the condition the men of Judah not attack and kill him. This was not for fear of the men of Judah but for their benefit. He sought no occasion against Israel but did not lack the wherewithal to destroy them if they fell on him (vv. 12b-13). After they had bound him with strong cords, they delivered him to the enemy whereupon the Lord made the cords to disintegrate, and Samson took up the jawbone of an ass and slew the enemy leaving them in heaps of corpses (vv. 14-16). After his mighty deed, Samson was athirst, and the Lord brought forth water from the jawbone and slaked his thirst in order that his glory be not marred (vv. 18-19). In verse 20 we are told of the tenure of Samson's reign as judge and deliverer of Israel.

This passage is gospel rich. As is always the case in the study of scripture, we have not seen aright until we see the glory of Christ is in every story and in every line. Especially in the case of the judges of Israel, each instance is a particular reference to Christ and his glorious work (Is. 33:22). As we have seen in our studies thus far, the salvation of the elect always involves the destruction of the enemy.

Vengeance belongs to the Lord, and Samson is here a picture of the Lord exacting judgment on the enemy in the deliverance of the people. This is clearly seen in Samson's destruction of the crops of the Philistines. The manner in which he accomplishes the destruction assures that all things, whether animate or inanimate serve the purpose of God. The employment of fire to destroy the sustenance and confidence of the enemy is surely a representation of the destructive power of the Word of God (Jer. 23:29; Acts 2:3; 2 Thes. 1:7-8).

The binding of Samson by the people of Israel picture the works of Israel against the Lord and his Christ.

First, they were able to do it, because they were *allowed* to do it by Samson himself (vv. 12-13). They had no power over him unless he gave it to them (John 18:1-8). The same was said of Pilate and the government of Rome (John 19:11). Unbeknownst to the men of Judah, there was, in place, the overriding purpose and providence of God. They were instruments in the hand of God for the occasion against the enemy (Matt. 27:2; Acts 2:23, 36; 4:27-28). The fact that the men of Judah would not fall on him is clearly seen in the refusal of Israel to crucify Christ but rather leave the deed to the law of Rome (John 18:31). It was within the concept of

their interpretation of their law to sell Christ for 30 pieces of silver and be the instigator of the conspiracy to murder him but not to be part of the act. The disintegration of the bindings and Samson's subsequent freedom represents the truth that death could not keep its prey; he tore the bars away (Acts 2:24). The final destruction of the enemy is a declaration of the victorious, vicarious death of Christ.

The manner and the means employed in the destruction of the enemy teaches us several things.

He used the jawbone of a freshly killed ass. With it he slew a thousand men and piled them up in heaps. In the use of this weapon of mass destruction, I think there are several possible interpretations.

First, this may point to the certainty that our Lord uses the carnal things of the world for the good of his people (Ex. 34:19-20). This jawbone of a freshly slain ass may picture the unredeemed. The unredeemed of the world are but instruments in the hand of God for the deliverance of his elect (Romans 9:17-23; John 17:2).

Second, this jawbone of a freshly slain ass may picture the sinner slain in Christ who died with Christ. It may picture those redeemed by death (the church). Our Lord said of these that the gates of hell would not prevail against them (Romans 16:20).

Third, this jawbone pictures the despised means by which the Lord's people are saved and their enemy destroyed. It is through the foolishness of preaching that God is pleased to save them that believe. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. It is foolishness to the wisdom of the world that such a plain thing, a thing comprised of

words and delivered by weak flesh, would bring a man from death to life, from deafness to hearing and from blindness to sight. Yet that plain, unadorned thing is what the universe hangs upon (1 Cor. 1:23-24; 2:2; Heb. 1:3; 4:12-13; 1 Peter 1:23-25). The jawbone of an ass does not seem like much, but in the hands of Christ, it is the mover of worlds. The gospel, that thing so insignificant to the world in the hands of the church, was said to turn the world upside down (Zech. 4:6).

Then, clearly following the scheme of the salvation of the elect, after all things were accomplished, Samson said, “I thirst” (John 19:28). Not only does this picture the words of Christ on the cross, it sets forth the glory of God in the salvation of sinners by the death and resurrection of Christ.

Samson beseeches the Lord for water on the basis of the glory of God. If he dies and stays dead having delivered Israel, the Lord would lose his glory. The glory of God requires that Christ die and live again by a voluntary act. It cannot be that any *force* or *need* be the cause of the death of Christ. The glory of God is that Christ died of his own volition—his death was an accomplishment (John 10:15-18)! Men, with their hatred, venom and abuse of Christ, did not end his life. God, in those 3 hours of darkness when he punished our Savior with the hell we deserved, did not end his life. Christ *gave* up the ghost when he finished the work. This is the only way in which the perfect law could be perfectly satisfied. A perfect death fulfills the law’s perfect demands and glorifies the God who gave it.

Finally, in v. 19 the Lord performs a miracle for the thirst of Samson. In doing so, he sets forth the gospel and the

results of the gospel in the people of God. Again, the jawbone pictures the gospel of Christ. He is the living water that flows through the preached word (Eph. 5:25-26; Titus 3:5). It is Christ, through the gospel, that satisfies the thirst for righteousness, but more, the gospel in the believer comes out as rivers of living water (John 7:37-39). When we hear the gospel, our spirit is revived.

FRAILITY

1, Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there an harlot, and went in unto her.

2, And it was told the Gazites, saying, Samson is come hither. And they compassed him in, and laid wait for him all night in the gate of the city, and were quiet all the night, saying, In the morning, when it is day, we shall kill him.

3, And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of an hill that is before Hebron.

Judges 16:1-3

One of the wonders of Old Testament typology is that while it is never a full revelation of the substance it portrays, it can, because of this characteristic, suggest one thing in a particular place and something else in another. The context governs.

For example, a harlot may represent the sinfulness of the human nature in one place, false religion in another and a sinner saved by grace and presented as a heroine of the faith in another place, as in the cases of Rahab and Tamar. A great deliverer such as Samson may picture the Lord Jesus Christ in his power to save, his having the Spirit without measure, and in another place represent the frailty of human flesh. In all cases, the Old Testament types picture some

aspect of Christ and his work, those for whom the work was accomplished and even the carnal and religious forces that oppose him and his elect. In the three verses considered in this study, the types are full and revealing.

The first thing here is the representation of the human nature in its sinfulness.

Samson went to Gaza. This is much more than a locale. It is a place that speaks of the attitude and obstinacy of sinful human nature. This entire chapter is the swan song of the life of Samson. Although for the greater part it is a beautiful portrayal of Christ's victory over his enemies, it is likewise a reminder that no matter the victories a person experiences in life as a believer, he is at any moment subject to the enticements of the flesh. Good and evil are always present with him (Romans 7:15-25). This is particularly true at the end of one's career.

It is fantasy to think that we get a handle on the flesh the longer we are in grace. The very concept of *grace* is that we realize with each day that passes we are powerless to overcome ourselves. We grow to understand that if favor comes to us, it is most assuredly *unmerited* favor. Throughout our lives we have experienced the truth that we have no ability, except that which comes from above. We become more doctrinally sound, sure of the truth of sovereign grace, and if it serves us well, it makes us wise unto salvation. It brings to us the knowledge that salvation, our salvation, is in no way, shape or form dependent upon anything about us (2 Timothy 3:15-16).

If our understanding of doctrine has made us proud or made us to feel self-confident, it has not served us well. Its

design is to do just the opposite, to make us more dependent upon Christ with each new day. Gaza means “strong” but also carries with it roots of fierceness, greediness, and voluntary willfulness. Underneath this sad failure of Samson lies the sad truth that he went to where he went and did what he did willfully, obstinately and in the strength and fierceness of the flesh.

The second thing seen in this passage is the result of the first. Samson sees a whore and goes in to be with her. Many in religion do not care to have their heroes tainted, so they press this passage to mean that Samson spent the night in an inn. They do so by using the less damning definition of the word “harlot.” It can be interpreted “innkeeper,” but this holds little weight, because the inns of those days were little more than brothels. The Bible never paints a rosy picture of humanity. Man at his best is a liar, a lie and lighter than vanity.

The weaknesses and sinfulness of humanity is always clearly declared in both saint and sinner. This sets things in their proper order and assures us that salvation is completely conditioned on the person and work of our Savior. Samson is a saint-sinner as is every believer. He at any moment, like you and I, can fall into a horrible state of sin. The good works which we have done, or might do, are done by sinners saved by grace, but an honest heart reveals that our good works, because they are done by us, have nothing to do with our acceptance with God. The moment we take our eyes off our Savior is the moment we go whoring after another God. We never stop looking to Christ to view something better, because there is nothing better. Samson's

venture into whoredom is merely another reminder of the frailty, willfulness and obstinacy of the flesh.

Third, the fact that Samson went to a whore suggests the power and seducing spirit of natural religion. This is seen in the actions of the Gazites when they heard that the mighty Samson had a chink in his armor. False religion is always lying in wait to catch the believer with his guard down. This is the heart of false religion, to destroy the church. We need not think religion is tolerant of the true church. It is merely very patient as it waits to destroy. Religionists accused John the Baptist of being antisocial and our Lord of being a sot and friend of the worst of society. The questions they asked of our Lord were always disguised efforts to catch him in something they could use against him.

So, the Gazites are representative of the false church, and they do not seek to kill Samson as he lies in the arms of debauchery; they wait all night in silence to expose and kill him in the broad disclosing light of day. They might have had a better opportunity to do him in while he was in the throes of whoring, but their hatred for him made them wait for the driving force of their false hope—something visible for all to see. Love covers a multitude of sin, but hate seeks to openly embarrass and shame the sinner (Gal. 1:10).

