

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: JUDGES

JUDGES

PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

JUDGES CHAPTER 1

Jdg 1:1 After the death of Joshua the children of Israel asked Yahweh, Who should go up for us first against the Canaanites, to fight against them?-

Biblical history is unlike any other national history of a people in that it seems to emphasize the spiritual weakness of Israel. The heroes are nearly all flawed rather than spotlessly glorious- and that, surely, is so as to give us realistic inspiration to rise up to their spirit, knowing how flawed we also are. And yet there's a tendency amongst some of us to idealize these men, in the same way as the Catholic and Orthodox churches portray them as white faced, haloed saints. Judaism has done the same. Despite the evident weaknesses of Samson (and other judges, e.g. Gideon) as revealed in the inspired record, later Jewish commentary sought to idealize them. Take Ecclesiasticus 46:11,12: "The judges too... all men whose hearts were never disloyal, who never turned their backs on the Lord...". Perhaps the psychological basis for this tendency is that we simply don't want to be personally challenged by the fact that heroes of faith were *so* much like us...

After the leadership of Moses, there came that of Joshua. See on Josh. 23:9. When he died, Israel expected that another such leader would be raised up: "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?”. They expected a man to be named. But instead, they were told that the whole tribe of Judah must go up. The reality would have sunk home- no more charismatic leaders, now the ordinary people must take responsibility.

When faced with the prospect of driving out the tribes, they procrastinated by asking "Who shall go up for us?". They wanted someone else to do the job, just as all religious [rather than spiritual] people want a leader to do their spiritual work for them. God could have responded: 'I have already gone before you, all of you have a duty to go up and possess the land, and to help your brethren. The question of who goes first is totally faithless and irrelevant!'. But He didn't say this. He told Judah to go up first (1:3).

Multiple times we read in Joshua that he "fought against" the Canaanites and also many times that Yahweh would fight against them. All Israel and Judah seem to have forgotten all that. Just like the Israelites of Gilead wanted someone to go and lead them in fighting "for us" against the Ammonites (Jud. 10:18). It's likewise hard for us to believe that with no visible leader, victory is assured. Joshua/ Jesus has already fought and won. Joshua didn't however defeat all the Canaanites. Perhaps this looks ahead to how the Lord Jesus has achieved complete victory, against all issues and factors that appear to preclude us possessing the Kingdom of God.

Jdg 1:2 Yahweh said, Judah shall go up. Behold, I have delivered the land into his hand-

Clearly there were various scenarios possible for Israel to take the land, as there are for our inheritance of the Kingdom. The tribes could have directly followed up on Joshua's victories. They could each individually have gone to take their inheritance. Or Judah was given the potential to take the whole land, and they could have followed up on those victories. Joshua 10 describes Joshua's massive victory against the five southern Canaanite kings, of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon. He went on to conquer further: "Joshua struck all the land, the hill country, the South, the lowland, the slopes, and all their kings. He left none remaining, but he utterly destroyed all that breathed... Joshua struck them from Kadesh Barnea even to Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, even to Gibeon. Joshua took all these kings and their land at one time, because Yahweh, the God of Israel, fought for Israel" (Josh. 10:40-42). Joshua 11 then describes his subjugation of the north: "So Joshua captured all that land, the hill country, all the South, all the land of Goshen, the lowland, the Arabah, the hill country of Israel, and the lowland of the same... even to Baal Gad in the valley of Lebanon under Mount Hermon. He took all their kings, struck them and put them to death... There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. They took all in battle... and cut off the Anakim from the hill country, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel: Joshua utterly destroyed them with their cities. There were none of the Anakim left in the land of the children of Israel. Only in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod did some remain. So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that Yahweh spoke to Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel" (Josh. 11:16-23).

The land was effectively subdued before Israel at that point, and all the individual tribes had to do was to go ahead and possess the land. The fact we read in Judges 1 and 2 of them failing to do so shows that even after that, the people were just satisfied with a bit of land where they were, and failed to see the glorious potential they had of more actively possessing the entire land. All this looks forward to the failure of God's people to make good on the vast victories of the Lord Jesus.

The fact we fail to realize our potentials doesn't mean God quits working with us. Reflect how Judah was given the potential to possess the whole land, and yet they selfishly only focused upon their own inheritance (Jud. 1:2,3). And yet God still worked with them, giving them victory in what battles they did fight (Jud. 1:4). Yet even then, Judah didn't

follow through with the help God was so eager to give them. They took Jerusalem, but later we read that the Jebusites were soon back living there (Jud. 1:8,21). But see on :22.

Gen. 49:8 had prophesied that Judah would defeat their enemies. But this was yet another example of conditional prophecy. For Judah didn't take the whole land, although potentially it was "delivered... into his hand". God had worked through Joshua to subdue all the land, but they had failed to follow up on this. The soldiers of the eastern tribes had been intended to subdue the land for their brethren; but that had not worked out. Now God tries another path; the tribe of Judah were given potential power to subdue the land for the other tribes. But again they failed. The whole Divine-human relationship has been one of tragically missed potentials, and God by all means trying different methods to achieve His purpose- of giving His people the Kingdom.

Just as all the animals and everything in the *eretz* promised to Abraham was 'delivered into the hands' of Noah (s.w. Gen. 9:2), so the nations of that *eretz* were delivered into the hands of Israel (s.w. Ex. 6:8; 23:31; Dt. 2:24; 3:2,3; 7:24; 21:10; Josh. 2:24; Jud. 1:2). Tragically, like Adam in Eden [perhaps the same *eretz* promised to Abraham] and Noah in the new, cleansed *eretz*, Israel didn't realize this potential. What was delivered into the hand of Joshua (Josh. 2:24) actually wasn't delivered into their hand, because they disbelieved (Jud. 2:23); and this looks ahead to the disbelief of so many in the work of the Lord Jesus, who has indeed conquered the Kingdom for us. They considered the promise of the nations being delivered into their hand as somehow open to question, and only a possibility and not at all certain (Jud. 8:7; Num. 21:2 cp. Num. 21:34). Some like Jephthah (s.w. Jud. 11:32; 12:3), Ehud (Jud. 3:10,28), Deborah (Jud. 4:14), Gideon (Jud. 7:15) did, for a brief historical moment; but as individuals, and their victories were not followed up on. Instead they were dominated by the territory. And so instead, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies within the *eretz* (s.w. Lev. 26:25; Jud. 13:1).

Jdg 1:3 Judah said to Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my designated portion so that we can fight against the Canaanites, and I likewise will go with you into yours. So Simeon went with him-

Judah refused to believe the promise of :2 that the whole land had been given to him. Instead, Judah chose to willfully misunderstand this as meaning that just their tribal canton had been given into their power. And even then, they thought they needed the human help of Simeon, as Simeon thought too about their inheritance.

Jdg 1:4 Judah went up and Yahweh delivered the Canaanites and Perizzites into their hand. They killed ten thousand men in Bezek-

"Thousand" when used of conflicts often refers not to a literal 1,000 but to a military subdivision. Bezek, 'place of lightning', could mean that God used natural causes, lightning, to destroy these people. For such seems His preferred style in defeating His enemies at the hands of His people, lest they be tempted to think it was their power which had won the victories. He is so sensitive to our temptations, and ever seeks to keep us from pride.

Jdg 1:5 They found Adoni-Bezek in Bezek and fought against him, and they killed the Canaanites and the Perizzites-

"They found" implies he had hidden. This verse summarizes the preceding and following verses. Bezek has not been located as a town; that of 1 Sam. 11:8 is too far north to be the same place. But they buried Adonibezek in Jerusalem (:7), and Adonizedek king of Jerusalem (Josh. 10:1,3) is called Adonibezek in the LXX. It could refer to the same individual.

Jdg 1:6 But Adoni-Bezek fled, and they pursued him, caught him and cut off his thumbs and

his great toes-

This kind of humiliation of a vanquished foe was common at the time, but seems inappropriate for God's people acting in faith that any victory was by His grace. This treatment was typically given to those who would later become the servants of the conquerors (Jud. 16:21; 1 Sam. 11:2; 2 Kings 25:7). But Judah's intention was thwarted by the man dying (:7). God did not intend His people to humiliate others, not even their enemies.

Jdg 1:7 Adoni-Bezek said, Seventy kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, scavenged under my table. As I have done, so God has requited me. They brought him to Jerusalem and he died there-

See on :6. He had supposedly vanquished 70 tribal chiefs, probably only rulers of very small areas. He treated them like dogs (cp. Mt. 15:27). We wonder whether this king came to repentance at the very end of his life, and accepted the God of Israel.

Jdg 1:8 The men of Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it, putting it to the sword, and set the city on fire-

Insofar as Israel followed their Angel, they had success. We repeatedly read that the cities they conquered were 'sent up in flames' (Jud. 1:8; Josh. 6:24; 8:8; 11:11), surely because they were following the Angel who was himself as a devouring pillar of fire (Dt. 9:3). Yet quite naturally we balk at the height of our calling, to follow the Angel. Their victory however was like those of Joshua- not followed up on. For soon the Jebusites were entrenched in Jerusalem (Jud. 1:21). They failed to possess the Kingdom; all they did was prove themselves in the right as having the rightful, Divinely given title to it. And there is a challenge to us here, winning theological victories to prove ourselves right, but not possessing the Kingdom. The burning with fire was to show that the city was *herem*, totally dedicated to Yahweh as a burnt offering. But this burning with fire was not at all complete, because in :21 we find the Jebusites living there again and they remained in control until David's time. Here we see the danger of merely symbolic dedication to Yahweh.

Jdg 1:9 Afterwards the men of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who lived in the hill country, in the South and in the lowland-

These three areas are how the area of Judah was divided up topographically. Judah had been given the power and potential victory throughout the land, but instead they focused only upon their own place in the Kingdom rather than seeking it for their brethren too (see on :2).

Jdg 1:10 Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron (the name of Hebron before was Kiriath Arba), and they struck Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai-

We must compare this and :11 with the record of what actually happened in Josh. 15:13-15: "And unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh he [Joshua] gave Hebron. And Caleb drove out thence the three sons of Anak, Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai, the children of Anak. And he went up thence against the inhabitants of Debir". It was Caleb who took Hebron and went against Debir. But the record here speaks as if the "he" was the tribe of Judah. We would expect to read "they went..." in :11, but the "he" clearly alludes to how it was Caleb who did this. We can conclude therefore that Caleb's victory was assumed by Judah as theirs, in their attempt to show that they had won victories against the local inhabitants within their tribal canton. This attempt to personally claim the spiritual conquests of others is not unknown amongst God's people today. It must have been somewhat irksome for Caleb to have Judah 'give' Hebron to him (:20), when he had himself conquered it. Or we can read all this as meaning that Caleb took Hebron, but it was repossessed after his time and Judah had to attack it again, giving it to him posthumously, in his memory (:20). This would then also be the situation

with Debir in the next verses. However, the actual towns of Hebron and Debir were to be given to the Levites and Caleb only inherited the countryside nearby to it (Josh. 21:10-15). So taking a city and then giving it away to others was commendable; but our suspicion is that they didn't in fact do this.

Jdg 1:11 From there he went against the inhabitants of Debir. The name of Debir before was Kiriath Sepher-

See on :10. "Now the name of Debir before was Kiriath Sepher" (Josh. 15:15). "Debir" is the word usually translated "oracle", referring to the sanctuary, which was centered around the word of God in the ark. The previous name also means something similar, 'Place of the scroll / books'. It's as if faithful Caleb renamed an idol shrine to a more Yahweh centered name. This confirms the suggestion made on Josh. 15:9,10 that the names associated with pagan worship were renamed by the faithful, but not renamed by the unfaithful.

Jdg 1:12 Caleb said, He who strikes Kiriath Sepher and takes it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter as wife-

We wonder why Caleb himself didn't take Kiriath Sepher. Perhaps, at 85 years old, the strength he had boasted of was not quite as he had imagined, and he was exhausted or weak after the conquest of Hebron. Or maybe he wished to ensure his daughter married someone who had the same spiritual ambition and faith which he had. And such men were apparently in deficit, as Othniel his brother (Josh. 15:17) was the only one to come forward for the challenge. As Caleb was then 85, Othniel would unlikely have been a very young man, looking to marry a young woman.

Jdg 1:13 Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it; and he gave him Achsah his daughter as wife-

As noted above, Caleb was then 85, so Othniel was not a young man at all; and Achsah was presumably a virgin. So valiant young, faithful men were apparently not to be found. For surely they were the kind of candidate Caleb was looking for.

Caleb was head of a household within the tribe of Judah. It could be argued that he was directly related to Judah through Hezron and Pharez (1 Chron. 2:5,18,25). But "Kenizzite" (also Num. 32:12) could refer to the Gentile tribe of Gen. 15:19; or to a man called Kenaz, memorialized by Caleb naming his son with that same name (1 Chron. 4:15). And Jud. 1:13 could mean that Caleb's father was called Kenaz. Caleb means "dog", and this is apparently alluded to when he is commended for faithfully following Yahweh, as a dog would follow its master (Num. 14:24). The genealogies are constructed in such a way that they don't preclude Caleb having been a Gentile who was fully accepted into the tribe of Judah. Perhaps the note at :16 about the descendants of the Kenites coming to live with Caleb's family is included to clarify the point that Caleb was a Kenite or Kenizzite.

Jdg 1:14 When she came, she got him to ask her father for a field, and she alighted from off her donkey and Caleb said to her, What would you like?-

Examples of spiritual ambition are inspirational; just as soldiers inspire each other by their acts of bravery. Achsah followed her father Caleb's spiritual ambition in specifically asking for an inheritance in the Kingdom (Josh. 14:12; 15:18); and this in turn inspired another woman to ask for an inheritance soon afterwards (Josh. 17:4). And so it ought to be in any healthy congregation of believers. Ponder the parallel between Is. 51:1 and 7: "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord... hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness". To know God's righteousness is to seek / follow it; of itself, it inspires us to ambitiously seeking to attain it.

"When she came" is literally 'when she came to him' and could refer to the wedding day. Hence GNB, similar to LXX, "On the wedding day Othniel urged her to ask her father for a field. She got down from her donkey, and Caleb asked her what she wanted".

Jdg 1:15 She said to him, Give me a blessing, for that you have set me in the land of the South; give me also springs of water. Then Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs-

The idea of being given a blessing is of receiving an inheritance, as in Josh. 14:13 AV: "And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb... Hebron for an inheritance". "A south land" presumably refers to Debir, which was apparently without a good water supply. Debir is on a hill, and there is a valley at the foot of the hill with springs. The territory had presumably been conquered by Caleb and was his own- but he gave away what he had conquered.

Inheritance was passed to the sons, not daughters. We see this from how the case of Zelophehad was considered (Num. 27:1-11); and we note how Abraham gave some inheritance to his less favoured sons, Ishmael and the sons of Keturah. Caleb had 15 sons: three sons by his first wife Azubah (1 Chron. 2:18), one by his wife Ephrath (1 Chron. 2:18), one by Achsah's mother, seven more by his concubines Ephah and Maacah (1 Chron. 2:49), and three more by an unnamed wife (1 Chron. 4:15). And yet some of the inheritance they were due was asked for by their sister Achsah, and Caleb agreed and gave it to her. It seems that Othniel's capture of Kiriath Sepher was accepted as the bride-price; the field in the Negev was the dowry [see other translations]; but the springs were a simple gift from Caleb to his daughter. Yet perhaps we can infer that the 'gift' of fertile springs meant that Othniel had to drive out whoever was living there. We enquire why we have this incident of Caleb, Othniel and Achsah at this point. Especially as it is a repeat of what we read earlier in Josh. 15:15-19. Caleb was a Kenizzite (Num. 32:12; Josh. 14:6,14), and :13 stresses "Othniel the son of Kenaz"; they were only adopted into the tribe of Judah. The bravery, ambition and zeal of his family to possess Canaanite territory is perhaps inserted as a contrast to how the rest of the chapter states or implies that the pure blooded Israelites were fearful, nervous and ineffective in possessing the land. We could perhaps read :11 as meaning that Judah 'went against' Kiriath Sepher but didn't conquer it- it was Caleb's family who did ["Judah... went against the inhabitants of... Kiriath Sepher. Caleb said, He who strikes Kiriath Sepher and takes it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter as wife"]. LXX says that Caleb "gave her according to her heart". With all her heart she wanted that land, despite the fact she had 15 brothers who had claim to it theoretically- but she received it.

Jdg 1:16 The descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the men of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which is in the south of Arad, and they went and lived with those people-

This note may be inserted at this point to support the idea that Caleb was also a Kenite / Kenizzite. See on :13. "These people" may refer to the people of Caleb, which would make sense if Caleb was ethnically related to them. LXX "with the people of Amalek" would corroborate with the connection between the Amalekites and Kenizzites made in 1 Sam. 15:6; Num. 24:20-22.

Jdg 1:17 Judah went with Simeon his brother and they attacked the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed the town. The name of the town was Hormah- Hormah ["devoted"] was the Canaanite Zephath ["watchtower"]. The strength of the Canaanites was devoted to Yahweh, and they were supportive of David when on the run from Saul (1 Sam. 30:30). What was taken from the world was devoted to Yahweh by the faithful Israelites involved in this area. And that is an abiding principle.

Jdg 1:18 Also Judah took Gaza with its border and Ashkelon with its border and Ekron with its border-

LXX says the opposite, "and Judah did not dispossess...". But that is perhaps an attempt to reconcile this statement with the reality that these Philistine areas remained in Philistine hands (Jud. 3:3; Josh. 13:2,3). But Jud. 1:18 says that "Judah took Gaza with its border and Ashkelon with its border and Ekron with its border". I suggest the answer is that their victory was like those of Joshua- not followed up on. And like the victory over Jerusalem recorded in Jud. 1:8, soon after which the Jebusites were soon again entrenched in Jerusalem (Jud. 1:21). They failed to possess the Kingdom; all they did was prove themselves in the right as having the rightful, Divinely given title to it. And there is a challenge to us here, winning theological victories to prove ourselves right, but not possessing the Kingdom.

Jdg 1:19 Yahweh was with Judah and drove out the inhabitants of the hill country, for he could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had chariots of iron-

"The valley" likely refers not to 'valleys' but to the flat coastland area where the Philistines settled. This is confirmed by Josh. 13:2 listing "All the regions of the Philistines" as still remaining to be possessed. The wording is very gracious, suggesting Yahweh was with Judah in their campaigns in the hill country, but not in the "valley". He was of course equally with them in "the valley" and it was only their lack of faith that stopped their conquest. He was not in reality "with Judah" there because although He was potentially, they chose not to realize that in practice. Likewise Emmanuel, "God with us", all men... but most choose not to experience this, and so God is disallowed by them from being "with" them.

The inhabitants of the valley had been defeated by Joshua. But Judah would not 'drive them out'. "Drive out" is s.w. "possess". We must note the difference between the Canaanite peoples and their kings being "struck" and their land "taken" by Joshua-Jesus; and the people of Israel permanently taking possession. This is the difference between the Lord's victory on the cross, and our taking possession of the Kingdom. Even though that possession has been "given" to us. The word used for "possession" is literally 'an inheritance'. The allusion is to the people, like us, being the seed of Abraham. The Kingdom was and is our possession, our inheritance- if we walk in the steps of Abraham. But it is one thing to be the seed of Abraham, another to take possession of the inheritance; and Israel generally did not take possession of all the land (Josh. 11:23 13:1; 16:10; 18:3; 23:4). The language of inheritance / possession is applied to us in the New Testament (Eph. 1:11,14; Col. 3:24; Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Pet. 1:4 etc.). Israel were promised: "You shall possess it" (Dt. 30:5; 33:23). This was more of a command than a prophecy, for sadly they were "given" the land but did not "possess" it. They were constantly encouraged in the wilderness that they were on the path to possessing the land (Dt. 30:16,18; 31:3,13; 32:47), but when they got there they didn't possess it fully.

Jdg 1:20 They gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had promised, and he drove out from there the three sons of Anak-

As discussed on :10, it was Caleb who had taken Hebron. But then Judah made out that they were so righteously granting it to him, as if they had won the victory. It was in any case given to Caleb by God through Moses and Joshua, not by them. And Hebron was a priestly city, so Caleb gave it away anyway.

Jdg 1:21 The children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem, but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day-

Josh. 15:63 says that "As for the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah couldn't drive them out; but the Jebusites live with the children of Judah at Jerusalem to this

day". We noted on :2 that Judah was given the potential to drive out the inhabitants of the entire land, including Jerusalem. They failed to do this and so Benjamin also failed to. Although "did not drive out" doesn't sound as if they failed in battle; they simply didn't attempt it, because they were satisficers, content with what they had and not seeing their much greater call and potential. Joshua had earlier defeated "Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem" (Josh. 10:1), but this victory wasn't followed up permanently; for Judah did take Jerusalem in :8 but lost it soon afterwards. Just as the Lord Jesus has taken Jerusalem for us...

It seems that as Jerusalem was on the border between Judah and Benjamin, they both had the opportunity to possess Jerusalem, but both chose not to. See on :19. As explained on :8, Judah defeated the king of Jerusalem. But they failed to possess his territory. They failed to possess the Kingdom; all they did was prove themselves in the right as having the rightful, Divinely given title to it. And there is a challenge to us here, winning theological victories to prove ourselves right, but not possessing the Kingdom.

Jdg 1:22 The house of Joseph went up against Bethel, and Yahweh was with them-

Bethel is about 2 km. away from the site of Ai, which had been totally destroyed by Joshua. There is archaeological evidence that Bethel was built up soon after the entry of Israel to Canaan under Joshua. Clearly the great victories of Joshua weren't followed up on, and some community of Canaanites associated with Ai had established or re-established themselves down the road at Ai. Yet Yahweh was eager to still support them at this later stage in trying to follow up on the Ai victory, for "Yahweh was with them" in attacking Bethel. This is the persistent theme- that Joshua's victories were not followed up on. For in any conquest, even a won battle must be followed up on. All this points to our failure to follow up on the Lord's total victory against sin in every form.

This term "house of Joseph" presumably refers to Ephraim and eastern Manasseh, but the term is used to describe a Benjamite in 2 Sam. 19:16,20. God's intention was that each family within each tribe had a specific inheritance, from which they drove out the local inhabitants and lived there with His blessing. But it seems that contrary to this intention, they often moved to other tribes, ever seeking for a better deal some place other than that which God intended for them.

"Yahweh was with them" is LXX "And Judah was with them", reflecting the one Hebrew letter difference between the two words Yahweh and Judah in the original. In this case, we would have some evidence that some in Judah saw the potential of :2, that all the land, for all the tribes, had been given into the possibility of Judah to conquer for them.

Jdg 1:23 The house of Joseph sent to spy out Bethel. The name of the city before was Luz- Although Luz was called Bethel (Gen. 35:6; Jud. 1:23), Josh. 16:2 implies a difference between them. Perhaps Luz was the city, and "Bethel" refers specifically to the altar of Jacob there. But Keil suggests Bethel refers to the "southern range of mountains belonging to Bethel, from which the boundary ran out to the town of Luz, so that this town, which stood upon the border, was allotted to the tribe of Benjamin (Josh. 18:22)".

Jdg 1:24 The spies saw a man come out of the city and they said to him, Please show us the entrance into the city and we will deal kindly with you-

They were perhaps seeking to emulate Joshua's victory over Jericho, and the preservation of Rahab (Josh. 6:23). The word translated "keep" in Ex. 23:20 is that translated "spies" here. The spies were the keepers in the way of Israel, to bring them in to the land. And yet the Angel at the exodus was their 'keeper' to bring them into the land. The spies were working in harmony with their Angels; and thus they succeeded. Israel's guardian Angel was to "keep" them in the way (Ex. 23:20), clearly echoing how the Angels kept the way to the tree of life

in Eden. The same Hebrew word for “keep” occurs very often in Exodus in the context of Israel being told to keep God’s commands; but their freewill effort was to be confirmed by the Angel keeping them in the way of obedience. They were to “keep” themselves in the way (Dt. 4:9 and many others; s.w. “take heed”, “observe” etc.), but the Angel would keep them in it. This mutuality is developed in Ex. 23:21, where having said the Angel will keep them, Israel are told “Beware of him, and obey his voice”. “Beware” translates the same Hebrew word as “keep”. The Angel would keep them., but they were to keep to the Angel. This is an example of how we are intended to have a mutual relationship with our guardian Angel, leading to Him strengthening us in the one way.

Jdg 1:25 He showed them the entrance into the city and they put the city to the sword, but they let the man go and all his family-

The conquests of Joshua were nearly all as a result of the local inhabitants coming against him. Even the men of Jericho are described as proactively fighting against Israel (Josh. 24:11). These later conflicts are a result of not having possessed the land as God intended, and so they seem to feature Israel now attacking the local peoples. This was it seems not God's ideal intention; His intention was that those peoples came against Israel and were therefore defeated.

Jdg 1:26 The man went into the land of the Hittites and built a city and called it Luz, which is its name to this day-

I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

Jdg 1:27 Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shean, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam or Megiddo and their surrounding settlements; the Canaanites continued to dwell in that land-

In the list of cities given to the Levites, "Bileam" meaning 'not of the people', is called Ibleam, Jud. 1:27; 2 Kings 9:27, and in Josh. 21:25, Gath-rimmon. Perhaps it is called "Bileam" in 1 Chron. 6:70 because it continues the theme that the tribes of Israel may have somehow manipulated the lots so that they gave less valuable cities to the Levites, or even cities which weren't theirs, thereby breaking the foundation principle of 2 Sam. 24:24.