The whore and her people are bent on the destruction of the church of the living God. Though there is no clear representation of substitution here, we must remember the life and times of Samson was one of purpose, namely, to find occasion against those who held the people of God captive. The remainder of this passage certainly suggests Christ's victory over death, so I don't think we would necessarily err

in seeing this incident as having to do with the crucifixion of Christ.

Although we would never intimate that our Lord sinned which Samson clearly did here, our Lord was made to be sin for us in what is called “the hour of darkness.” Though our Lord was never guilty of whoremongering, all our whoredoms were made to meet on him. He was dealt with by the Father as if he were guilty of everything that we and Samson had committed. At that time, he was compassed about by a hateful despising multitude that delighted to think they would soon be rid of him (Psalm 22:6-7,12-13, 16; Ps. 2:1-3).

I believe this to be a reasonable application, because of what takes place in verse 3 of our text. The plans and schemes of the vicious multitudes towards Christ come to nothing. They thought to kill the deliverer, thought his grave was sealed (as it were) with a giant stone (gates of the city) and set men to watch over him. Their plans were utterly disappointed.

In the night Samson, knowing their plot, left Gaza by breaking down the gate of the city, lifting the door, bolt and bar, and carrying it to the high mountain at Hebron. That night, while men watched the tomb of our Lord, death did not keep its prey. While the multitudes were rejoicing in the thought of what they had done to the Savior, he tore the bars of death away, lead captivity captive and gave gifts to men. He carried death, and all that attends it, upon his mighty shoulders. He bore our sins in his body and bore them away alone.

Religion's plans were thwarted on Calvary. They thought to destroy the *one* who they would not have to reign over

them. But on that night, Satan and his minions were cast down and chained in the bottomless pit. This same Jesus whom you crucified, God has made both Lord and Christ. Yet God has set his King on Zion's holy hill. He has given Christ the heathen to do with as he pleases. He laughs at their calamity, mocks them and has them in derision. When the Gazites came for their prey, he was gone. Even the gates of the city wherein they trusted were taken away.

To God be the glory!

OCCASION

3, And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of an hill that is before Hebron.

4, And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

5, And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lieth, and by what means we may prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him: and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred pieces of silver.

6, And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee.

7, And Samson said unto her, If they bind me with seven green withs that were never dried, then shall I be weak, and be as another man.

8, Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven green withs which had not been dried, and she bound him with them.

9, Now there were men lying in wait, abiding with her in the chamber. And she said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he brake the

withs, as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire. So his strength was not known.

10, And Delilah said unto Samson, Behold, thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: now tell me, I pray thee, wherewith thou mightest be bound.

11, And he said unto her, If they bind me fast with new ropes that never were occupied, then shall I be weak, and be as another man.

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

13, And Delilah said unto Samson, Hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound. And he said unto her, If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web.

14, And she fastened it with the pin, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awaked out of his sleep, and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web.

15, And she said unto him, How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me? thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth.

16, And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death;

17, That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man.

18, And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath shewed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand.

19, And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him.

20, And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him.

21, But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house.

22, Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven.

23, Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their

god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand.

24, And when the people saw him, they praised their god: for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us.

25, And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars.

26, And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them.

27, Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport.

28, And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O LORD God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.

29, And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left.

30, And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might;

and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.

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

Judges 16:3-31

This final episode in the history of Samson, an episode that has been told and retold, has been turned into morality plays, the source of many Hollywood and TV movies and was even the inspiration for Michael Landon's career as a javelin thrower. It has been used to show how lust is a tool of deception and even how a man will give up anything for the love of a woman. However, in this case, it seems more to represent the power of incessant nagging. On a purely natural level it is the consummate definition of betrayal.

All those things, the misuse and use of this story, are in truth merely the incremental workings of divine providence. This is the story of the end of Samson as judge and deliverer of Israel and the final and glorious deliverance of Israel from the iron hand of the enemy. It is the culmination of a series of events that brings to conclusion that which is clearly declared in Chapter 14 and verse 4. This is the “occasion against the Philistines” that was the destiny of this Nazarite named Samson from the womb.

I believe there are two stories here, each depicting a spiritual aspect. One is a picture of a *sinner* saved by grace. The other is a picture of our *Lord* and his great deliverance of his people by death. In this lesson, I want us to consider the first. This story is a picture of a sinner saved by grace.

Samson was chosen of the Lord before he entered into this world. He was an object of divine creation (Jud. 13:3-5) and was designated as the Lord's servant before he was formed in his mother's womb (Jer. 1:5; Gal. 1:15). He was a Nazarite from birth of whom a chief characteristic was that no razor would ever touch his head. Many assert this lengthy hair to have been his strength, but it was symbolic of his consecration to God. The Nazarite's hair spoke to his relationship with God. It was not his strength, because on every occasion Samson did a mighty deed, it was not his hair credited but the Spirit of God upon him. His strength came from God and revealed God's relationship with him. His hair came from him and spoke of his consecration to God. In this aspect, this is a story, our story, of how we so often fall and how we take our eyes away from Christ.

Once again, we are reminded that the entirety of our relationship with God is in a *look*. Samson had an *eye* for the ladies. In the first part of this chapter, as with the beginning of the account of Samson, his troubles began because he set his eyes on various women. Now there is no particular inherent evil for a man to desire a woman. The Lord made men and women to be attracted to one another. The evil exists when anything makes us forget what we are here for. We have been saved by grace that we might be for the glory of God (Eph. 1). As far as the purpose of God is concerned,

that is always the exact outcome of his grace toward us in Christ. We are and will be for his glory. But from our side of the equation, we often find ourselves seemingly far from our Lord because of sin. We fail to enjoy what he has done for us (Ps. 51:11-12).

Note there seems to be a progression to that sinful estate. This is the manner in which sin works. It begins with a look (a look away) and ends in ruin. Samson's eyes were burnt out. That which was the source of his problem, the lust of the eyes was removed. In the lost man such a thing would not curb his lust (Gen. 19:11). But in the child of God, when God cuts a lump out of the clay the lump is gone. The Philistines thought to punish Samson, but they were merely instruments employed to bring Samson back to the eyes of faith. Sin is a process that begins with one thing and progresses to a ruinous end (James 1:12-16). For the child of God, chastisement will bring him to the feet of the Savior.

Something else about this progression is that it misplaces confidence. Samson was confident in the Lord. He had experienced the power of the Lord when he had slain a lion barehanded. He had experienced the Spirit's power when he slew an army with the jawbone of an ass and when he had escaped the Gazites taking the gates of their city with him. Now he has established a relationship with Delilah, and we find his confidence in the Lord has been replaced with confidence in himself. Samson had even experienced the power of the importunity of a woman when he gave her the answer to the riddle in the beginning of this record of his life.

Now Samson has come to the place where he has forgotten God, yet he holds to the idea that God is with him.

History has repeated itself. Twice now, the women he desired have stolen a secret from him, yet every indication, in fact the clear declaration of scripture teaches us he was supremely confident of his strength prevailing as it had before. He mistook his strength for the Lord. He had forgotten that it was not his strength but the Spirit of the Lord, yet he believed nothing had changed between him and the Lord. Verse 17 suggests he knew that his strength was from the Lord, but verse 20 makes it clear that his confidence, though he thought it to be in the Lord, was actually confidence in himself.

He did not consider that the Lord would give him what he wanted yet send leanness to his soul. He was not aware “the Lord was departed from him.” The wording of this suggests he had misconstrued this for some time. In fact, in the original language the words “was departed” are in the perfect tense. This could speak of a present act but could also mean an act already completed in the past. Samson, by what follows, discovers there is a “disconnect” between him and the Lord. He told Delilah what she wanted to know, because his weakness in the flesh made him believe he was yet consecrated to God when he had chosen a wretched course.

When the Philistines bored out his eyes, they acted as does all false religion. Without eyes, they knew he could do no more damage. They acted as all religion does. Once their conquest is blinded by them they put him to work in slave labor. This is also indicative of legalist religion. They saw the hero fall, the man who said he was God's servant, and they knew there was no possibility of recovery. His God, in their minds, had abandoned him.

Although the wiles of a woman and the cruelty of their own hands had done the deed, they were more than willing to give credit to the idol of their making (vv. 22-23). Unbeknownst to them, they had been instruments of divine providence to cause Samson to walk by faith and not by sight. Being so blind themselves, they did not see Samson's hair had again begun to grow. They were blind to the fact that Samson belonged to the Lord, and nothing he did, or they did could change that. In the midst of the consequence of his sin, he wist not that the Lord was bringing him back to himself. The Lord was returning Samson to his consecration. Even Samson was probably unaware of the work of the Lord in him.

In their revelry and their mockery of God's servant they merrily marched to their doom. The stage was set, they had gathered to make sport of the failure of the man who said he was God's servant. When you fall, do not expect any other response from false religion. But do not despair, the Lord has brought you out to bring you in. He will never leave you or forsake you. The trial of your faith will come forth as fine gold. They have gathered; indeed, they have been herded into this place step by step. They have been *made* to gather for the "occasion" purposed for them.

The words of Samson are so true of every believer who has forgotten the Lord and by divine goodness brought again to see with eyes other than natural ones and brought to fall completely on the mercy of God (v. 28). Samson's cry is the cry of every blood bought soul who realizes his sin and his error. Like the thief on the cross his cry is simple and wondrously profound, "O Lord God remember me;" like the

publican in the temple who smote upon his breast and cried, "Lord have mercy on me, the sinner;" like the saints beneath the throne who cry, "Lord how long before thou avengest thine elect?" Samson does not boast of his former victories but sues at the door of mercy (v. 28). Here also is the heart of every believer. Though martyrdom is not sought, it is a thing every believer is ready for when the time for it arrives. The glory of the Lord in the deliverance of his people is worth dying for.