Dor was in Asher (Josh. 11:1,2; 12:23; 17:11; Jud. 1:27,28). Taanach was within either Issachar or Asher (Josh. 17:11,12,25; Jud. 5:19). But these towns were also given to Ephraim (1 Chron. 7:29). As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the whole nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. But the precise nature of that reward is as it were negotiable by us now, according to our spiritual ambition. Just as Caleb chose Hebron and secured it for himself.

Jdg 1:28 When Israel had grown strong they put the Canaanites to forced labour and did not utterly drive them out-

For "forced labour", see on :30. For "drive out", see on :19. To 'grow strong' can be a technical term for having military superiority (s.w. 1 Kings 20:22; 2 Chron. 17:1; 21:4).

Jdg 1:29 Ephraim didn't drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, but the Canaanites lived in Gezer among them-

Living together meant that there was a reconciliation of cultures between them. If the Israelites had been truly devoted to Yahweh's ways in practice, such reconciliation would not have been practicable; or we would be reading that the Canaanites accepted Yahweh. But the opposite happened. We read that the Israelites 'dwelt among' the Canaanites in some areas and vice versa, and this would have been as a result of making a covenant with those "inhabitants of this land" (Jud. 2:2), which in turn abrogated their exclusive covenant with Yahweh.

Jdg 1:30 Zebulun didn't drive out the inhabitants of Kitron or Nahalol, but the Canaanites lived among them and became subject to forced labour-

One reason why Israel failed to drive out the tribes, and thereby lost the Kingdom, was simply because they wanted to take tribute from them (Josh. 17:13). Ez. 7:19 defines "silver and gold" as Israel's stumblingblock- moreso than idols. They just so loved wealth. The men of Bethshemesh looked into the ark to see if there were any more jewels left in it (1 Sam. 6:19 cp. 6,15); they trampled upon the supreme holiness of God in their crazed fascination with wealth.

Jdg 1:31 Asher didn't drive out the inhabitants of Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik, or Rehob-

According to the definition of Asher's territory in Josh. 19:24-31, these were their border towns. Perhaps they settled down to inherit the territory in the midst of their canton, and just couldn't be bothered to subjugate the peripheral towns. For "drive out", see on :19. Many of the towns which weren't subjugated by the tribes were on the very edges of their tribal cantons. They were therefore literally thorns in their sides (Jud. 2:3).

Jdg 1:32 but the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land, for they did not drive them out-

Living among the Canaanites would imply that Asher were a minority amongst a majority. The extent of disobedience to the commands to slay the inhabitants of the land is quite astounding. We read that the Israelites 'dwelt among' the Canaanites in some areas, and this would have been as a result of making a covenant with those "inhabitants of this land" (Jud. 2:2), which in turn abrogated their exclusive covenant with Yahweh.

Jdg 1:33 Naphtali didn't drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh or Beth Anath, but he lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land who became subject to forced labour-

Living among the Canaanites would imply that Naphtali were a minority amongst a majority. For "forced labour", see on :30. For "drive out", see on :19. The two towns mentioned here were idol sanctuaries, 'house of the sun god' and 'house of Anath', another Canaanite idol. These ought to have been destroyed, and not doing so was tantamount to breaking covenant with Yahweh (Jud. 2:2).

Jdg 1:34 The Amorites forced the children of Dan into the hill country, for they would not allow them to come down to the valley-

Even when God punished Israel, He seems to later almost take the blame for their judgments; thus He says that He left some of the Canaanite nations in the land to teach Israel battle experience (Jud. 3:2 NIV). His grace is so positive about them in the way He writes about them. Yet elsewhere the presence of those remaining nations is clearly linked to Israel's

faithlessness, and their survival in the land was actually part of God's punishment of Israel. He almost excuses Israel's apostasy by saying that they had not seen the great miracles of the Exodus (Jud. 2:7). "The portion of the children of Judah was too much for them" (Josh. 19:9) almost implies God made an error in allocating them too much; when actually the problem was that they lacked the faith to drive out the tribes living there. Likewise "the border of the children of Dan went out too little for them" (Josh. 19:47), although actually "the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley" (Jud. 1:34). When Dan fought against Leshem, this one act of obedience is so magnified in Josh. 19:47 to sound as if in their zeal to inherit their territory they actually found they had too little land and therefore attacked Leshem. But actually it was already part of their allotted inheritance. Yet God graciously comments: "all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel" (Jud. 18:1).

Jdg 1:35 but the Amorites continued to dwell in Mount Heres, in Aijalon and in Shaalbim. Yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed, so that they became subject to forced labour- For "forced labour", see on :30. Mount Heres is 'mount of the sun,' probably the same as Irshemesh, 'city of the sun', in Josh. 19:41. As noted on :33, these pagan sanctuaries ought to have been destroyed.

Jdg 1:36 The border of the Amorites was from the ascent of Akrabbim, from the rock and upward-

"The rock" may be that at Kadesh of Num. 20:8, or Petra / Sela ["the rock", Obadiah 3]. The point is that the local population drew a boundary line in the area which was supposed to be Israel's, and defended and enforced it. This was how weak Israel were from the beginning.

JUDGES CHAPTER 2

Jdg 2:1 The angel of Yahweh came up from Gilgal to Bochim. He said, I brought you up out of Egypt-

Angels are usually recorded as just appearing. This Angel apparently travels from Gilgal to Bochim. Gilgal was Joshua's base camp for his conquest of the land (Josh. 9:6; 10:6; 10:15; 10:43; 14:6), and where the [same?] Angel had first appeared to him encouraging him in his conquest. This surely is the Angel that was promised to Israel in Ex. 23 who would lead them into the promised land and subdue their enemies. It was likely through the mouth of that Angel that Israel had been warned against intermarriage and idolatry in Canaan. Israel were circumcised at Gilgal (Josh. 5:2-9) and stones had been set up there so that "When your children ask their parents in time to come, "What do these stones mean?" then you shall let your children know, "Israel crossed over the Jordan here on dry ground." For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we crossed over, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, and so that you may fear the LORD your God forever" (Josh. 4:20-24 NRSV). But the Angel removes from there and travels some way- perhaps observed doing so by the Israelites. The message was that Yahweh had departed from them and come to a place of weeping, 'Bochim'. But a fair case can be made that Bochim was in fact Bethel. Bethel is connected with weeping: "And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried below Bethel under an oak: and the name of it was called the Oak of Weeping" (Gen. 35:8; also in Jud. 20:26). The LXX is clear: "The angel came to the Weeping Place, even to Bethel, even to the house of Israel". And we have just read of Bethel in Jud. 1:22-26. The terrible reality is that God wept because of how Israel had wasted their potential to inherit the Kingdom, which Joshua-Jesus had made possible for

them. And surely He weeps today. But Israel wept too (:4)- they shared God's perspective on their failures, and thus came to know His Spirit. This is, therefore, the model repentance- to come to see things as God does, to feel about our sins as He does.

The Hebrew is "I made you to go up out of the land of Egypt". This was God's grace to Israel, through the Angel. For the people didn't actually want to leave; they liked the idea of it, as men like the idea of quitting the world today, but preferred to stay: "Is not this the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness" (Ex. 14:12). Stephen in Acts 7 argues that Israel were always resistant to the saving work of Moses, just as they were to that of the Lord. They constantly murmured against him and rejected his leadership. And yet God brought them up from Egypt, literally, made them go up out of Egypt (stressed in Lev. 11:45; Dt. 20:1; Josh. 24:17; Jud. 6:8 and so often). Just as Abraham was taken out of Ur, and we too were taken out of the world. We are called, but He certainly assists our response to that call. Just as in the Lord's parable, those invited to the wedding feast are sent servants to actually bring them to it. And they resisted even that.

The salvation from the Egyptians was at the Red Sea, long ago (Ex. 14:30). The Israelites were repeatedly reminded of this (Jud. 2:1; 6:8; 10:11). But they failed to perceive that God's actions in history were in fact their personal salvation, an act of grace shown to them also. David grasped that point, and his Psalms often thank God for the exodus, as if it had happened to him personally. But the problem is that Israel like all people tended to only see what was before their face at that moment. They had no sense of God's historical salvation of them, and the guarantee that He would likewise come through for them, if they remained faithful to Him.

And have brought you to the land which I swore to your fathers, and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you-

The promises made to Abraham were made by an Angel. This is implied in the Genesis account and repeated later- e.g. Judges 2:1 describes the Angel which led the people of Israel out of Egypt and into Canaan reminding them of "the covenant which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break My covenant with you". Thus when we read passages talking of the covenant God made with them and with Abraham, let us watch out for further allusions to Angelic work. When we read of God breaking His covenant, are we to understand that the Angels can speak like this, but God Himself doesn't and can't? Or that God has such passion and emotion that He can say 'contradictory' things like this?

Consider the following examples of God 'repenting'. For each, try to explain it in terms of *God Himself* changing His mind, and then think how an understanding of Angels could do better: Ex. 4:24; Num. 14:34 AVmg.; Ex. 32:11 mg.; Hos. 12:4; Jud. 2:1 cp. Zech. 11:10,11. If you like this line of approach, consider the following examples, of where 'God' says He won't do something; and then does: Ex. 33:3 cp. 34:9; Dt. 4:31; 31:6,8 cp. 31:17. See on Zech. 11:10,11.

Although the idea of Angels changing their minds has some attraction, my own conviction is that God as it were limits His omniscience and omnipotence in order to enter into real relationship with His people. He has emotions, and speaks in the fire of His wrath, as we do, who are made in His image. And so He utters judgments which by grace He didn't totally follow through on. Perhaps the repentance or intercession of a minority ameliorated His judgments; or perhaps the pole of grace and love is stronger within Him than that of judgment. For mercy rejoices against judgment, even within His personality.

God promised that even if Israel sinned, He would never break His covenant with them (Lev. 26:44; Jud. 2:1). But He did (Zech. 11:10 cp. Jer. 14:21 "don't break Your covenant

with us"), as witnessed by the termination of the Law of Moses, which was the basis of His covenant with Israel. His love creates yet another Bible paradox. Israel broke the covenant by their disobedience (Lev. 26:15; Dt. 31:16 and many others). God therefore broke His part of the covenant. Yet God made His promises concerning the unbreakable covenant because He chose to speak in words which did not reflect His foreknowledge that Israel would sin. The apparent contradiction is resolvable by realizing that God did not set His mind upon Israel's future apostasy when He made the 'unbreakable' covenant with them. And yet the paradox still ultimately stands; that He broke His covenant with them when they sinned. He worked through this punishment in order to establish an even more gracious new covenant.

It was Israel who "broke the everlasting covenant" (Is. 24:5; Jer. 11:10); "they broke My covenant through all your abominations" (Ez. 44:7). But from God's side, He remained faithful to them, like the faithful partner in a marriage. As Paul put it, if we deny Him, He abides faithful (2 Tim. 2:13). The covenant was broken by Israel but not by God.

Jdg 2:2 and you must make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; break down their altars'. But you have not listened to My voice; why have you done this?-

As discussed on :1, their covenant with the inhabitants of the land was an undoing and abrogation of the exclusive covenant with Yahweh which they had signed up to. And yet He still remained in covenant. We read that the Israelites 'dwelt among' the Canaanites in some areas, and this would have been as a result of making a covenant with those "inhabitants of this land" (Jud. 2:2), which in turn abrogated their exclusive covenant with Yahweh (:1). The existence of pagan place names throughout the record of the conquest, e.g. Bath Dagon, house of Dagon, Beth Shemesh, house of the sun god, all demonstrates that they didn't break down the altars.

Jdg 2:3 Therefore I tell you that I will not drive them out from before you, but they shall be thorns in your sides-

I noted on Jud. 1 that many of the towns which weren't subjugated by the tribes were on the very edges of their tribal cantons. They were therefore literally thorns in their sides (Jud. 2:3).

And their gods will be a snare to you-

Twice in 1 Timothy, Paul speaks about a snare; the snare of the devil (1 Tim. 3:7), and the snare of wanting wealth (6:9). The desire for wealth in whatever form is the very epitome of the devil, our inherent sin which we must struggle against. The idea of a snare is that it results in a sudden and *unexpected* destruction. The unexpectedness of the destruction should set us thinking: surely the implication is that those who are materialistic don't realize that in fact this is their besetting sin, and therefore their rejection in the end because of it will be so tragically unexpected. It's rather like pride; if you're proud and you don't know it, then you really are proud. And if we're materialistic and don't know it, we likewise really have a problem. The idea of riches being a snare connects with copious OT references to idols as Israel's perpetual snare (Ex. 23:33; Dt. 7:16; Jud. 2:3; 8:27; Ps. 106:36; Hos. 5:1). Paul's point is surely that the desire of wealth is the equivalent of OT idolatry.

Jdg 2:4 When the angel of Yahweh spoke these words to all the children of Israel, the people lifted up their voice and wept-

As in their response to Joshua's speech challenging their idolatry, we rather wait with expectant hope to read that like Jacob's sons, they bring out their idols and bury or burn them. If only we could achieve a second naivety in reading the records, we would at this point be on the edge of our seats, waiting for them to now ditch their idols. But we read only of their tears, the emotion of a religious moment, rather than any lasting response to the blunt warning they had been given. Yet still God graciously responds to their tears.

Jdg 2:5 They called the name of that place Bochim; and they sacrificed there to Yahweh-
We notice that they had the opportunity to rename or name places in Israel. But they retained so many place names which have clear associations with Baal and Dagon. As noted on :4, they went through the motions of religious worship and repentance- but there is no record of them actually ditching their idols.

Jdg 2:6 Now when Joshua had sent the people away, the children of Israel went every man to his inheritance to possess the land-

Joshua / Jesus "let the people go" / dismissed them to live in their possessions which he had liberated for them. He dismissed them to go and live in their specific inheritance which it seems each family were given, although unrecorded this is implied by the laws about inheritance. We think of Daniel standing in his lot at the last day. The phrase is so often used of Israel being let go from Egypt. Now they were let go into the Kingdom. But they balked at it, wanted a hand to hold, a man to follow. And no man was raised up to replace Joshua after his death. The Lord's death and finished work are likewise all we need. It is for us to now go and inherit the Kingdom, although the Lord uses this language about how we shall do so after the judgment seat.

They were to quit their idolatry and then possess the land in God's strength. They went forward to possess the land, but with no record of having ditched their idols. "Drive out" is s.w. "possess". We must note the difference between the Canaanite peoples and their kings being "struck" and their land "taken" by Joshua-Jesus; and the people of Israel permanently taking possession. This is the difference between the Lord's victory on the cross, and our taking possession of the Kingdom. Even though that possession has been "given" to us. The word used for "possession" is literally 'an inheritance'. The allusion is to the people, like us, being the seed of Abraham. The Kingdom was and is our possession, our inheritance- if we walk in the steps of Abraham. But it is one thing to be the seed of Abraham, another to take possession of the inheritance; and Israel generally did not take possession of all the land (Josh. 11:23 13:1; 16:10; 18:3; 23:4). The language of inheritance / possession is applied to us in the New Testament (Eph. 1:11,14; Col. 3:24; Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Pet. 1:4 etc.). Israel were promised: "You shall possess it" (Dt. 30:5; 33:23). This was more of a command than a prophecy, for sadly they were "given" the land but did not "possess" it. They were constantly encouraged in the wilderness that they were on the path to possessing the land (Dt. 30:16,18; 31:3,13; 32:47), but when they got there they didn't possess it fully.

Jdg 2:7 The people served Yahweh all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of Yahweh that He had worked for Israel-

Serving a god meant doing sacrifice to it as they did to the Baals (:11). As discussed on Josh. 24, I suggest that the 'service of Yahweh' in view here refers to the operation of the tabernacle rituals. For 'serving Yahweh' can be a technical term which refers to this and nothing else. This is not to say that they were faithful nor exclusively committed to Him. Joshua in Josh. 24:19 had said that they could not 'serve Yahweh' acceptably, unless they ditched their idols. Which they didn't. The people understood serving Yahweh as doing the rituals of His religion, whereas Joshua understood it as serving Him exclusively with no place in their hearts for any idolatry.

Even when God punished Israel, He seems to later almost take the blame for their judgments; thus He says that He left some of the Canaanite nations in the land to teach Israel battle experience (Jud. 3:2 NIV). His grace is so positive about them in the way He writes

about them. Yet elsewhere the presence of those remaining nations is clearly linked to Israel's faithlessness, and their survival in the land was actually part of God's punishment of Israel. He almost excuses Israel's apostasy by saying that they had not seen the great miracles of the Exodus (Jud. 2:7). "The portion of the children of Judah was too much for them" (Josh. 19:9) almost implies God made an error in allocating them too much; when actually the problem was that they lacked the faith to drive out the tribes living there. Likewise "the coast of the children of Dan went out too little for them" (Josh. 19:47), although actually "The Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley" (Jud. 1:34). When Dan fought against Leshem, this one act of obedience is so magnified in Josh. 19:47 to sound as if in their zeal to inherit their territory they actually found they had too little land and therefore attacked Leshem. But actually it was already part of their allotted inheritance. Yet God graciously comments: "all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel" (Jud. 18:1).

Jdg 2:8 Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Yahweh, died, being one hundred and ten years old-

Numbers and ages in Hebrew literature are not necessarily to be taken literally. This was the age at which Joseph is recorded as reaching (Gen. 50:26), and we will read in Josh. 24:32 of the burial of Joseph's bones at Shechem, at the same time as Joshua is buried. We are clearly invited to see a connection between the two men, both of them maintaining spirituality and hope in the Kingdom whilst surrounded by unspirituality and terrible failure by God's people to realize their potential.

Jdg 2:9 They buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnah Heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, on the north of the mountain of Gaash-

"In the border" may mean that they believed even then that one day he would be resurrected, and then immediately enter into his eternal inheritance. LXX adds: "There they put with him into the tomb in which they buried him, the knives of stone with which he circumcised the children of Israel in Galgala, when he brought them out of Egypt, as the Lord appointed them; and there they are to this day".

Josh. 24:30 says Joshua was buried in Timnath Serah. "Heres" means the sun, and may well have a pagan reference. Perhaps the name was changed back to its original "Heres" because the Israelites worshipped the gods of the Canaanites.

Jdg 2:10 Also all that generation were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who didn't know Yahweh, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel-

The "fathers" served other gods (Josh. 24:2), but the Bible describes death as a gathering to the fathers. Clearly the differentiation between good and bad men is not made at death. Death is unconsciousness, and the ultimate division and reward will be at the return of the Lord Jesus and the judgment seat He will then set up.

Note the parallel between knowing Yahweh and seeing / experiencing all His works for His people (:7). This experience is what it is to know Yahweh, rather than purely academic theoretical knowledge.

Jdg 2:11 The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh and served the Baals-

Serving Yahweh was to be exclusive. Any worship of Baals was to break that exclusive covenant they had made with Yahweh and therefore to forsake Yahweh (:12,13). But 'forsaking Yahweh' is how He saw it. They themselves never became atheists or formally abrogated their relationship with Yahweh. They believed that they could worship Yahweh

through worshipping Baal, and that they were doing nothing wrong to Him by this infidelity. Hence Yahweh warns in Hos. 2:16, "You shall no longer call Me Baal".

"The children of Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh" is a refrain which occurs seven times in Judges (Jud. 2:11; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1), recalling how Israel both over history and in the last days were to be punished "seven times" for their sins (Lev. 26:23,24).

Jdg 2:12 They forsook Yahweh the God of their fathers who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods of the peoples who were around them and bowed themselves down to them-

See on :11.

And they provoked Yahweh to anger-

God can be grieved [s.w. 'provoke to anger']. He has emotions, and His potential foreknowledge doesn't mean that these feelings are not legitimate. They are presented as occurring in human time, as responses to human behaviour. This is the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to human time-space limits, in order to fully enter relationship and experience with us. As He can limit His omnipotence, so God can limit His omniscience, in order to feel and respond along with us.

Jdg 2:13 They forsook Yahweh and served Baal and the Ashtaroth-

As explained on :11, this was how Yahweh felt. They themselves didn't think they had forsaken Him. The Bible at times speaks from God's viewpoint, at others from the perspective of the people whose actions are being described. To forsake Yahweh was to break covenant with Him (Dt. 31:16,17). Israel did forsake Yahweh (Jud. 2:13), but still He remained faithful to them, as Hosea remained faithful to Gomer despite her infidelity to their marriage covenant. Instead of forsaking them as He threatened, He instead by grace sent them saviours, judges, looking forward to His grace in sending the Lord Jesus, Yah's salvation.

The punishment for forsaking Yahweh was that "Yahweh will send on you cursing, confusion and rebuke in all that you put your hand to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the evil of your doings by which you have forsaken Him. Yahweh will make the pestilence cleave to you until He has consumed you from off the land into which you now go in to possess it" (Dt. 28:20,21). We expect these things to therefore happen at this time; but we note God's amazing patience and gentleness in not bringing these things immediately, and instead raising up judges as saviours for this wayward people.

'Baal' literally means an owner, hence a lord or husband. One of David's mighty men was called Baal-Yah (1 Chron. 12:5 AV "Bealiah", owned by Yah). What was wrong with Baal worship was that it made Baal your owner or possessor. Accepting God as our owner has huge practical import. Man's need for belonging is ultimately met. We belong to God. We are His servants. Ashtaroth is the fertility god also known as Astarte, or Ishtar by the Assyrians and Babylonians, Aphrodite to the Greeks.

Jdg 2:14 The anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel and He delivered them into the hands of raiders who plundered them, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around so that they could no longer stand before their enemies-

As noted on :13, this was a very restrained response from Yahweh, and not actually according to the judgments threatened for forsaking Him in Dt. 28:20,21. The judgments of Dt. 29:23-27 were likewise the prophesied outcome of Israel forsaking Yahweh; and this too didn't happen at this time, by grace alone: "The whole land is sulphur, salt and burning, that it is not sown nor giving produce and no grass grows therein, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which Yahweh overthrew in His anger and in his wrath. They and all the nations shall say, Why has Yahweh done thus to this land? What does the

heat of this great anger mean? Then men shall say, Because they forsook the covenant of Yahweh the God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and went and served other gods and worshipped them, gods that they didn't know and that He had not given to them. Therefore the anger of Yahweh was kindled against this land, to bring on it all the curse that is written in this book". But instead we are to read that although God punished them, He raised up saviours to save them from the judgments; and this looks forward to His grace in the Lord Jesus, 'Yah's salvation'.

Jdg 2:15 Wherever they went the hand of Yahweh was against them for evil, as Yahweh had spoken and as Yahweh had sworn to them; and they were very distressed-

See on :18. But as noted above, He did not bring upon them all the things which He had spoken, in wrath He remembered mercy. This "distress" is the word used of the distress of the historical Jacob / Israel (Gen. 32:7), when like Israel he was confronted with his sins and led to cast himself upon God's grace.

Jdg 2:16 Yahweh raised up judges who saved them from those who plundered them-

The judgments for forsaking Yahweh were of total destruction- see on :13,14. We expect these things to therefore happen at this time; but we note God's amazing patience and gentleness in not bringing these things immediately, and instead raising up judges as saviours for this wayward people. And those saviours look forward to the Lord Jesus.

Jdg 2:17 Yet they didn't listen to their judges; for they played the prostitute after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly out of the way in which their fathers walked, who had obeyed the commandments of Yahweh. They didn't do so-

Israel is so often set up as the bride of God (Is. 54:5; 61:10; 62:4,5; Jer. 2:2; 3:14; Hos. 2:19,20). This is why any infidelity to God is spoken of as adultery (Mal. 2:11; Lev. 17:7; 20:5,6; Dt. 31:16; Jud. 2:17; 8:27,33; Hos. 9:1). The very language of Israel 'selling themselves to do iniquity' uses the image of prostitution. This is how God feels our even temporary and fleeting acts and thoughts of unfaithfulness. This is why God is jealous for us (Ex. 20:15; 34:14; Dt. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15)- because His undivided love for us is so exclusive. He expects us to be totally *His*.

Jdg 2:18 When Yahweh raised up judges for them-

God Himself 'arose and saved' Israel from Egypt (Ps. 76:9, s.w. "raised up a saviour"), and the phrase is also used of Moses in Ex. 2:17. But the people didn't want this radical deliverance from their enemies, because like the generation saved from Egypt, they were with their enemies in their hearts, and worshipped their gods as Israel had taken the idols of their Egyptian enemies with them, through the Red Sea (Ez. 20:17). So the potential possible in these raised up saviours / judges was never totally realized.

Yahweh was with the judge and saved them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge, for it grieved Yahweh because of their distress because of the oppression-

The hand of their enemies was effectively Yahweh's hand (:15). Yet God's grace worked as it were against His own judgment. We see here the tension between mercy and judgment deep within the personality of God; and the pole of grace wins out over that of necessary judgment. And this God is our God. "Grieved" is the word for "repent" (as AV); He changed His mind, because He was grieved for them. And so we read in Hos. 11:8 of how His repentings were kindled together deep within Him.