Taking hold of the pillars that supported the Philistine's confidence, the renewed believer having been brought again to seek the Lord's glory dies to the world, and the world dies to him (Gal. 6:14). This is the oft repeated life of the child of God. He is a sinner, saved by grace.

ANARCHY

1, And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah.

2, And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst, and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it. And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my son.

3, And when he had restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it unto thee.

4, Yet he restored the money unto his mother; and his mother took two hundred shekels of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten image: and they were in the house of Micah.

5, And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.

6, In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

7, And there was a young man out of Bethlehemjudah of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there.

8, And the man departed out of the city from Bethlehemjudah to sojourn where he could find a place: and he came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah, as he journeyed.

9, And Micah said unto him, Whence comest thou? And he said unto him, I am a Levite of Bethlehemjudah, and I go to sojourn where I may find a place.

10, And Micah said unto him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten shekels of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals. So the Levite went in.

11, And the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man was unto him as one of his sons.

12, And Micah consecrated the Levite; and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah.

13, Then said Micah, Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest.

Judges 17

Judges chapters 1-16 follows a chronology of the Judges whom God raised up to deliver Israel from their various oppressors. The fault, the blame for Israel's dilemmas, laid solely at the door of Israel. Every deliverance was sent because Israel continually did that which was not right in the eyes of God. In every case, that wrong thing was idolatry which led to captivity.

The first 16 chapters is the record of the people of God adopting the ways and the gods of their surrounding neighbors, endeavoring to incorporate the idols of the pagans into the worship of the true God. The result was they wound up crying out to God for deliverance. It is interesting to note they did not cry to be delivered from their idolatry but from the result of it.

The first 16 chapters of this book are a synoptic view of a nation, blessed of God, yet wholly given to idolatry. The truth of the entire matter is found in verse 6 of chapter 17. “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” This is the definition of *anarchy*. By the account of this chapter we see not only the government missing but the priesthood was for hire. The two institutions ordained of God for the spiritual and social welfare of humanity was clean gone. The result is the people “did what was right in their own eyes,” and that is a recipe for disaster.

What we have beginning in chapter 17 and through the end of this book is not a chronological continuance of what has gone before. The remainder of this book is actually the record of how Israel got into this mess. It is not the record of the *end* of the time of the judges but rather the *beginning* of the wholesale idolatry of Israel. The time frame for the remainder of the last chapters of this book begins shortly after the end of the life of Joshua (Jud. 2:7) and ends with the death of Samson (Jud. 16:31). Micah's idolatry probably began when the Danites (the tribe of Samon) were sequestered to the refuge of the mountains (Jud. 1:34)

There, in that reclusive environment, the seeds of idolatry were sown in the fertile ground of betrayal. Without government and spiritual influence, the mind is not bothered with the trivialities of things like honor and virtue. The chapter begins with Micah betraying his own mother. He steals from her 1,100 hundred pieces of silver. Having broken the commandment to honor his mother and father, he is guilty of all. I find it interesting that some years later the price of betrayal had not changed. Samson was betrayed for the same price. Perhaps through superstition and religion, Micah's act had set a representative example of what it is to sell a soul. Perhaps this is the Alpha and Omega of idolatry.

What follows is the definition of idolatry as it begins and ends. It begins with the false repentance of getting caught with stealing what does not belong to you. Is this act any different than the willful act of Adam who sought to steal the glory of God in the garden? The beginning is not the act but the confession of conscience. Micah was stricken in conscience or maybe in slavish fear of the curses his mother had leveled at the perpetrator of the crime (vv.1-2). Two things are apparent.

First, Micah's conscience is not yet cauterized, and second, his mother still has some sense of the mercy of the Lord. This is error and it is two-fold.

First, confession born of conscience is at first thought synonymous with forgiveness. However, the actions that follow that confession shows that nothing born of conscience will ever bring about forgiveness. Such a confession is merely the beginning of the long and treacherous road to idolatry.

Secondly, religion is about acts and the immediate confession of acts always brings about the accolades of presumed blessings from on high (v. 2).

I have read commentators who actually praised Micah's mother for what followed, because "at least," they say, "she named the name of Jehovah." But her invocation of the name of the LORD is more like those of Matthew 21 than of one who seeks to glorify God. This is obvious.

She first vows to dedicate the entire amount of the stolen booty to honor the repentance of her son, then reneges on her vow and reduces the amount of the value of her God to just over ten percent of the original estimation. The manner in which she seeks to honor her son and her god proves she seeks not to honor the true God. The manufacture of the molten and the graven images is in direct rebellion against the true God.

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth" (Exo. 20:4)." This is the beginning of idolatry, the manufacture of something visible to represent what cannot and has never been seen. What would godless religion be in this day without its physical representations of their god? What diminishing of the mind must take place to make one think that a representation of the imagination is true deity?

Idolatry cannot operate in a vacuum. Mere images are insufficient to keep religion apace. Men must exalt one in likeness of themselves to speak to of spiritual matters and to make publicly confession. Micah could not consult the images he had made. They represented Jehovah in his mind,

but Judaism must also have *priesthood*. Micah manufactures an ephod (priest's garment) and teraphim. Teraphim was probably meant to serve the purpose occupied by the Urim and Thummim. Then he consecrated one of his sons to be his *priest*. There are so many things wrong with Micah's action it would be difficult to name them all. For brevity's sake, let's just consider a few.

Micah was an Ephraimite and the consecration of the priest belonged to the tribe of the Levite only. Priests came only from the tribe of Levi. Micah's son was not qualified for the post. God, not men, makes priests. Every aspect of what Micah did was pure disobedience to God and, though religious, was nothing more than idolatry. Religion's chief business is to exalt man, to follow man, to get spiritual guidance from man and claim that he is serving the true God. Micah had a house of gods and a priest of his own making, and the reason is plain (vv. 5-6).

Conscience always has the same response to any effort to soothe it. It is never enough. If what Micah had was the best he could get, he would live with it, but his actions toward the vagabond priest that came along proved the efforts he had made at religious repentance were not enough. Immediately when a real son of Levi became available, Micah jumped on him like a duck on a June bug.

Here at last is a real priest, a man with credentials. The fact this priest was a vagabond is a revelation that true worship of God had fallen on hard times. In this day the priest could have started any number of ministries and made a fine living. But mass communications were not available at the time. Micah saw his advantage and went for it. He

bought him a pastor, a priest and a spiritual adviser for a pittance. His value of holy things seems to be a genetic predisposition. Like his mother, he got his religion from the lowest bidder. For a pittance, slave wages, clerical garb and room and board, Micah bought himself access to god.

His conscience is seared with the hot iron of religion. He has done what was necessary to assuage his conscience. He has a house full of religious artifacts, a priest who is his son and one he calls “father” (v. 10). He has purchased his redemption with fine gold and silver. And dead to God, he lives in full assurance of delusion (v. 13).

This is the beginning of that which will result in the end of the last judge.

Next we will see the tribe of Samson join in the idolatry that began at Micah's house.

The lessons here are simple. Idolatry is the natural end of all efforts to soothe the conscience. When the worship of the true God is gone, when the Lord is diminished in value, there is no way to quieten the conscience. All idolatry begins with efforts to *undo* a sinful act of rebellion by means other than what God has appointed. Idolatry is the religion of the wounded conscience. Idolatry is never a wholesale denial of God but rather the incorporation of man assisting God in his own salvation. False religion relies on physical representation of holy things, so called, and finds pastors who are for sale. Idolatry, when fully embraced, gives full assurance for a time, but as we will see in lessons to come, assurance fades when mercenary pastors get a better offer from a superior number.

I had said I would look at the death of Samson as a picture of Christ's death in this lesson. I will look at it with you when we see it as the final remedy for the idolatry that brought it about. The message is plain. Salvation, the true soothing of conscience is the perfect sacrifice of Christ. Add to or diminish it in any way and there is nothing left but idolatry. May God grant us grace to ever look upon Christ and his perfect work!

ANARCHY II

1, In those days there was no king in Israel: and in those days the tribe of the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in; for unto that day all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel.

2, And the children of Dan sent of their family five men from their coasts, men of valour, from Zorah, and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land, and to search it; and they said unto them, Go, search the land: who when they came to mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah, they lodged there.

3, When they were by the house of Micah, they knew the voice of the young man the Levite: and they turned in thither, and said unto him, Who brought thee hither? and what makest thou in this place? and what hast thou here?

4, And he said unto them, Thus and thus dealeth Micah with me, and hath hired me, and I am his priest.

5, And they said unto him, Ask counsel, we pray thee, of God, that we may know whether our way which we go shall be prosperous.

6, And the priest said unto them, Go in peace: before the LORD is your way wherein ye go.

7, Then the five men departed, and came to Laish, and saw the people that were therein, how they dwelt careless, after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and

secure; and there was no magistrate in the land, that might put them to shame in any thing; and they were far from the Zidonians, and had no business with any man.

8, And they came unto their brethren to Zorah and Eshtaol: and their brethren said unto them, What say ye?

9, And they said, Arise, that we may go up against them: for we have seen the land, and, behold, it is very good: and are ye still? be not slothful to go, and to enter to possess the land.

10, When ye go, ye shall come unto a people secure, and to a large land: for God hath given it into your hands; a place where there is no want of any thing that is in the earth.

11, And there went from thence of the family of the Danites, out of Zorah and out of Eshtaol, six hundred men appointed with weapons of war.

12, And they went up, and pitched in Kirjathjearim, in Judah: wherefore they called that place Mahanehdan unto this day: behold, it is behind Kirjathjearim.