Jdg 2:19 But when the judge was dead they turned back and behaved more corruptly than their fathers in following other gods to serve them and to bow down to them. They didn't

cease from their evil practices or from their stubborn ways-

The book of Judges reflects this grace of God- showing, incidentally, that grace isn't only a New Testament theme. We are so wrong if we imagine that Judges is all about a cycle of sin, judgment, repentance, raising up a judge-saviour, salvation and restoration to God. For one thing, the cycles are never the same- for God is in passionate relationship with His people, and passionate love doesn't work to the 'same ole same ole' plan every time. Time and again we find that Israel sin, do not repent (Jud. 2:19)- and yet all the same God sends them a Saviour. They are saved without repentance, simply because God pities them (Jud. 2:15,16). They do the very things which God predicted in Deuteronomy would result in Him breaking the covenant with them (see on :13,14)- and yet He does *not* break His side of the covenant (Jud. 3:1). In all this we see an altogether profound grace, arising out of God's passionate love for His people. We simply don't 'get' how passionate is God's love for us!

After each judge they did "more corruptly" than the previous generation. We get the same impression in the record of the kings. It all gives the impression of an ever downward slide into the final apostacy which elicited the captivities in Assyria and Babylon. These are therefore presented as only happening after an amazing display of patient grace over many generations.

"Stubborn" is literally hard or difficult. The way of the flesh is difficult, just as Paul says that men crucify themselves / pierce themselves through with many sorrows through loving money (1 Tim. 6:10).

Jdg 2:20 The anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel and He said, Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers and has not listened to Me- To keep covenant was thus paralleled with listening / being obedient to God. The covenant was broken, because they had broken it rather than God. And yet for generations (see on :19), He still kept His side of it. Josh. 23:16 had said that when Israel "transgressed [My] covenant", then they would "perish quickly from off the good land". But as noted on :19, this didn't happen "quickly". God's grace waited many generations before exiling them from their land. He changed His mind, or 'repented', because of His grace; see on :18.

GNB suggests the sense is that God regularly said that He would no longer drive out the nations, every time a judge died and the people turned away: "Then the LORD would become furious with Israel and say, "This nation has broken the covenant that I commanded their ancestors to keep. Because they have not obeyed me, I will no longer drive out any of the nations"".

Jdg 2:21 I also will no longer drive out from before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died-

Israel were told to work with God to drive out the nations who lived in Canaan, because if those people remained there, they would be a spiritual temptation for Israel. But Israel sinned, they willfully followed the idols of Canaan rather than the God of Israel. And therefore God said that He would not help Israel in driving out the nations any more (Jud. 2:20,21). It was as if He was confirming them in their desire to succumb to the temptations of the surrounding nations. He as it were 'led them into temptation', and we are to pray in the words of the Lord's prayer that we are not led as they were.

Jdg 2:22 So by them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of Yahweh to walk therein as their fathers did, or not-

As discussed on :21, the test of Israel was really leading them further down the downward spiral which they themselves wanted. We note Yahweh graciously considered that "their fathers" had "kept the way of Yahweh", clearly alluding to Abraham and the patriarchs (Gen.

18:19). But this too was an imputation of righteousness by grace, for the patriarchs often strayed from that covenant, Jacob especially.

Jdg 2:23 So Yahweh left those nations without driving them out quickly and didn't deliver them into the hand of Joshua-

Josh. 23:16 had said that when Israel "transgressed [My] covenant", then they would "perish quickly from off the good land". But as noted on :19, this didn't happen "quickly" when they now transgressed the covenant. God's grace waited many generations before exiling them from their land. Instead, God puts it so positively by saying that He didn't drive out the nations "quickly". The positive nature of His grace is seen all through this sad record of human failure.

The implications that we should respond 'quickly' to the Gospel surely mean that we should not have any element of indifference in our response to the call of God, and yet the foundations of a true spiritual life cannot be laid hastily. The Father drove out the tribes from Canaan slowly, not immediately- or at least, He potentially enabled this to happen (Jud. 2:23). But Israel were to destroy those tribes "quickly" (Dt. 9:3). Here perhaps we see what is meant- progress is slow but steady in the spiritual life, but there must be a quickness in response to the call of God for action in practice. Compare this with how on one hand, God does not become quickly angry (Ps. 103:8), and yet on the other hand He *does* get angry quickly in the sense that He immediately feels and responds to sin (Ps. 2:12); His anger 'flares up in His face'.

Just as all the animals and everything in the *eretz* promised to Abraham was 'delivered into the hands' of Noah (s.w. Gen. 9:2), so the nations of that *eretz* were delivered into the hands of Israel (s.w. Ex. 6:8; 23:31; Dt. 2:24; 3:2,3; 7:24; 21:10; Josh. 2:24; Jud. 1:2). Tragically, like Adam in Eden [perhaps the same *eretz* promised to Abraham] and Noah in the new, cleansed *eretz*, Israel didn't realize this potential. What was delivered into the hand of Joshua (Josh. 2:24) actually wasn't delivered into their hand, because they disbelieved (Jud. 2:23); and this looks ahead to the disbelief of so many in the work of the Lord Jesus, who has indeed conquered the Kingdom for us. They considered the promise of the nations being delivered into their hand as somehow open to question, and only a possibility and not at all certain (Jud. 8:7; Num. 21:2 cp. Num. 21:34). Some like Jephthah (s.w. Jud. 11:32; 12:3), Ehud (Jud. 3:10,28), Deborah (Jud. 4:14), Gideon (Jud. 7:15) did, for a brief historical moment; but as individuals, and their victories were not followed up on. Instead they were dominated by the territory. And so instead, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies within the *eretz* (s.w. Lev. 26:25; Jud. 13:1).

JUDGES CHAPTER 3

Jdg 3:1 Now these are the nations which Yahweh left to test Israel, those who had not known all the wars of Canaan-

Israel do the very things which God predicted in Deuteronomy would result in Him breaking the covenant with them- and yet He does *not* break His side of the covenant. In all this we see an altogether profound grace, arising out of God's passionate love for His people. We simply don't 'get' how passionate is God's love for us! See on Jud. 2:19. Jud. 2:23 says that "Yahweh left those nations without driving them out quickly and didn't deliver them into the hand of Joshua". Josh. 23:16 had said that when Israel "transgressed [My] covenant", then they would "perish quickly from off the good land". But as noted on Jud. 2:19, this didn't happen "quickly" when they now transgressed the covenant. God's grace waited many generations before exiling them from their land. Instead, God puts it so positively by saying that He didn't drive out the nations "quickly". The positive nature of His grace is seen all through this sad record of human failure.

Yahweh left or 'gave rest' to Israel's enemies, using the very word used of how He would give rest to Israel so that they didn't experience war nor opposition from enemies. But this was reversed. They need not have had any war, if they had been loyal to the covenant. So God "left" nations in the land to teach Israel war, hoping still to lead them to a position where they would conquer those enemies in obedience to the covenant. But we note "He did this only in order to teach each generation of Israelites about war, especially those who had never been in battle before" (:2 GNB). The implication is that living at peace and safety was now never envisioned by God as being possible for Israel. Even if some future generation had never experienced war [the contemporary generation most definitely had], they likely would need to fight in future. Because they seemed bent on sin, God now foresees they would never get to a point where they would be without war. Because war, the threat from enemies, was the result of unfaithfulness to the covenant. As happened after the flood, God comes to a more realistic view of His people's weakness. Through understanding what's going on here, we can better appreciate the Kingdom prophecies which speak of Israel finally dwelling at peace and without threat from their enemies. Because they shall sin no more, and the result of righteousness shall be peace from their enemies all around them.

Jdg 3:2 so that the later generations of the children of Israel might learn battle experience, those who before knew nothing of it-

As discussed on :1, this is putting it so positively. For the reason He didn't drive out the nations was because they had broken covenant with Him (Jud. 2:19-23). Even when God punished Israel, He seems to later almost take the blame for their judgments; thus He says that He left some of the Canaanite nations in the land to teach Israel battle experience. His grace is so positive about them in the way He writes about them. Yet elsewhere the presence of those remaining nations is clearly linked to Israel's faithlessness, and their survival in the land was actually part of God's punishment of Israel. He almost excuses Israel's apostasy by saying that they had not seen the great miracles of the Exodus (Jud. 2:7). "The portion of the children of Judah was too much for them" (Josh. 19:9) almost implies God made an error in allocating them too much; when actually the problem was that they lacked the faith to drive out the tribes living there. Likewise "the coast of the children of Dan went out too little for them" (Josh. 19:47), although actually "The Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley" (Jud. 1:34). When Dan fought against Leshem, this one act of obedience is so magnified in Josh. 19:47 to sound as if in their zeal to inherit their territory they actually found they had too little land and therefore

attacked Leshem. But actually it was already part of their allotted inheritance. Yet God graciously comments: "all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel" (Jud. 18:1).

God didn't drive the nations out as a punishment and also as a test of Israel's faithfulness, which they failed by marrying into those nations and therefore worshipping their gods (Jud. 2:20-23). But here God speaks more positively of how He sought to use those nations as a training for Israel. To train their faith in Him. We marvel at God's incessant desire to save, and to use even abject human failure to somehow by all means save some.

"Learn battle experience" is literally, 'learn war'. The ideal was that God would have driven out the nations and Israel lived at peace, none making then afraid. The Kingdom age will feature "they shall learn war no more". But God now adopts a suboptimal policy. He wants to teach Israel to fight, to learn war, and so He intended to work through the nations remaining in the land. To strengthen Israel's faith. Towards the end that they would drive out all the nations and live in peace. He acts similarly if e.g. someone marries out of the Faith. He doesn't abandon them but continues working with them, even though they have made their spiritual path more difficult for themselves and less likely of success.

Jdg 3:3 the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites, the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived on Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal Hermon to the entrance of Hamath-

But Jud. 1:18 says that "Judah took Gaza with its border and Ashkelon with its border and Ekron with its border". I suggest the answer is that their victory was like those of Joshua- not followed up on. And like the victory over Jerusalem recorded in Jud. 1:8, soon after which the Jebusites were soon again entrenched in Jerusalem (Jud. 1:21). They failed to possess the Kingdom; all they did was prove themselves in the right as having the rightful, Divinely given title to it. And there is a challenge to us here, winning theological victories to prove ourselves right, but not possessing the Kingdom.

Jdg 3:4 They were left to test Israel, to know whether they would listen to the commandments of Yahweh which He commanded their fathers by Moses-

Israel were told to work with God to drive out the nations who lived in Canaan, because if those people remained there, they would be a spiritual temptation for Israel. But Israel sinned, they willfully followed the idols of Canaan rather than the God of Israel. And therefore God said that He would not help Israel in driving out the nations any more (Jud. 2:20,21). It was as if He was confirming them in their desire to succumb to the temptations of the surrounding nations. He as it were 'led them into temptation', and we are to pray in the words of the Lord's prayer that we are not led as they were.

Jdg 3:5 The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites-

Living together meant that there was a reconciliation of cultures between them. If the Israelites had been truly devoted to Yahweh's ways in practice, such reconciliation would not have been practicable; or we would be reading that the Canaanites accepted Yahweh. But the opposite happened. We read that the Israelites 'dwelt among' the Canaanites in some areas and vice versa, and this would have been as a result of making a covenant with those "inhabitants of this land" (Jud. 2:2), which in turn abrogated their exclusive covenant with Yahweh.

Jdg 3:6 and they took their daughters to be their wives and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods-

Many passages make the connection between marriage out of the covenant, and adopting idolatry: Ex. 34:12-16; Dt. 7:2-9; Jud. 3:6,7; 1 Kings 11:2,3; Mal. 2:11; 2 Cor. 6:14. Dt. 7:4 RV dogmatically predicts that a Gentile man will definitely turn away the heart of his Hebrew son-in-law... So certain is it that marriage to Gentiles leads to accepting their idols that Ezra 9:1,2 reasons that Israel hadn't separated from idols because they had married Gentiles. Time and again, those who marry out of the covenant claim that they feel strong enough to cope with it, that marriage is only a human thing, and that their spiritual relationship with God is between them and God, and unaffected by their worldly partner. Yet this is exactly the opposite of what God's word says. It's not true that you can marry into the world and be unaffected in your own spirituality. Solomon thought he could handle it; and apparently, he did- for the first 20 years or so. But his Gentile wives were his spiritual ruin at the end.

Jdg 3:7 The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh and forgot Yahweh their God, and served the Baals and the Asherahs-

Serving Yahweh was to be exclusive. Any worship of Baals was to break that exclusive covenant they had made with Yahweh and therefore to forsake or forget Yahweh (Jud. 2:12,13). But 'forsaking / forgetting Yahweh' is how He saw it. They themselves never became atheists or formally abrogated their relationship with Yahweh. They believed that they could worship Yahweh through worshipping Baal, and that they were doing nothing wrong to Him by this infidelity.

"The children of Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh" is a refrain which occurs seven times in Judges (Jud. 2:11; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1), recalling how Israel both over history and in the last days were to be punished "seven times" for their sins (Lev. 26:23,24).