13, And they passed thence unto mount Ephraim, and came unto the house of Micah.

14, Then answered the five men that went to spy out the country of Laish, and said unto their brethren, Do ye know that there is in these houses an ephod, and teraphim, and a graven image, and a molten image? now therefore consider what ye have to do.

15, And they turned thitherward, and came to the house of the young man the Levite, even unto the house of Micah, and saluted him.

16, And the six hundred men appointed with their weapons of war, which were of the children of Dan, stood by the entering of the gate.

17, And the five men that went to spy out the land went up, and came in thither, and took the graven image, and the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image: and the priest stood in the entering of the gate with the six hundred men that were appointed with weapons of war.

18, And these went into Micah's house, and fetched the carved image, the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image. Then said the priest unto them, What do ye?

19, And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest: is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel?

20, And the priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod, and the teraphim, and the graven image, and went in the midst of the people.

21, So they turned and departed, and put the little ones and the cattle and the carriage before them.

22, And when they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men that were in the houses near to Micah's house were gathered together, and overtook the children of Dan.

23, And they cried unto the children of Dan. And they turned their faces, and said unto Micah, What aileth thee, that thou comest with such a company?

24, And he said, Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and ye are gone away: and what have I more? and what is this that ye say unto me, What aileth thee?

25, And the children of Dan said unto him, Let not thy voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows run upon thee, and thou lose thy life, with the lives of thy household.

26, And the children of Dan went their way: and when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back unto his house.

27, And they took the things which Micah had made, and the priest which he had, and came unto Laish, unto a people that were at quiet and secure: and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and burnt the city with fire.

28, And there was no deliverer, because it was far from Zidon, and they had no business with any man; and it was in the valley that lieth by Bethrehob. And they built a city, and dwelt therein.

29, And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born unto Israel: howbeit the name of the city was Laish at the first.

30, And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of

Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land.

31, And they set them up Micah's graven image, which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

Judges 18

This is the continuing account of the horrible state of idolatry that permeated the life of Israel and led to the day when Samson destroyed more in his death than he did while he was alive. This idolatry and its results lead Israel into captivity time after time and eventuated in Israel calling for help from God. This idolatry is why we have the record of the Judges whom God raised up to deliver his people.

That which should be foremost in our thinking is a thankful heart. We who have been given faith to believe Christ and his gospel ought always to be full of praise that our God sent his Son, the true righteous judge and deliverer to save us, not temporarily, but eternally. We ought always to ascribe greatness to him who by his sovereign grace caused us to turn from our idols to serve the living God. The only thing that delivered us, that caused us to differ from those of our former estate is sweet sovereign grace.

Let us be mindful that if God by Christ had not judged our enemy and freed us of his grasp, we would still believe our enemy to be our ally, our devil to be our God. We must remember, though this account of idolatry is repulsive to us, it was not always so. Every vile thing we see here is a reminder of what we still are by nature, and the bent that

drove our former existence remains within us. Thanks be unto God for his great mercy toward his chosen sinners.

This chapter is the record of Micah's "bought and paid for" priest getting a promotion and Micah's loss of all his hope. This account begins with the reminder of the origin and originator of all idolatry.

The Danites had not possessed all their land, their inheritance. If it was their *inheritance*, it was *theirs*. Why did they not possess it? They did not possess it because they *did not believe* God. He had *promised* to give them their land and had *promised* to destroy their enemies so they could freely possess it. They did not have their inheritance because of unbelief. The result of unbelief is they were more than ready to adopt the religion of Micah and give honor to the gods he had manufactured. Idolatry does not come from outside influences but an inward principle of the heart. They coveted Micah's priest and his gods, and covetousness is idolatry (Col. 3:5).

The tribe of Dan, or more probably a family of that tribe, sent out five men to espy the land, and they came upon the house of Micah. As they were passing, they heard the voice of the priest and recognized it. Although how they knew the sound of his voice is not known, the fact they did suggests the priest was an itinerant preacher who had been looking for a pastorate for some time. He was a roaming vagabond priest looking for a *job*. God has put many capable preachers in the church and teaching elders to aid the pastor in the work among the brethren. But a pastor is a pastor, because he has a flock over which God has given him oversight as one who must give account for their souls. There may be a

flock without a pastor for a time, but there is no pastor without a flock.

One of the marks of the false preacher is that he is always looking for a bigger flock. False pastors are opportunists. When I first came here, there were only about 12 members. For years I had to put up with comments from folk who measured success by numbers. This was for me a “great place to start,” or this was my “first” pastorate, or that I wouldn't be here “that long.” I used to get strange looks when I told folks that I was planning to die in Cherokee with my brothers and sisters to whom God had given me privilege to minister. The measure of the success of a man whom God has called to preach is that when he had opportunity to preach, he had but one message, Christ and him crucified.

The world's measure is an increase in the number of the folks the preacher gets to pastor. The Danites knew this when they sought to offer Micah's priest a bigger church. These five spies first approached this priest on the basis of his vanity. They sought counsel from him (v. 5). By this, two things are revealed; they knew they could win him by intimating that he could speak for God, and there was a willingness on their part to get religious sanction for the task ahead of them.

They sought the blessing of the priest. They sought justification for their taking possession of the land. This is a revelation of the nature of unbelief. They didn't believe God, but they needed to believe something, and that something was enough for them. Verse 14 reveals the god they believed were the images that Micah had made, and these images were the oracle the priest turned to for guidance. By

suspending all reason, both the priest and the Danites believed the images were a visible manifestation of the invisible God.

Having received the blessing of the priest (v. 6), they found a city they could easily overcome. It was a city without government and too far from the help of another city to present any problem (v. 7). Notice again the logic of the Danites. They did not go to possess the city because it was their legal inheritance but because it was something with which they could have success in the power of their flesh. They believed that they could obtain in the flesh what was solely a *promise* of the Spirit. The insanity of unbelief is to see that salvation is by free grace and then come up with a plan whereby *you* can attain it.

What follows is very revealing about the nature of idolatry. The Danites were not satisfied with just overpowering the city of Laish, they wanted to possess it with the trappings of religion to give further credence to their doings. They came into Micah's house and stole the ephod, the teraphim and the graven images (v. 14-18). What is pitiful about the whole thing is for someone to feel a need for a god that can be stolen, a god that cannot even protect itself from thieves! A god void of power to do his will and subject to the power of someone else is no god at all!

Though the Levite seemed to offer a modicum of resistance (v. 18c), the response of the Danites soon quelled all of his reticence. First, note the Danites had such respect for the priest that they had no problem telling him to shut his trap (v. 19a). A preacher once attended here for a while until I unwittingly made him to doubt the reality of salvation,

because, unknown to me, he had made a profession under a false gospel. He called me to say he did not appreciate what I had said. I told him to give it some time and he would get over it. He never returned. One of the marks of idolaters is they like the preacher around to bless their activities but have no respect nor care for him opening his mouth.

I once spoke to a lady here in Cherokee who was a member of a church that had been without a pastor for two years. I asked her how that was going, and she said the church was doing just great. I told her that if such was the case that I wouldn't even bother calling a pastor. I got no response, but I knew, to that church, a pastor was nothing more than an ornament.

After the Danites told the Levite to hush up, they made him an offer he couldn't refuse (v. 19 "better for you"). Verse 20 declares the heart of this vagabond priest. He gets a promotion, gets to keep the heisted deities and minister to a congregation of religious thieves and thugs. It just doesn't get any better than that. His heart was glad. It was the salad days.

In verse 24 we see the end of idolatry. Micah is stripped of his hope. When he came to retrieve his priest and his diminutive deities, he is confronted by an overwhelming force who put him in his place. They asked him, "What's your problem?" Here again the theme of idolatry is displayed. The power of the god is seen in the number, power and ruthlessness of the congregation that has made the deity to be their god. Micah is appalled at the question. He cries, "You've stripped me of my priest and my gods, and you ask me what's bothering me." Idolatry's hope lies in what it can

see and possess, hold and move, manufacture and display. In the end the idolater is without hope (Is. 44:19-20). In verse 25 the Danites sent Micah packing with the threat that he had “better go home or he might get hurt.”

In the end, the Danites took the city, set the gods up and worshipped them until the Lord sent them into captivity. Also, the vagabond priest has been identified. He now has a name (v. 30). His promotion is complete.

Verse 31 reveals the heresy of what we have just seen. The Danites were worshipping these false gods while the tabernacle was in Shiloh, where each day the ceremonial sacrifices were being offered to the true, invisible God. Also, Shiloh is a name that speaks of Christ. All the while God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, all idolatry worships their defunct deities.

Thank God we worship the God who cannot be made, handled, moved or put on a shelf. Our God is in the heavens; he has done whatsoever he has pleased. He is in Shiloh for in Christ dwelleth the fullness of the Godhead bodily. He is the same yesterday today and forever, and none who believe in him shall ever be ashamed, confounded or left without hope.

Praise the Lord that he has thrown down our idols and made us to worship him in spirit and in truth.

ANARCHY III

1, And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of mount Ephraim, who took to him a concubine out of Bethlehemjudah.

2, And his concubine played the whore against him, and went away from him unto her father's house to Bethlehemjudah, and was there four whole months.

3, And her husband arose, and went after her, to speak friendly unto her, and to bring her again, having his servant with him, and a couple of asses: and she brought him into her father's house: and when the father of the damsel saw him, he rejoiced to meet him.

4, And his father in law, the damsel's father, retained him; and he abode with him three days: so they did eat and drink, and lodged there.

5, And it came to pass on the fourth day, when they arose early in the morning, that he rose up to depart: and the damsel's father said unto his son in law, Comfort thine heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way.

6, And they sat down, and did eat and drink both of them together: for the damsel's father had said unto the man, Be content, I pray thee, and tarry all night, and let thine heart be merry.

7, And when the man rose up to depart, his father in law urged him: therefore he lodged there again.

8, And he arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart: and the damsel's father said, Comfort thine heart, I pray thee. And they tarried until afternoon, and they did eat both of them.

9, And when the man rose up to depart, he, and his concubine, and his servant, his father in law, the damsel's father, said unto him, Behold, now the day draweth toward evening, I pray you tarry all night: behold, the day groweth to an end, lodge here, that thine heart may be merry; and to morrow get you early on your way, that thou mayest go home.

10, But the man would not tarry that night, but he rose up and departed, and came over against Jebus, which is Jerusalem; and there were with him two asses saddled, his concubine also was with him.

11, And when they were by Jebus, the day was far spent; and the servant said unto his master, Come, I pray thee, and let us turn in into this city of the Jebusites, and lodge in it.

12, And his master said unto him, We will not turn aside hither into the city of a stranger, that is not of the children of Israel; we will pass over to Gibeah.

13, And he said unto his servant, Come, and let us draw near to one of these places to lodge all night, in Gibeah, or in Ramah.

14, And they passed on and went their way; and the sun went down upon them when they were by Gibeah, which belongeth to Benjamin.

15, And they turned aside thither, to go in and to lodge in Gibeah: and when he went in, he sat him down in a street of the city: for there was no man that took them into his house to lodging.

16, And, behold, there came an old man from his work out of the field at even, which was also of mount Ephraim; and he sojourned in Gibeah: but the men of the place were Benjamites.

17, And when he had lifted up his eyes, he saw a wayfaring man in the street of the city: and the old man said, Whither goest thou? and whence comest thou?

18, And he said unto him, We are passing from Bethlehemjudah toward the side of mount Ephraim; from thence am I: and I went to Bethlehemjudah, but I am now going to the house of the LORD; and there is no man that receiveth me to house.

19, Yet there is both straw and provender for our asses; and there is bread and wine also for me, and for thy handmaid, and for the young man which is with thy servants: there is no want of any thing.

20, And the old man said, Peace be with thee; howsoever let all thy wants lie upon me; only lodge not in the street.

21, So he brought him into his house, and gave provender unto the asses: and they washed their feet, and did eat and drink.

22, Now as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, certain sons of Belial, beset the house round about, and beat at the door,

and spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him.

23, And the man, the master of the house, went out unto them, and said unto them, Nay, my brethren, nay, I pray you, do not so wickedly; seeing that this man is come into mine house, do not this folly.

24, Behold, here is my daughter a maiden, and his concubine; them I will bring out now, and humble ye them, and do with them what seemeth good unto you: but unto this man do not so vile a thing.

25, But the men would not hearken to him: so the man took his concubine, and brought her forth unto them; and they knew her, and abused her all the night until the morning: and when the day began to spring, they let her go.

26, Then came the woman in the dawning of the day, and fell down at the door of the man's house where her lord was, till it was light.

27, And her lord rose up in the morning, and opened the doors of the house, and went out to go his way: and, behold, the woman his concubine was fallen down at the door of the house, and her hands were upon the threshold.

28, And he said unto her, Up, and let us be going. But none answered. Then the man took her up upon an ass, and the man rose up, and gat him unto his place.

29, And when he was come into his house, he took a knife, and laid hold on his concubine, and divided her, together with her bones, into twelve pieces, and sent her into all the coasts of Israel.

30, And it was so, that all that saw it said, There was no such deed done nor seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt unto this day: consider of it, take advice, and speak your minds.

Judges 19

Upon reading the account of this tragedy there can be no doubt about the depravity and perversity of the human heart. This chapter is prefaced with the words that summarize the estate of Israel at this time. There was no king in Israel and the people did what was right in their own eyes. This nation was without any governmental, judicial and spiritual influence. Their being without a king means more than they were without an *earthly* king. The headlong plunge into idolatry was the result of forgetting the *Lord* was their king. All their problems were a result of forgetting God.

Having forgotten God all that was left was to govern themselves by what they deemed right in their own eyes. Man could not be in a worse state than this. Men laud and applaud the supposed freedom to accept or reject God. They set their will on a pedestal and believe and cherish the false idea that they are captain of their own ship of destiny. They are doing what is right in their own eyes. This is the definition of *anarchy* and *reprobation*. Their freedom is a horrible state of bondage to idolatry. There is no worse

governor than a mind and heart that can do nothing but sin. Spurgeon said, "A self-made man is very poorly made."

This sad chapter in the life of Israel must be viewed within the context of the grand scheme of sovereign providence. Israel has strayed far from God. As we saw in previous studies, there was never any doubt this would be the case once Israel possessed the promised land (Deut. 31. 16-18; 20). We have also seen by proclamation and example their idolatry will all but destroy them until they have nowhere to turn but to God and beg for help.

This theme repeated from the beginning will go on until all the elect are finally brought to glory. This episode will eventuate in this very theme in the next chanter. It will serve to galvanize Israel in seeking justice for the abuse of this woman, and after twice failing in their own power, they will call upon the Lord and receive help. It is good to know the way things turn out, because just a general look at this story without the knowledge of the overriding providence of God would make it all but impossible to glean anything from this story but a rehearsal of the total depravity of man.

Tonight, if the Lord permits, I want to look for the gospel, because we know, according to the words of our Lord, the scriptures testify of him.

The first thing we see that relates to the gospel is that the concubine (wife) of this Levite played the whore. Though this is sinful and unacceptable behavior, some of the most prominent and memorable women in scripture are harlots. Tamar played the harlot for respect of the seed of promise. Rahab the harlot was the only one spared in Jericho and like Tamar was part of the maternal lineage of our Lord. Gomer

betrayed her husband Hosea and stands as a picture of the elect of God and his gracious dealing with them. The first 4 verses of this chapter parallel the story of Hosea and Gomer and the gracious love that God has for his chosen bride. She betrayed him; he went after her to reconcile with her, and they celebrated with joy at the reconciliation (Hosea 2:14-23).

The second thing before us is that though Israel was almost completely given to idolatry, to include the priesthood, there seems to be in this particular priest a remaining sense of right and wrong. When he was traveling to Shiloh to worship God, he refused to lodge in Jebus (Jerusalem). The city was “not of the children of Israel” (v. 12). It was the inheritance of Judah and Benjamin but was occupied by the Jebusites, pagans all. This Levite refused to stay among the idolatrous gentiles (Gal. 2:5). He chose rather to go to Gibeah, which the Benjamites possessed, a land from which the idolaters had been driven. To one who has experienced grace, it does matter what church you go to. This man, at least in this case, refused to compromise; he refused to enjoy the pleasure of sin for a season.

The third thing is that when the Levite got to Gibeah, there was nowhere to abide (v. 15). Does this not picture our Lord who “came to his own, and his own received him not.” Was he not in his earthy life without a place to lay his head? This Levites deprivation leads us to see a picture of grace (v. 16-20). The fact that none in Gibeah showed hospitality to this Levite revealed they too had forgotten God. Hospitality, entertaining strangers, is a basic tenant of grace. It is still so in the East and among the Muslims it is law.

Among the Jews during this time, a lack of hospitality was punished by a fine. The reason is that hospitality meant taking the stranger into your house and supplying all his needs at absolutely no cost to him. It is a mark of the child of God, because it pictures the grace of God toward sinners. This Levite had with him that which would sustain him, but the old man would not let him use it. Hospitality meets every requirement, provides every need and refuses anything in return (2 Kings 5:20a).

The gospel is presented in sweet and subtle terms here. The Levite has no place to stay. He is called a wayfarer and a sojourner, two names that are applied to the elect of God. The old man was coming from his work. When we were taken in by Christ, he was the ancient of days who had finished his work. It was the old man who saw the Levite and sought him out. Christ saw us and came to our aid. The benediction spoken by the old man is a sweet reminder of the gospel of grace. "Peace be with thee, howsoever let all thy wants lie upon me" (v. 20). True peace is realized when we understand that all we need is laid upon our savior.

The fourth thing seen here is that the Devil attacks hardest when we are at peace and enjoying the benefits of grace (v. 22). The Levite was enjoying the hospitality of the old man, seemingly safe in his house when the sons of Belial came calling. In our weakness, the Lord is our strength. In our strength, we are most vulnerable.

What follows is the revelation of the insidiousness of sin. The story of these men, these perverts, mirrors the account of Sodom and Gomorrah. They wearied themselves to have this man to whom the old man had shown hospitality. They

were sexual perverts, sodomites, and their reprobation is manifest. The old man, pleading with them on the basis of the laws of hospitality, did not put a dent in their resolve. Out of respect for the Levite, and perhaps considering that giving his daughter or the Levite's concubine was less of an offense than the act of sodomy, the old man offered his own daughter as well as the wife of the Levite.

The sons of Belial took the concubine and gang raped her all night long. They spent themselves on her until dawn began to break. Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. The concubine crawled back to the doorstep of the old man and died. This is always the Devil's design, to kill. When the Levite spoke to his wife, she could not hear. Dead people can't hear.

What occurs next is a graphic account of the Levite dismembering his concubine into 12 pieces and sending her drawn and quartered remains to the twelve tribes of Israel. This act was sometimes employed upon beasts as an act of terrorism, to bring about fear (1 Sam. 11:7). This act gained such notoriety in Israel that it became proverbial for consummate evil (Hosea 9:9). What the Levite did was *not* an act of terrorism. It was a call for *justice* for the treatment of the woman by those in Gibeah. It was a call for Israel to consider their estate (v. 30). It was a call to view the work of the idolaters and act in justice.