Jdg 3:8 Therefore the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel and He sold them into the hand of Cushan Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia. The Israelites served Cushan Rishathaim for eight years.

The pattern of 'serving' their Canaanite conquerors and then 'crying unto the Lord' (Jud. 3:8,9,14,15) recalls their servitude to the Egyptians, resulting in Israel 'crying to the Lord' (Ex. 2:23), and being answered by the Passover deliverance - which looked forward to the events of the Lord's second coming. Their deliverances by the judges therefore also typify this. "Saviours (judges) shall come up upon mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau (so that) the Kingdom shall be the Lord's" (Obad. 21). "Saviours / judges" may be an intensive plural referring to the one true saviour / judge, Jesus.

The phrase "the Lord sold them into the hand of..." , which occurs here in Jud. 3:8, runs as a refrain throughout the record of Israel's punishment at the hand of her enemies. The force of what this will mean in practice is brought out in Dt. 32:30: "How should one chase a thousand (Jews), and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock (protecting Angel) had sold them...?". Given the huge numerical superiority of Israel's Islamist enemies, this shows a total military collapse by the Israelites in the face of this aggression. This is a far cry from the arrogance, confidence, bravery and 'fight to the death' attitude of modern Israelis.

Jdg 3:9 When the Israelites cried to Yahweh, Yahweh raised up a saviour for them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother-

God Himself 'arose and saved' Israel from Egypt (Ps. 76:9, s.w. "raised up a saviour"), and

the phrase is also used of Moses in Ex. 2:17. But the people didn't want this radical deliverance from their enemies, because like the generation saved from Egypt, they were with their enemies in their hearts, and worshipped their gods as Israel had taken the idols of their Egyptian enemies with them, through the Red Sea (Ez. 20:17). So the potential possible in these raised up saviours / judges was never totally realized.

Jdg 3:10 The Spirit of Yahweh came on him and he judged Israel. He went out to war and Yahweh delivered Cushan Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Cushan Rishathaim-

We can too easily skim read these verses and fail to appreciate how huge was the victory. "Mesopotamia" was the vast region between the Euphrates and Tigris; the Hebrew is Aram-naharaim 'Syria of the two rivers,' usually held to designate the country between the Euphrates and the Tabor (2 Kings 17:6). This king was mighty and ruled a large territory. He was perhaps seeking to get access to the sea, hence he attacked Israel. But this great king and his army were slain by the small clan of Othniel in the South of Judah.

Just as all the animals and everything in the *eretz* promised to Abraham was 'delivered into the hands' of Noah (s.w. Gen. 9:2), so the nations of that *eretz* were delivered into the hands of Israel (s.w. Ex. 6:8; 23:31; Dt. 2:24; 3:2,3; 7:24; 21:10; Josh. 2:24; Jud. 1:2). Tragically, like Adam in Eden [perhaps the same *eretz* promised to Abraham] and Noah in the new, cleansed *eretz*, Israel didn't realize this potential. What was delivered into the hand of Joshua (Josh. 2:24) actually wasn't delivered into their hand, because they disbelieved (Jud. 2:23); and this looks ahead to the disbelief of so many in the work of the Lord Jesus, who has indeed conquered the Kingdom for us. They considered the promise of the nations being delivered into their hand as somehow open to question, and only a possibility and not at all certain (Jud. 8:7; Num. 21:2 cp. Num. 21:34). Some like Jephthah (s.w. Jud. 11:32; 12:3), Ehud (Jud. 3:10,28), Deborah (Jud. 4:14), Gideon (Jud. 7:15) did, for a brief historical moment; but as individuals, and their victories were not followed up on. Instead they were dominated by the territory. And so instead, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies within the *eretz* (s.w. Lev. 26:25; Jud. 13:1).

This king of Cush (also featured in Ez. 38:5, N.I.V.) has the epithet 'Rishathaim', meaning 'double wickedness'. These things point forward to the conflicts of the latter days between the Lord Jesus, Israel's ultimate judge / saviour, and the latter day enemies of Israel within the land promised to Abraham. This serves to emphasize how the latter day invasion will be headed up by an individual who is unashamedly a 'man of sin', a true anti-Christ. He was "king of Mesopotamia" (Jud. 3:8), literally meaning 'Aram (Syria) of the two rivers', i.e. Tigris and Euphrates. This would point to a geographical location in modern Iran / Iraq.

Jdg 3:11 The land had rest forty years. Othniel the son of Kenaz died-

The forty years rest of Jud. 3:11; 5:31; 8:28 may not be a literal period. I have elsewhere noted that the forty year reigns of Saul, David and Solomon create chronological problems if read literally. The idea may be that forty years was a time of testing, as it was for Israel in the wilderness. We think of the Lord's 40 days of testing too. In this case, they were tested by peace. And they consistently failed, as God's people often do.

Jdg 3:12 The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh. Yahweh strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of

Yahweh-

This hints, perhaps, at a relatively sudden revival / strengthening of Israel's enemies, allowed by God in order to punish His people. They dominate Israel, they repent, and then cry to Yahweh for a saviour- and the Lord Jesus will be sent. It could be argued that this has indeed occurred since the discovery of oil in the Arab states; alternatively it could refer to a sudden revival after a dramatic defeat by Israel and/or her Western allies. Jer. 48:47 NIV clearly speaks of a revival of Moab's fortunes in the last days.

The repeated mention of Edom, Moab and Ammon in the prophets is hard to interpret specifically, seeing that these nations covered relatively small geographical areas which are now in Jordan and Syria. It may be that it is from these nations that the latter day onslaught is launched. We can, perhaps, therefore look to those countries becoming increasingly radicalized against Israel.

Jdg 3:13 He gathered to him the Ammonites and Amalek and he went and struck Israel; and they took possession of the city of palm trees-

Amalek was a tribe fated to destruction by God (Ex. 17:14), so we immediately suspect that this domination of Israel will come to destruction.

This should be seen against the background of many Scriptural indications that the latter-day entity dominating Israel in their land will comprise a confederacy of surrounding nations, united by the single desire of attacking Israel. Psalm 83 is a notable example of this. We note these attackers came from the east, over Jordan, and took Jericho (Dt. 34:3), perhaps making it their headquarters on the west bank of the Jordan. However, "the city of palm trees" could also have been En-gaddi, since Jericho had been destroyed by Joshua and wasn't rebuilt until the time of Ahab (1 Kings 16:34).

Jdg 3:14 The Israelites served Eglon king of Moab for eighteen years-

"Eglon" means 'calf', the same word used of the calves later worshipped by Israel. He was named after his idol, and yet Yahweh strengthened him (:12) in order to punish His people. God may use people, but that usage doesn't mean that He therefore approves of them. We too may be used by God, but this is no evidence of our acceptability with Him. He is described as "fat" and is slain with a knife- as if this was the slaying of the fatted calf. In the prodigal parable, the Lord interprets this as a celebration for repentance. Possibly Israel had sinned and repented, and Ehud was raised up in response to that. Or more likely, God counted Israel as having repented when they hadn't.

Jdg 3:15 But when the Israelites cried to Yahweh, Yahweh raised up a saviour for them, Ehud the son of Gera the Benjamite, a left-handed man. The children of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab-

It seems from 1 Chron. 8:6 that Ehud's family were carried captive to Mahanath, a place in Moab. And this would explain his motivation in fighting to free Israel from Moabite domination. The Ehud of 1 Chron. 8:6 was also a Benjamite [from Geba] who was related to Gera; see note there. Left handed people were considered strange and often relegated to the periphery of society in primitive societies; we see again how almost all the judges had something which made them despised and rejected. And yet it was exactly that group which God delighted to use to save His people (Jud. 3:15). We notice how God used left handed people to give David victory (1 Chron. 12:2), and to punish their hypocritical brethren (Jud. 20:16), and also the left handed Jael (Jud. 5:26 LXX). He seems to rejoice in using those

whom man despises. See on :21. It's also possible that Ehud was right handed but had lost use of his right hand, thus making him effectively left handed. The Hebrew for 'Left-handed' here is literally 'a shut up right hand'. It isn't the same as in :21 where we are told of his left hand. That again would support the theme- that human strength is taken away so that God may be glorified through human weakness. And although he was of Benjamin, the son of the right hand, that was somehow shut up or disabled. This explains why there's something odd in the grammar of the phrase "the Benjamite". Literally it reads "a son of the right hand". Perhaps the idea is that the son of the right hand has his right hand somehow disabled, so that he is left handed. His natural ability has been removed. Ehud couldn't be the man he was intended to be. And all this was part of God's psychological background work in 'raising up' Ehud to save Israel.

I discuss on Jud. 20:16 how Benjamin were noted by the other tribes for having a regiment of left handed men. Benjamin means 'son of the right hand', the firstborn- something Judah and the other tribes bitterly resented. It's as if they were known as 'left handers', famed or mocked by the other Israelites for their left handed slinging regiment- as a dig against their role as being sons of the right hand. And this tension was behind the way the Israelites were later eager for an excuse to wipe out the tribe of Benjamin. Left handedness is associated with sexual deviance, homosexuality and femininity in some African cultures, and it quite likely was in the time of Judges. "Sinister" literally means 'left handed'. "Men shook hands with their right hands since it was this hand that carried any weapon and if a weapon was being carried shaking hands could not take place". Indeed losing the right hand was seen as a punishment for sexual deviance. Ehud would have felt misunderstood and misjudged, perhaps contributing to his initial desire to make a suicide mission to assassinate Eglon. Probably his personal desperation was stronger than any courage that came from faith. In their culture at the time, being 'normal' was all important. And it was not normal to be left handed. And so many of us fall into that category, of those not considered 'normal'. But God uses those very abnormalities. The point is that the man who was of the right handed tribe was in fact left handed; he fitted the image of a man who didn't live up to his name, and was perhaps mocked because of it. But it was that despised left hand which God was to use. And so continues a great theme in Judges, that God uses the marginalized and disdained as His great warriors. Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah... the left handed, female, youngest son, illegitimate son of a prostitute. Just as Ehud uses a home made dagger with his left hand, others use an ox goad, a tent peg, water pitchers instead of swords, a millstone thrown over a wall, the jawbone of a donkey... the weak, everyday things of life. This is still how God's Spirit works.

If Ehud's right hand was deformed, and he had no sword on his left thigh, Eglon would not have suspected that Ehud had any nefarious purpose in wanting to come close to him. God worked through the left-ness of Ehud. The man who had lost use of his right hand was not fit for military service; but he became the great warrior deliverer of Israel. The right hand is associated with good things (Is. 48:13; Ex. 15:6; Ps. 89:25; 110:1), morality (Ps. 137:5), approval (Gen. 48:13-20; Ps. 80:17; Is. 41:13) and purity (Ex. 29:20; Lev. 8:23; 14:14,17). But the left hand is associated with the opposites of these things. The rejected go to the left hand; and Ecc. 10:2 sums it up: "A wise man's mind is at his right, and the fool's mind at his left". But through this weakness, God works.

Ehud was "raised up" by God, but clearly worked on his own initiative. His plan involved making himself a dagger (:16), carefully working out an assassination plot based on his knowledge of Eglon's palace after having been there many times taking tribute; and a cunning

plan to pretend to have received a message from the idols at Gilgal for Eglon. This was all a result of ideas forming in his own mind, and having the single minded courage to develop them. Yet all this was under God's control, 'raising him up' for the moment.

Jdg 3:16 Ehud made himself a sword which had two edges, a cubit in length; and he wore it under his clothing on his right thigh-

"Made himself" is literally 'made him', and could as well mean that he made the sword as a gift for Eglon- but in presenting it to him, plunged it into Eglon to murder him. There is irony throughout. Eglon, the fatted 'calf' [as Eglon means] was sacrificially offered. For the dagger recalled the priestly knives. Whereas Ehud had been bringing sacrifices to Eglon. We ponder whether all this irony and mockery was in fact of the Spirit. Yet still God worked through it all. Ehud was a man of a disabled right arm; he did whatever he did with his left hand. To fashion a sharp knife with only his left hand would not have been easy. And the record stresses that he "made [it] himself". We are left to imagine him struggling one handed with the hot metal, making some kind of vice to hold the knife as he sharpened it... And so the one handed man made a two edged sword / dagger / knife, with its own hilt. The way he makes it himself, and returns from the idols to Eglon alone, all suggests he had planned the assassination carefully- and without the involvement of anyone else. Because, I suggest, he thought of it as a suicide mission. God worked through the hand of this disabled, suicidal, left handed loner... For men who think up suicide missions do so for many reasons. Not just bravery or a desire to achieve a greater good for their own side at the cost of their life. The desire to end their own lives can also play a large part, and this was likely the case with Ehud. But as with Samson, God worked through it. We note that the Spirit only came upon Ehud after his assassination of Eglon. The assassination itself was apparently his own plan, although part of his being 'raised up' for the job of delivering Israel from Moab.