As we will see, it worked. In the providence of God, this incident will be the catalyst for the nation that was doing right in their own eyes to call on God to destroy their enemies and deliver them. This will eventuate in the

assignment of judges. God will have his people to call on him and designs his providence to always bring it to pass.

ANARCHY IV

1, Then all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was gathered together as one man, from Dan even to Beersheba, with the land of Gilead, unto the LORD in Mizpeh.

2, And the chief of all the people, even of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand footmen that drew sword.

3, (Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel were gone up to Mizpeh.) Then said the children of Israel, Tell us, how was this wickedness?

4, And the Levite, the husband of the woman that was slain, answered and said, I came into Gibeah that belongeth to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to lodge.

5, And the men of Gibeah rose against me, and beset the house round about upon me by night, and thought to have slain me: and my concubine have they forced, that she is dead.

6, And I took my concubine, and cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel: for they have committed lewdness and folly in Israel.

7, Behold, ye are all children of Israel; give here your advice and counsel.

8, And all the people arose as one man, saying, We will not any of us go to his tent, neither will we any of us turn into his house.

9, But now this shall be the thing which we will do to Gibeah; we will go up by lot against it;

10, And we will take ten men of an hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and an hundred of a thousand, and a thousand out of ten thousand, to fetch victual for the people, that they may do, when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, according to all the folly that they have wrought in Israel.

11, So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, knit together as one man.

12, And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, What wickedness is this that is done among you?

13, Now therefore deliver us the men, the children of Belial, which are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel. But the children of Benjamin would not hearken to the voice of their brethren the children of Israel:

14, But the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together out of the cities unto Gibeah, to go out to battle against the children of Israel.

15, And the children of Benjamin were numbered at that time out of the cities twenty and six thousand men that drew sword, beside the inhabitants of Gibeah, which were numbered seven hundred chosen men.

16, Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men lefthanded; every one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss.

17, And the men of Israel, beside Benjamin, were numbered four hundred thousand men that drew sword: all these were men of war.

18, And the children of Israel arose, and went up to the house of God, and asked counsel of God, and said, Which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin? And the LORD said, Judah shall go up first.

19, And the children of Israel rose up in the morning, and encamped against Gibeah.

20, And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin; and the men of Israel put themselves in array to fight against them at Gibeah.

21, And the children of Benjamin came forth out of Gibeah, and destroyed down to the ground of the Israelites that day twenty and two thousand men.

22, And the people the men of Israel encouraged themselves, and set their battle again in array in the place where they put themselves in array the first day.

23, (And the children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until even, and asked counsel of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother? And the LORD said, Go up against him.)

24, And the children of Israel came near against the children of Benjamin the second day.

25, And Benjamin went forth against them out of Gibeah the second day, and destroyed down to the ground of the children of Israel again eighteen thousand men; all these drew the sword.

26, Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the LORD, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.

27, And the children of Israel enquired of the LORD, (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days,

28, And Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days,) saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease? And the LORD said, Go up; for to morrow I will deliver them into thine hand.

29, And Israel set liers in wait round about Gibeah.

30, And the children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and put themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times.

31, And the children of Benjamin went out against the people, and were drawn away from the city; and they began to smite of the people, and kill, as at other times, in the highways, of which one goeth up to the house of God, and the other to Gibeah in the field, about thirty men of Israel.

32, And the children of Benjamin said, They are smitten down before us, as at the first. But the children of Israel said, Let us flee, and draw them from the city unto the highways.

33, And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place, and put themselves in array at Baaltamar: and the liers in wait of Israel came forth out of their places, even out of the meadows of Gibeah.

34, And there came against Gibeah ten thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and the battle was sore: but they knew not that evil was near them.

35, And the LORD smote Benjamin before Israel: and the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjamites that day twenty and five thousand and an hundred men: all these drew the sword.

36, So the children of Benjamin saw that they were smitten: for the men of Israel gave place to the Benjamites, because they trusted unto the liers in wait which they had set beside Gibeah.

37, And the liers in wait hasted, and rushed upon Gibeah; and the liers in wait drew themselves along, and smote all the city with the edge of the sword.

38, Now there was an appointed sign between the men of Israel and the liers in wait, that they should make a great flame with smoke rise up out of the city.

39, And when the men of Israel retired in the battle, Benjamin began to smite and kill of the men of Israel about thirty persons: for they said, Surely they are smitten down before us, as in the first battle.

40, But when the flame began to arise up out of the city with a pillar of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them, and, behold, the flame of the city ascended up to heaven.

41, And when the men of Israel turned again, the men of Benjamin were amazed: for they saw that evil was come upon them.

42, Therefore they turned their backs before the men of Israel unto the way of the wilderness; but the battle overtook them; and them which came out of the cities they destroyed in the midst of them.

43, Thus they inclosed the Benjamites round about, and chased them, and trode them down with ease over against Gibeah toward the sunrising.

44, And there fell of Benjamin eighteen thousand men; all these were men of valour.

45, And they turned and fled toward the wilderness unto the rock of Rimmon: and they gleaned of them in the highways five thousand men; and pursued hard after them unto Gidom, and slew two thousand men of them.

46, So that all which fell that day of Benjamin were twenty and five thousand men that drew the sword; all these were men of valour.

47, But six hundred men turned and fled to the wilderness unto the rock Rimmon, and abode in the rock Rimmon four months.

48, And the men of Israel turned again upon the children of Benjamin, and smote them with the edge of the sword, as well the men of every city, as the

beast, and all that came to hand: also they set on fire all the cities that they came to.

Judges 20

Since this is a lengthy and detailed chapter, I will try to give a brief synopsis of it. The occasion is the gathering of the children of Israel into an army to avenge the abuse and murder of the Levite's concubine. They have been galvanized and brought to action after the Levite cut the dead woman into 12 pieces and dispersed her throughout Israel. It is upon the knowledge of the acts against this woman that the Israelites rise up to seek justice.

They first approach the Benjamites and ask them to release the sons of Belial so that they may bring them to justice, and they do so with the obvious presence of military force should the Benjamites refuse. The Benjamites then prepare to defend against the other tribes. The tribes of Israel are for the first time in a long time of one accord, and it is for a noble cause (v. 11). The Benjamites refuse to turn the criminals over to the Israelites and are set to do battle against them and the people of Gibeah.

The Israelites, having set themselves in battle array seek the counsel of the Lord as to who should lead in the battle. The Lord tells them to have Judah go to battle first. The result is the Benjamites thoroughly whip the Israelites. This defeat does not seem to deter the Israelites and they again seek counsel from God. This time they weep before the Lord, and their question seems to reveal they are not as sure as they were before but still are ready to do battle if the Lord directs so. The Lord tells them to go and fight, and they are

again routed by the Benjamites. In 2 days, the Israelites lost 40,000 men.

Again, the Israelites approach the Lord. This time they go to where Phinehas, the high priest, ministers before the ark of God in Shiloh. This tells us this incident preceded the time of Samson, because Phinehas would have been more than 300 years old if he were a contemporary of Samson. The people approach with tears and fasting (all day), offering of burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord. But this time, the question asked was of a different tenor. Their assurance is now gone, and they no longer know whether to go to battle or not. Phinehas gives them the word of the Lord, and the word is the word of promise that the Lord will deliver the Benjamites and the culprits of the rape into their hands. The next day, employing proven battle tactics and stratagem, the Israelite defeats the Benjamites, capture the city and serve justice to the offenders.

There are several things here that teach us gospel truths.

The first is that the God of glory acts according to his own counsel. The intricate workings of the mind and will of God are infinite and make us to stand in awe of his greatness. We know from the beginning of this book the intent and design of this time of judges is to finally have occasion against the enemies of the people. We know also that God's ways are not our ways and his thoughts are not our thoughts. His ways are past finding out. We see the pattern of behavior that is continually repeated by the people, idolatry, captivity, beseeching God for help and deliverance. The principle is plain. God will fix it so his people will call upon him.

In this particular episode we see another aspect of God's sovereignty. The place and time where he acts does not always fit our sense of propriety and proportion. The nation was wholly given to idolatry. On a daily basis the people were worshipping Baal and Baal-peor. It is upon the rape and murder of this woman, not the daily idol worship, when the people suddenly become a people of conscience and counsel to seek justice. God crosses a man's path at the time and place he has appointed.

Saul of Tarsus hated believers in Christ until the time appointed that he would love them and be willing to die for them. Before that time arrived, he held the coats of them that stoned Stephen and made the destruction of the name of Christ his life's goal. He had no idea God had separated him from his mother's womb, and when it pleased God, he called him by his grace to defend those he had sworn to destroy.

In our text, God does not employ the laws against idolatry to stir the conscience of the people but rather the laws concerning adultery and murder. During the time of the Judges, the people will be constantly reminded of the result of idolatry, but it is evident that in no case were they ever convicted of it, because at the death of every judge they turned headlong back into it. Perhaps the insidious nature of idolatry, because it is often justified in the idolater's mind by the fact that idolatry is usually a mixture of truth and error, makes conviction by the law next to impossible. Murder, rape and adultery are much more definitive crimes. The preacher of the gospel faces the same dilemma. Men do not see what they do as idolatry, because they do what they do

in the name of Christ. God always knows where and on what basis to cross a man's path.

The next things we see in this passage of scripture are the questions asked and the responses given. Three times the Israelites approached God, and twice God sent them to experience a horrible defeat and loss of life. The third time he sent them they prevailed. The thing to be learned here is the manner in which the Lord is to be approached.