This is presumably measuring by the "short cubit," i.e. the length from the elbow to the knuckles, about 13 inches or 33 cm. The idea of a saviour with a two edged sword looks ahead to the Lord Jesus and His latter day deliverance of His people from the same neighbouring peoples (Rev. 1:16).

Jdg 3:17 He offered the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man-

There is a strange emphasis on Eglon's physical form. "Eglon was a very fat man" is supported by the detailed and gory record of his death by stabbing: "Ehud... thrust it (the dagger) into his belly: 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" (Jud. 3:17,21,22). The men of Moab are likewise described as "lusty" (Jud. 3:29), the Hebrew word meaning literally 'oily, greasy', and implying fatness. All this emphasis - and it is that - must be for a reason. Surely it suggests that the Moabites had indulged themselves in the good life, eating and drinking to excess - doubtless at the expense of the Israelites whom they were then dominating. This would indicate that the latter day enemies of Israel will be enjoying great material prosperity, yet most standard-of-living indicators show that Israel's neighbours generally are far from having this. A massive redistribution of wealth brought about by revolutions, coupled with holding the West to ransom with oil prices and pillaging the wealth of Israel, would easily bring about this situation.

However, LXX gives "handsome", and the word translated "fat" is used also of flourishing animals and plants (Gen. 41:2,5; 1 Kings 5:3). It is the word used for Daniel and his friends appearing so healthy and strong (Dan. 1:13, as Ps. 73:4). But generally the word is used of animals, perhaps inviting us to see Ehud as a priest sacrificing Eglon, whose name means 'bull'. "Present" is mentioned three times and the word *mincha* can mean 'sacrifice'. But Ehud

sacrifices the fattened calf Eglon with a priestly knife.

Jdg 3:18 When he had finished offering the tribute he sent away the people who carried the tribute-

This could have happened at Eglon's palace in Moab, or at his field headquarters in the "city of Palm trees" (:13), which I suggested was En-gaddi or Jericho (see on :28). It seems Ehud wanted to operate totally alone; possibly because there was nobody of exactly the same mind in the group of Israelites accompanying him. This would be a sad reflection on how willing they were to be subjugated; and also a parade example in serving God alone, even if our brethren are weak; see on :19.

Jdg 3:19 but he himself turned back from the idols that were by Gilgal and said, I have a secret errand to you, king. The king said, Keep silence! All his attendants left him-

This language could suggest that "he himself" turned away from idolatry, but his brethren were happy to remain with the idols. The assassination had to be carried out by himself alone because he had nobody of a similar mind to support him. See on :26. *"Turned back" carries the idea of repentance. Perhaps only at this point did Ehud repent of idolatry; hence the significance of him passing beyond the idols on his return.* "Gilgal" means a circle, so perhaps the "hewn images" were arranged in a circle. We are left guessing what happened to the other Israelites. Ehud alone "turned back from the idols" so we are left to guess that the others stayed there worshipping them. Ehud acted alone, spiritually and in every way. He never shared his mission with anyone else, for likely the mindset of the Israelites was as in Samson's time- accepting that the Gentiles ruled over them, and not seeking to overthrow them in any realistic way. They simply complained of their burdens, just as many today. The way God worked through Ehud to save them was therefore grace itself to the undeserving. "Errand" is literally a 'word', which is why the king asks his servants to be silent and to leave- so that the prophetic word could be heard by him.

"Secret message" is literally 'a hidden thing'. Ehud has in view his hidden dagger. He is constantly being sarcastic and ironic- not an altogether spiritual characteristic. The sarcasm and irony continues, in that it was the king himself who commanded his servants to leave him alone with Ehud. Ehud could not have contrived this, nor could he have asked them to leave. This was God's hand confirming him in his brave mission- which may well have been planned by him as a suicide mission, hence him going alone. For had he murdered Eglon, the servants would soon have murdered him. The long delay of the servants in unlocking the door and finding Eglon dead, a delay just long enough to allow Ehud to escape with his life, was likewise surely the hand of Divine providence which Ehud could not have himself orchestrated. We also reflect how Eglon didn't scream when stabbed or in his death throes [possibly any groaning from him was thought to be the sound of the obese man having another stomach upset]- again, Ehud could not have orchestrated this. Had Eglon screamed, his servants surely would have heard and come to arrest Ehud. Likewise the servants didn't check or frisk Ehud's right thigh where his dagger was hidden. They saw his right hand was deformed and there was no sword on his left thigh, as would be normal for a right handed man; and so presumably they let him go in to Eglon. All these things lead us to suspect again that he himself had planned it all as a suicide mission; but God saved him from death at that point, so that he could rally Israel by his example.

Jdg 3:20 Ehud came to him as he was sitting alone in the cool upper room. Ehud said, I have a message from God to you. He arose out of his seat-

The cameraman of Divine inspiration is zoomed close in here upon the two men. We are told that the room is an upper room, and cool; we see Eglon arising out of his seat, perhaps with some difficulty if he were obese. "God" is *elohim*, and Ehud is pretending that he has been to the idols near Gilgal, the *elohim*, and has been sent back by them to Eglon with a personal message for him. Balak, another king of Moab, likewise "rose up" to hear the oracle from Balaam. And we think of Samuel taking Saul aside alone to give him a word from the Lord (1 Sam. 9:27). Oracles were sometimes given to kings by priests or local rulers as a sign that they accepted the king's sovereignty over them. And Ehud is surely doing this. Ehud's deceit is of a very high level. Although his personal bravery isn't in question, and was surely an outcome of his faith, a higher level would surely have been to simply trust in Yahweh and in Yahweh's Name attack the Moabites and liberate territory from them. But Ehud's bravery and huge risk is of such an extraordinary level that we naturally hesitate before suggesting he could have done even better. But it seems to me that he could have done even better... by not pretending he actually was an idol worshipper.

Jdg 3:21 Ehud put forth his left hand and took the sword from his right thigh and thrust it into his body-

Again there is the stress on the fact that Ehud used his left hand; see on :15. He presumably was grasping the king, about to whisper in his ear a message from God. And perhaps he did indeed have a message from God which he whispered as he stabbed him.

Jdg 3:22 The handle also went in after the blade and the fat closed on the blade, for he didn't draw the sword out of his body, and it came out behind-

It would seem that AV "and the dirt came out" may be correct. Ehud knew he only had one chance, to kill the man immediately without him screaming in agony to attract attention. So he would have struck him with full force. But the idea may also be that the man was as it were pierced right through; the image of total victory used several times of God's piercing through of His latter day enemies. Or we could render the phrase to the intent that he immediately went out into the *parshedon*, or inner chamber, and thence to the next chamber (:23). This would continue the very fine attention to detail noted on :20.

ESV "and the dung came out". This turned Eglon's throne into a toilet chair or seat. The irony and sarcasm of the record surely reflects Ehud's thinking; and such an attitude seems suboptimal in spiritual terms.

Jdg 3:23 Then Ehud went out into the porch and shut the doors of the upper room on him and locked them-

As noted on :20, we have a very close attention to detail here. He managed to make the door lock after he closed it. Ehud clearly planned the assassination carefully. He would have been familiar with the layout of the palace because he had presumably been there several times before, offering tribute during the 18 years of Moabite domination of Israel (:14). Yet bringing the tribute to Eglon could be seen as a sign of weakness. But through that, God worked. For it gave Ehud knowledge of the palace layout.

Jdg 3:24 Now when he had gone out, the servants came and saw that the doors of the upper room were locked, and they said, Surely he is covering his feet in the upper room-

Covering the feet is an idiom for sleeping (1 Sam. 24:3), but it could be that it also means 'to go to the toilet'. His obesity may have been such that he had frequent bowel problems, of which he was embarrassed, and they assumed he had locked the doors for the sake of his own privacy.

There is a bitter sarcasm in the record. Eglon was indeed going to the toilet, in that his excrement flowed out from his wound and he was lying in it. This sarcasm reflects how Ehud had planned things. And we again question whether such bitter sarcasm was right when doing God's work. So much could have gone wrong for Ehud, but nowhere does he hint at praise of God's grace to him. Rather does the record reflect his perspective, of shaming an enemy and making him and his people a laughingstock. But that surely isn't God's approach to His enemies. The AV brings out better the triple usage of "Behold". We are given as it were a slow motion description of the servants' actions and confusion. We aren't given such slow motion description of Ehud's escape and flight. The record seems to reflect Ehud's intention- to mock and poke fun at the Moabites, as their inaction is contrasted with his dashing heroism as he successfully exits the palace and flees: "They saw that, *behold*, the doors of the parlour were locked, they said, Surely he covereth his feet in his summer chamber. 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". We note the similarities between Ehud's left handed, deceptive murder of Eglon, claiming to have a quiet word for his victim; and the deception used by Joab to assassinate Abner and Amasa, again using his left hand in an unexpected left handed thrust and shedding out the bowels of the victim (2 Sam. 3:27; 20:8-10). Joab's assassinations were wrong, as the record makes clear (1 Kings 2:5,6,31,32). But we wonder whether he was inspired by Ehud; and that raises the question as to whether Ehud used the right methods to assassinate Eglon. Even though God worked through them. Just as He did through Samson's very deceptive and morally wrong ways of murdering Philistines.

Jdg 3:25 They waited until they were ashamed; but still he didn't open the doors of the upper room, therefore they took the key and opened them and behold, their lord was fallen down dead on the earth-

"Still he didn't open the doors of the upper room" is written from the perspective of the servants. For we know, as the readers, that their king is lying there dead. But the Bible chops and changes in whose perspective it adopts, and this is helpful to remember when assessing the language of demons in the New Testament.

Jdg 3:26 Ehud escaped while they waited and passed beyond the idols and escaped to Seirah- This was a daring, single handed assassination that reflected a deep faith within Ehud. I suggested on :19 that the assassination had to be carried out by himself alone because he had nobody of a similar mind to support him. His brethren were happy to remain with the idols (:19), but Ehud passed beyond them- to true relationship with Yahweh. "Seirah" has not been defined as a town, and may be the name for the forests of the hill country of Ephraim (:27). The record continually mocks at the enemy, calling Eglon a fat cow sacrificed by Ehud, who cleverly duped the dumb courtiers. And here, Ehud "escaped" whilst none of the Moabites "escaped" Israel (:29 s.w.). The *pesilim* ["idols"] may refer to carved pagan stones which the Moabites had set up as boundary markers on the territory they had taken over from the Israelites. They probably had an image of Eglon and his gods upon them, like other boundary markers which have been unearthed, which is why Ehud claims he has received a revelation from those gods to give to Eglon.

Jdg 3:27 When he had arrived, he blew a trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went down with him from the hill country, and he went before them-

I suggested on :19 and :26 that Ehud was pretty much alone in his high level of devotion to Yahweh. But although the other Israelites were spiritually weak, they still had some potential

strength; and Ehud's example inspired them to come forward for the Lord. If [like Elijah] he had despised them for their unspirituality, then they would not have rallied to him.

There is no record of Ehud telling the Israelites that he had slain Eglon. He urges them to follow him- "he went before them"- to attack the Moabites. Clearly his single handed act of faith inspired him to further faith, and somehow his confidence in victory inspired Israel.

Jdg 3:28 He said to them Follow me, for Yahweh has delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. They followed him and took the fords of the Jordan opposite the Moabites and didn't allow any man to pass over-

I suggest that Eglon was based at "the city of palms" which he had made his headquarters on the western side of Jordan. Now he had been slain, the Moabites wanted to flee back over the Jordan to Moab. Ehud guessed this would happen, and so took the fords of Jordan. "Opposite the Moabites" would then mean "before the Moabites arrived".

Ehud was a man whose right hand was closed or restricted. But he had assassinated Eglon with his left hand. And so he urges Israel that their "hand" too can prevail, and :30 confirms this by saying that Moab was subdued under the hand of Israel. If the deformed hand of Ehud could do what he did, so could the weak hand of Israel. And we are also to be inspired by the victories of those who one way or another are limited in their right hand. We love watching handicapped people achieving great things... and should be inspired that we too can arise above our own handicaps. Ehud's victory was intended to be the inspiration for Israel's. Thus the fatness of Eglon is repeated in :29, where the 10,000 Moabites slain were all 'fat' or strong (Heb.). Above all, the Lord's victory as a man of our nature is to inspire us to likewise overcome.

Jdg 3:29 They struck down about ten thousand Moabite men at that time, every strong man and every man of valour, and none escaped-

See on :17. The word for "thousand", especially when used in a military context, doesn't necessarily refer to a literal 1,000. Rather can it mean some kind of military subdivision.