The first time the Israelites approached the Lord, they *already had a plan* in place. They had gathered an army and knew, or at least thought they knew they would prevail. After all, the thing they were doing was certainly honorable and just. They were seeking to honor the law, to establish the law again in the land. The reason they approached the Lord was to somehow obtain sanction of what they had already planned. They had numbers, power and will. All they wanted was to get God's stamp of approval. Their inquiry does not suggest they really sought help but only how they should approach the battle (v. 18).

The second time they approached the Lord after they had been severely routed, they were sad and shed tears. This time it seems they are actually asking counsel of the Lord. They are not as sure as they were before (v. 23). The experience of loss had made them sincere, but the question seems to imply they were perhaps unsure about their single-minded view of justice. At the very least they had not considered they had *already been told* to enjoin the battle and were now wondering if they should *back out*. They had not asked themselves, "If God sent us to battle, why have we

lost?" The Lord sends them to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory once again.

After the second defeat they come to the Lord again. This time several things are different. They came weeping and sat silent before the Lord all day, and they fasted (indicative of worship). They fasted, because what they were seeking was more important than food. This time they approached the Lord with blood offerings that addressed their sin and God's justice, as well as peace offerings denoting a heart of thanksgiving for what God had done (indicative of worship). Perhaps of most importance they came to the High Priest, the ark of the Covenant, where the Lord dwelt (indicative of worship). Though it does not say they did not seek a priest with the two former approaches, the fact it was omitted suggests they approached God without the *designated mediator*. Note also, it seems the High Priest is the one who asked the question of God this time (v. 28). The difference is plain. This time they approached God, willing to wait on God and depending on him for help, not merely to justify what they had already purposed to do in the power of the flesh.

This is a simple lesson. Sincerity even in a just cause, even with all in one accord, does not guarantee the blessing of God. If God is approached to sanction a just cause rather than for worship and help, he may allow you to have what you desire, but it will end in failure. First and foremost, God must be approached in worship, and worship requires a singleness of mind. The only way to worship God is on the basis of sin being remitted by *the acceptable sacrifice*. Sin's remission brings about worship that is filled with praise and thanksgiving. This approach must be through the High

Priest, the mediator between man and God, and the High priest must speak *for* you, intercede for you. Only one fills every requirement. Christ is the mediator, high priest, sacrifice, offering, the praise and the thanksgiving.

We have a just cause, a righteous cause—to preach the gospel to the world and by it to discover and bring sin to justice, but we dare not endeavor to do so in the power of the flesh, or simply because it is right. We must seek the Lord to fight for us, to help us, and we must do so in worship, waiting on him, looking to him and seeking to establish and honor his law and his character.

THE BEGINNING

1, Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpeh, saying, There shall not any of us give his daughter unto Benjamin to wife.

2, And the people came to the house of God, and abode there till even before God, and lifted up their voices, and wept sore;

3, And said, O LORD God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be to day one tribe lacking in Israel?

4, And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people rose early, and built there an altar, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.

5, And the children of Israel said, Who is there among all the tribes of Israel that came not up with the congregation unto the LORD? For they had made a great oath concerning him that came not up to the LORD to Mizpeh, saying, he shall surely be put to death.

6, And the children of Israel repented them for Benjamin their brother, and said, There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day.

7, How shall we do for wives for them that remain, seeing we have sworn by the LORD that we will not give them of our daughters to wives?

8, And they said, What one is there of the tribes of Israel that came not up to Mizpeh to the LORD? And,

behold, there came none to the camp from Jabeshgilead to the assembly.

9, For the people were numbered, and, behold, there were none of the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead there.

10, And the congregation sent thither twelve thousand men of the valiantest, and commanded them, saying, Go and smite the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the children.

11, And this is the thing that ye shall do, Ye shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman that hath lain by man.

12, And they found among the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead four hundred young virgins, that had known no man by lying with any male: and they brought them unto the camp to Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

13, And the whole congregation sent some to speak to the children of Benjamin that were in the rock Rimmon, and to call peaceably unto them.

14, And Benjamin came again at that time; and they gave them wives which they had saved alive of the women of Jabeshgilead: and yet so they sufficed them not.

15, And the people repented them for Benjamin, because that the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.

16, Then the elders of the congregation said, How shall we do for wives for them that remain, seeing the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?

17, And they said, There must be an inheritance for them that be escaped of Benjamin, that a tribe be not destroyed out of Israel.

18, Howbeit we may not give them wives of our daughters: for the children of Israel have sworn, saying, Cursed be he that giveth a wife to Benjamin.

19, Then they said, Behold, there is a feast of the LORD in Shiloh yearly in a place which is on the north side of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south of Lebonah.

20, Therefore they commanded the children of Benjamin, saying, Go and lie in wait in the vineyards;

21, And see, and, behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in dances, then come ye out of the vineyards, and catch you every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin.

22, And it shall be, when their fathers or their brethren come unto us to complain, that we will say unto them, Be favourable unto them for our sakes: because we reserved not to each man his wife in the war: for ye did not give unto them at this time, that ye should be guilty.

23, And the children of Benjamin did so, and took them wives, according to their number, of them that danced, whom they caught: and they went and

returned unto their inheritance, and repaired the cities, and dwelt in them.

24, And the children of Israel departed thence at that time, every man to his tribe and to his family, and they went out from thence every man to his inheritance.

25, In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Judges 21

As we come to the last chapter in the book of Judges, we actually come to the beginning of the time when our Lord gave judges to Israel, many years after the death of Joshua. The last three chapters of this book are a rehearsal of the attitudes and heart of the people that brought them to cry unto the Lord for deliverance. The final three chapters take place historically in the first few chapters of this book. The people had not possessed the promised land, because they had not obeyed God by believing he would fight for them.

They had also done precisely what God had said they would in Deuteronomy 31. They had immediately begun to mix themselves with idols by worshipping Baal, Ashtaroth and any number of pagan gods. At the same time, they had kept up the facade of the religion delivered to them at Sinai, and such mixture was strictly prohibited. By comparison, the practice of introducing any of the elements of the Old Covenant with the New is equally prohibited and is no less idolatry and paganism (Gal. 1:8-9; 2 Cor. 6:14-17). Those in the book of Hebrews who had taken up the practices of the Old Covenant, seeking to combine them with the New

Covenant, were deemed apostates for whom there was no possibility of recovery. For those who might tinker with the notion of a little law combined with grace making for better behavior and personal merit, they have only to look at the book of Judges to see the end is always disastrous. Paul said to the Galatians that such were fallen from grace.

Although these two chapters have shown at least a modicum of moral fiber among the children of Israel, the last words of this book are the true summation of even the most concerted efforts to do what they deemed right. The people did what “was right in their own eyes.” Ultimately this is the ordained end of the Old Covenant. It was never designed to save but to keep the people under some semblance of lock and key until the Redeemer came.

The Old Covenant was a *continuous* reminder of sin. Every sacrifice, every ceremony, the 10 Commandments, and the 8 Sabbaths were continually repeated, because not one of them ever put away one sin. The book of Judges is a glaring reminder of the end of any covenant that depends on our obedience. It is doomed to fail. Thank God that the New Covenant which wrought our salvation was entirely dependent upon the perfect obedience of our blessed Savior, an obedience that he perfectly acquitted when He, by himself, became obedient even to the death of the cross and saved his people, his elect, from their sins.

Where had the Old Covenant brought this people? They were in wholesale idolatry. They were manufacturing gods for the nooks and crannies of their home. The priesthood had been reduced to become hirelings for the largest congregation. The Benjamites had become so base they were

willing to die rather than give us rapists and murders. Their tribe had been reduced to 600 men. The hope of bringing the tribe back to its former estate (numerically) was gone, because the rest of Israel had sworn an oath to allow none of their daughters to marry a Benjamite on pain of death.

This chapter brings us to the place where Israel begins to regret their oath and their decimation of the tribe Benjamin. Hatching a plan whereby they can give the remaining Benjamite their brides while still honoring their oath, they send 12,000 soldiers to Jabesh-Gilead. Those of Jabesh-Gilead had refused to join them in their justice against those who raped and killed the Levites concubine. The 12,000 of Israel, slew everybody in the town except for 400 virgins, which they delivered to the Benjamites. Still 200 virgins short of 600 needed, they organized a scheme whereby the Benjamite men would kidnap the remainder of the needed virgins from their *own* tribes.

This would not be a breaking of the oath because they did not actually *give* the virgins to the Benjamites; they fixed it so they were *kidnapped*. This is so indicative of those who have no king. They find ways to circumvent the law, by placing the blame on someone else. Shifting blame to something or someone else to gain presumed righteousness is the mark of the legalist (touch not, taste not, handle not). Although the motive to return the tribe of Benjamin to its former estate making sure all 12 tribes were intact was honorable and the cause worthwhile, usurping the law to do so would merely cause them to go deeper into idolatry, of which the book of Judges is ample proof. Once again, we see

no effort born of the flesh can ever produce a spiritual result (John 3:6; Rom. 8:5-8).

These last three chapters set forth the plague of idolatry and its insidious nature. Idolatry is the natural religion of everyone born of woman, every son and daughter of Adam in this world. The appointment of judges for Israel only sufficed to subdue the idolatry for the length of the judge's life. Immediately upon the judge's death, the people embraced their idols and did that which was *not* right in the eyes of the Lord. Because of their idolatry, they were sent into captivity until they cried to the Lord. Then the process was repeated.

The subtlety of idolatry is clearly seen.

First, it is said the people did what was right in their own eyes (Proverbs 16:25). It is interesting to note the last verse of the book of Judges asserts this fact. If we could deem the account here to be an attempt at morality and an effort to do the right thing, then we can see that moral efforts are not deliverance. Our righteousness is as filthy rags. The truth is, this moral decision made by Israel in seeking justice for the raped and murdered concubine and the effort to restore Benjamites is not the end of the story of Israel's idolatry. It is the description of how it *began*. The word "moral" is not in the Word of God. Perhaps it is omitted because moral activities and judgments that do not flow from a state of imputed righteousness are nothing more than another way to die. They are nothing more than a trek down the highway of idolatry.

Secondly, the employment of religious icons and so-called sacred paraphernalia, as did Micah with the manufacture of the teraphims, never attend to spirituality

but rather induce and increase unbelief. “The just shall live by faith.” We walk by faith and not by sight. A hope that is seen is not hope. The only evidence of salvation given in all of scripture is faith (2 Cor. 4:18). Most use crosses and pictures and make Bible verses to be “mottos” decoupage and mounted on walls to help in their Christian lives. They want to be “seen” as Christian, but faith and true righteousness are invisible to the eye. You cannot prove you are a Christian, and any effort to do so is merely idolatry and Phariseism no matter how it is clothed and no matter the beauty of its self-righteous garments. It is still what the old writers used to call “spendida pecatta” or “shining sins.”

There is only one way to be righteous and that by the death of Christ on your behalf. If Christ has been made to be righteousness to you, then you neither need nor desire anything you can touch or see. In fact, the believer disdains, disallows and disowns everything that can “prove” his righteousness (Phil. 3:4-8).

Thirdly, idolatry is manifested when those who are supposed to speak for God, become hirelings. Though pastors are said to be servants of the flock and to belong to the flock, they are likewise said to rule the flock in spiritual matters as those who must give account for the souls of those to whom they minister. This being the case, though they are supported by the flock in temporal matters, they are appointed by God and thus stand independent from the necessity of pleasing men. When their appointment is reduced to the ways of men and they hire themselves out to the highest bidder, as did the Levite with Micah, or when they compromise their message for fear of censure or loss of

employment, they are the ripe garden in which the seeds of idolatry are sown and come to fruition.

The preachers of “Christ and him crucified” are, in the Bible, called “Sons of thunder.” But the idolatrous milque-toast, pantywaist, pusillanimous, pulpiteers who decorate the podium of works and freewill religious edifices are clouds without water. Though idolatry is complex and may travel under a thousand names and denominations, it is simple to detect. If anything, and I mean anything, is added to the righteousness of Christ as our only acceptance before God, if any righteousness, any morality is mixed with that of Christ alone, it is a rival to the glory of Christ and is nothing more, nothing less and nothing else than idolatry. God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Christ.

These last 3 chapters of Judges teach the beginning of the time of the Judges. The end of it is seen with the death of Samson and the subsequent destruction of the enemies of the people. We will look at that in our next study, as the last chronological reference to the work of Christ in this blessed, telling and revealing book.

May our Lord keep our eyes upon Christ lest we look to ourselves and find nothing there but a bent to idolatry.

DELIVERANCE

21, But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house.

22, Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven.

23, Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand.

24, And when the people saw him, they praised their god: for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us.

25, And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars.

26, And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them.

27, Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport.

28, And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O LORD God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.

29, And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left.

30, And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.

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

Judges 16:21-31

As we come to the end of the book of Judges we must go back to the last recorded Judge of Israel. That judge was Samson. His death was the end of this era and the beginning of the time when there was to be a king in Israel. The next book we will study is the book of Ruth. The book of Ruth links the book of Judges with the books of First and Second Samuel, not in chronology, but as a connection of the writings of Samuel.

As we have seen, Samson is a type and picture of the sinner saved by grace and likewise a picture of Christ the Savior of his people. The death of Samson and what it accomplished typifies what our Lord accomplished on Calvary.

The Philistines are a vivid example of organized religion, the religion that hates God, the religion whose doom is sealed, the religion that will fall at the words of the Master in the last day. What these men did to Samson was done thinking they were doing away with him for good. They treated him as if he were nothing. This is precisely the heart of every sinner who knows not God. They wanted to be rid of Samson, because in his power, the power of the Spirit of God, he was able to do great things. Their armies, their intellects and their numbers were nothing against him.

With his bare hands he slew a lion. With the jawbone of an ass he slew thousands. When they thought they had him captive, he slipped from their midst unawares and took their hope with him. At the end they thought they had finished him. He was their object of scorn and sport, but while the words of bile and hatred were upon their tongues, he completely and utterly destroyed them. When he brought the house of the Philistines down upon their heads, he at the same time delivered Israel from their enemies. This is the gospel.

The life of Samson began by divine appointment and anointing. He was sanctified from his mother's womb to be the judge and deliverer of Israel (Ps. 22:9-10; Prov. 8:22-31; John 1:1-2).

We look at the incident of Samson and Delilah, and we see the depravity of humanity. We wonder how this could be a picture of the gospel. To a real degree our Lord left glory, because he had purposed to save his bride. He came because he loved his bride and would do what was necessary to redeem her, even to the giving of his life (Eph. 5:25). His betrothed was not a lady of refinement. She had spent herself in whoredoms and was unworthy of the least of his favor. Though we may not press the particulars to fit the type, the general truth is both accurate and beautiful.

Like Hosea of old our Lord was betrothed to a whorish woman, and he loved her and gave himself for her life (Romans 5:6-10). This theme is declared throughout the gospel (Gal. 2:20; Rev. 1:5-6). What brought Samson to the place where he was abused by the enemies of God can be attributed, to a great degree, to his love for a woman. Though his was an impure love, Christ's love for his whorish bride was purer than the driven snow. It was both chaste and divine. Though Samson was deceived by Delilah and her deception brought him to be handled so cruelly, our Lord voluntarily gave himself to his enemies for the sake of his bride (Is. 50:6; John 18:4-8).

The abuse of our Lord Jesus Christ was a revelation of how humanity, particularly religious humanity, feels about God. The one time they were allowed to touch God they vented every bit of hatred they had in their hearts and proved they were enemies of the Most High (Romans 8:7-8; Pro. 8:36). It is interesting to note that both Samson and the Lord were betrayed by a kiss.

The treatment of Samson as well as our Lord by the enemies of God had a singular motivation. They wanted to get *rid* of them. Had the true God been as the god of the Philistines (Dagon), they would have had no problem with Samson or Christ. Dagon was a god *they made*, a figment of their *imagination* to whom they erected statues. The true God is invisible, and any notion of an image of him is forbidden.

How do you get rid of a God you cannot see? You seek to destroy his *emissary*. They could not deal with a God who by invisible Spirit could do wonders that were impossible for a mere man. They could not deal with a God who controlled everything. Sovereignty is the bane of false religion. They cannot abide a God whom they cannot move, manipulate or control by their will. They plot to kill the one who he is anointed (Psalm 2; Acts 4:25-28). They with a single mind declared they would not have this man to reign over them, and their imagination proved a vain thing. It is interesting to note the name "Delilah" means feeble. Her attempt, along with those of her countrymen, was utterly feeble. The message of Pentecost was a declaration that *the Man* whom we had abused and crucified was back, and he is LORD (Isaiah 45:9-10; Acts 2:36).

The Philistine's design was also to enslave Samson, to humiliate and make him the brunt or their jokes. This too was the design of those who crucified Christ. The crucifixion was not an effort to make death a noble thing or to avoid cruel and unusual punishment. Its very design was to bring one to open shame. Our blessed Lord, the Lamb of God, hung naked, bruised and bleeding for all to see. At the foot of

the cross, the religious mocked and wagged their tongues. Even the thief, who was at last brought to paradise that very day, at first “cast the same in his teeth.” This reveals both the elect and those who continue to hate God are of one nature by birth. Samson was brought to public humiliation and thus pictured the ignoble treatment of our Lord. Samson, however, was *forced* into slavery. Our Lord *voluntarily* became a man and was found in the form of a servant, a bond-slave, because he loved his father's house (Phil. 2:7).

The shameful use of Samson and bringing him to the place of being as a beast is also a picture of our Lord being made sin for his elect. Though Samson's humiliation was for all to see, when our Lord was made sin, none but him and his God were there to see. The rest of the world was under the shroud of darkness. This matter of eternal punishment is so horrible that human eyes could not bear it. There is no real explanation of it. The more I consider that my God as a man was made sin, that all the sin of all the elect was made to meet on him, the more I am in awe of the entire matter. There are simply no words that can explain what it truly meant for our Lord to be “made to be sin.” Here we must bow in gratitude and praise and glorify God for this magnificently divine scheme that accomplished our salvation and made us to be the very righteousness of God.

Finally, Samson's death was a great accomplishment. By his death he delivered Israel from the cruel clutches of the Philistines and did so by destroying the enemy. This is the continual theme of scripture, the salvation of the elect by the destruction of the enemy. This is what the Holy Spirit

teaches concerning Christ's accomplishment on Calvary (John 16:8-11; 12:31-33). Verse 30 of Judges 16 is a proclamation of the utter success of Christ's death and precisely what that marvelous death accomplished. "So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life." Our Lord slew many with his words in the three and a half years of his earthly ministry. Oh, but his death slew many more!

First, his death slew death itself for every one of the number that cannot be numbered, his elect. When he died, they died in him. His death in their stead assured they would not suffer the second death.

Second, the "more" slain (v. 30) included the enemies of the gospel. The death of Christ while fully saving the elect sealed the non-elect in their eternal death. As our Lord did in Egypt, so he did on Calvary. He got blood at every house. We were all guilty of the death of Christ. The blood shed for the elect was ample propitiation for their sin of shedding it. The blood shed by the non-elect was charged to them and they bear it for all eternity (Mt. 27:24-25). On Calvary, everyone who ever lived was slain,

"So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life" (Heb. 2:14).

Your Notes

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