Jdg 3:30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. The land had rest for eighty years-

The nations in the land being "subdued" was the outcome of Israel being obedient to the covenant (s.w. Dt. 9:3). We read this word "subdued" used of how the land was at times subdued before Israel (Jud. 3:30; 4:23; 8:28; 11:33). But each time it is clear that the people generally were not obedient to the covenant. One faithful leader was, and the results of his faithfulness were counted to the people. This is what happened with the Lord's death leading to righteousness being imputed to us.

Jdg 3:31 After him came Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed six hundred Philistine men with an ox goad, and he also saved Israel-

Anath is clearly a reference to Anat, the god of warriors. He was named according to a belief that he as a warrior would have Anat supporting him. But again we see, as with Jael and Gideon, how being surrounded by a background and culture of spiritual error and weakness didn't preclude people from rising above it. And so it is today.

Some pointings of the Hebrew in Jud. 3:31 have Shamgar killing 600 Philistines with an ox goad or "mattock" [as LXX]- using whatever came to hand in workaday life. Likewise Samson killing 1000 men with the jawbone of an ass (Jud. 15:14,15). Likewise Jael with her

[wooden] tent peg and mallet.

The Hebrew phrase "attack... and save" is used in 1 Sam. 23:2 when David is uncertain about whether to attack the Philistines. David is being pointed back by this allusion to the zeal of Shamgar the son of Anath, 'the answer'. The answer to David's question was in Shamgar. David was spiritually and mentally exhausted at this time, and God's way forward for him at this time was to get up and be proactive for others. That is not always the right answer for us in our low moments, but when it is, we will be directed to it by God, perhaps through allusion to Biblical characters.

Samson's victory at Lehi may have inspired Shammah to slay the Philistines at the same place, years later (2 Sam. 23:11; AV "into a troop" is Heb. "Lehi"). And yet Samson's victory with a donkey jawbone would have been inspired by Shamgar's victory with an ox goad (Jud. 3:31). This is how the body of Christ should function; one spiritual victory inspiring another.

JUDGES CHAPTER 4

Jdg 4:1 The children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, when Ehud was dead-

This is the intentionally repeated cycle of all the historical records, both of the judges and kings. Israel's apparent loyalty to Yahweh was only seen at the time of strong individual reformist leaders. Immediately the leader died, they returned to unashamed idolatry. Clearly the message is that no matter what strong leadership there may be amongst God's people, or what truly spiritual ethos and culture is inculcated by them- the hearts of individuals can still be untouched by it. And so without that culture, if the church closes or the individual moves away geographically or cannot attend due to health issues, or the leader dies... the commitment of the individual will be shown to have been meaningless. We must ask ourselves how our faith would really be, if we were taken away from the Godly influences and cultures in our lives. If individual believers were forcibly removed from their churches and spiritual networks- would their faith stand? This is why we must continue our appeal for personal Bible reading, indeed Bible study, and serious personal prayer and witnessing.

"The children of Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh" is a refrain which occurs seven times in Judges (Jud. 2:11; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1), recalling how Israel both over history and in the last days were to be punished "seven times" for their sins (Lev. 26:23,24). But another refrain in Judges is that every man did what was right in his own eyes- but what is right in our own eyes, following our own heart, is usually not what is right in God's eyes.

Jdg 4:2 Yahweh sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan who reigned in Hazor-

Josh. 11 speaks of Joshua totally destroying Hazor so that no Canaanite remained there. But clearly the site had been re-taken and populated again. Just as happens with the victories of Joshua-Jesus against everything that might be a barrier to our inheritance of the Kingdom. Joshua's destruction of "Jabin" is understandable once we perceive that "Jabin" was not a personal name but a title, like 'Pharaoh'.

Yahweh sold them, but the record often says that they sold or prostituted themselves to the idols of the nations. He will confirm men in the path they wish to go.

The record of Deborah and Barak's victory over "Jabin king of Canaan" is shot through with connections with other passages which are clearly latter day prophecies, e.g. Ps. 83, Ez. 38. There is also a very deliberate series of allusions in their song of victory to Israel's exodus from Egypt and the destruction of Pharaoh's army - which is also prophetic of Israel's future deliverance from her neighbouring oppressors by the Lord's return. Other expositors have shown the links between the song of Deborah and Barak and Ps. 68, which is clearly

prophetic of Christ's work of deliverance both on the cross and in the final deliverance of Israel from the forces of evil.

"Jabin" meaning "man of great understanding" may suggest that he was the intellectual think-tank behind the confederacy, whose ideology was operationalized by a capable, well resourced, military leader (Sisera). The motivation for the coming attack on Israel must be ideological as well as just "to take a great spoil". However, the words of Sisera's mother imply that he (and she!) personally was motivated by a desire for the riches of the Israelites: "Have they not divided the prey... of divers colours of needlework... meet for the necks of them that take the spoil?" (Jud. 5:30). Such total confidence in victory is yet to be seen in a Middle East scarred with the memories of Israel's victories over the last decades.

The captain of whose army was Sisera who lived in Harosheth of the Gentiles-
This presents an identical scenario to Sennacherib king of Assyria having Rabshakeh as his field commander during his attack on Jerusalem, which beyond doubt was a major type of Israel's latter day invasion outlined in passages like Ez. 38 and Ps. 83.

Jdg 4:3 The Israelites cried to Yahweh, for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and for twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel-

"Oppress" is the word used of how Israel were oppressed in Egypt (Ex. 3:9). But the intention, as with Israel's latter day oppression, is that it would lead them to cry out for Yahweh's salvation, 'Jesus': "For they will cry to Yahweh because of oppressors, and He will send them a saviour and a defender, and He will deliver them" (Is. 19:20 s.w.). All the judges were therefore types of the ultimate deliverance of Israel by the Lord Jesus in the last days.

The fearful implications of "chariots of iron" [probably wooden chariots with iron scythes on the wheels] is hard for us to fully appreciate. "The children of Joseph said... the Canaanites that dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron" (Josh. 17:16), as if that were a totally understandable reason for their unwillingness to even challenge the Canaanites; whilst some years later Saul and Jonathan were the only Israelites to have iron weapons, thanks to the Philistines' monopoly over it (1 Sam. 13:19-22). Possession of 900 "chariots of iron" was therefore like having some super-weapon into whose paradigm no other armaments could enter. This may have its latter day equivalent during the coming period of Israel's total domination by her neighbours. See on :15. The scythes on the wheels were specifically intended to destroy foot soldiers on flat ground. Yet Barak charged down Tabor onto the flat ground, his men at his "feet", as foot soldiers, with no shield nor spear [according to Jud. 5], to engage with these chariots. This was in total faith. And his 'coming down' Tabor matches Yahweh's 'coming down' in victory.

Jdg 4:4 Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, judged Israel at that time-

"Deborah" is usually interpreted as meaning 'bee', but clearly it is a form of the common Hebrew word for 'word' or 'saying', *debar*. The prophetess was a woman of the word, and as with many personal names, she was named after her life's work- just as Anglo Saxons carry the name carpenter, smith, buckler, joiner etc. She "judged Israel" perhaps in the sense of giving them judgments from God's word. A judge was a deliverer, and being a judge was being a deliverer (Jud. 2:16; 3:10). She is not recorded as having delivered Israel and so we assume her 'judging' Israel was in teaching them the law, and thereby resolving disputes. Doing what the Levites were intended to do, but clearly didn't do- as we see from the accounts of Levites in Jud. 17-21. Judges typically received a commission or were filled with the Spirit; but we don't read of that with Deborah. Most of the judges are described as having been raised up by Yahweh to save Israel (Jud. 3:9,15; 6:14; 10:14,15; 13:5); and they were empowered to do so by Yahweh's spirit (Jud. 3:10,28; 6:16,34; 7:22; 8:3; 11:29,32; 13:25; 14:19; 15:14; 16:20). The judges "save" Israel; but that term is never used about Deborah (cp.

Jud. 2:16; 3:9,15,31; 6:14,15; 8:22; 10:1; 13:5). None of these things are ever stated of Deborah. This sets us up to be somewhat uneasy about her from the start; and we will see that she continually reflects pride. She is not later listed as a judge in 1 Sam. 12:9-11 LXX, but Barak is; and Barak is the one noted by name for his faith in Heb. 11:32.

Jdg 4:5 She lived under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came up to her for judgment-

Presumably this refers just to those Israelites who wanted to hear the judgments of God's word. She laments in Jud. 5:10 LXX that she was largely ignored, and she rebukes those who ignored her prophetic words and had been unwilling to assist in the battle: "Ye that sit on the judgment-seat, and walk by the roads of them that sit in judgment by the way". It was Deborah who sat by the roadside giving judgment from God's word, and who was largely ignored

Note the parallel between an Angel sitting under an oak and a prophetess sitting under an oak (Jud. 4:5; 6:11). In Jer. 23:18,22 we find prophets standing in the "council of the Lord" (RV) to receive His word; and yet this sounds very much like Angels standing in the court of Heaven to receive God's word of command. "The God of the spirits [Angels] of the prophets sent his Angel" to the prophet John (Rev. 22:6 RV); implying that as God had sent His Angel-Spirits to inspire the prophets, so now He did to John. Ps. 147:15,18 speak of the sending out of God's word to melt snow and send rain; this must surely refer to the Angels being sent out from the court of Heaven to do these things. The way the "watcher and holy one" came down from Heaven is paralleled with the word of Divine command likewise coming down from Heaven (Dan. 4:23,31). The universe is not just ticking away on clockwork; the Angels are actively being sent out from Heaven to perform what may appear the most mundane and repetitious of things. Thus God sends out His Angels; He sends out His word; and He also sent out His prophets (Haggai- Hag. 1:12; Ezekiel- Ez. 3:5,6). God rose up and sent out His prophets (2 Kings 17:13; Jer. 7:25 and many others). He is described as doing this because those prophets likewise identified with the word (as Deborah- see on :4) and became part of their own message.

The geography is significant. Deborah lived in the south, and apparently had little ability to motivate many of the people around her, according to her lament in Judges 5. She sends a message to a man in the far north of Israel, telling him to rally 10,000 men and go and fight a far superior enemy. That Barak responds to this message, and from a woman, sent from a distance, is commendable. It was a great act of faith, even if his faith wasn't as total as it might have been, and reveals his huge respect for Deborah, 'woman of the word / *debar*'.

Jdg 4:6 She sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh Naphtali and said to him-

'The holy place of Naphtali' is an example of the pagan place names still being used. Barak is being called to leave all that and go and work for Yahweh in His strength. "Barak", 'lightning', is the word used to describe Yahweh's miraculous manifestation through lightnings in the saving of His people (s.w. Dt. 32:41; 2 Sam. 22:15), and He will use them again in the last days when He repeats these ancient victories over Israel's enemies (s.w. Hab. 3:11; Zech. 9:14). But Barak was slow and nervous to live up to the potential victory which was implicit in his name; and that was the tragedy of Israel's history at the conquest. And it is the abiding tragedy of so much spiritual history.

Hasn't Yahweh, the God of Israel, commanded-

This could imply he had received the prophetic word to go into battle, but had not responded. Jud. 5:2 LXX says that "A revelation was made in Israel when the people were made

willing", referring to the specific prophetic word given to Deborah here in Jud. 4:6,7 that victory was possible- if the people were willing. Which Barak wasn't, completely.

'Go to Mount Tabor and take with you ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and Zebulun?'

"Mount Tabor... the river Kishon (Jud. 4:6,7) is near the valley of Jezreel -

Armageddon. Hence Jud. 5:19 speaks of "the waters of Megiddo", and "men of... Naphtali... and... of Zebulun" from those same areas (4:6) were used to win the victory. "Take with you", AV "draw toward", is s.w. :7 for how God would likewise draw the enemy toward them. The two sides were to be drawn together by God in conflict.

This records the call to arms as only for Naphtali and Zebulun. But the other tribes are criticized in Jud. 5 for not entering into the spirit of the event. The need is the call, and no legalistic arguments can stop that call. The calling of 10000 men of Naphtali and Zebulun to Mount Tabor by Barak and Deborah surely was some fulfilment of the otherwise enigmatic Dt. 33:19: "They shall call the peoples to the mountain. There they will offer sacrifices of righteousness, for they shall draw out the abundance of the seas". This prophecy has as context "the ten thousands of Ephraim; they are the thousands of Manasseh" (Dt. 33:17). The impression is given there that they would offer sacrifice there on "the mountain" and share the spoil of "the seas" [nations], and possibly this happened as Deborah sung the song of Jud. 5. The people of Ephraim and Manasseh are first in the list mentioned in Jud. 5 as those who supported the thousands of Zebulun and Naphtali, and who assembled to the mountain of Tabor. Asher and Dan are criticized in Jud. 5 for not assembling to Tabor because they were too concerned with their business in their ports on the coast. But Dt. 33:19 LXX promises blessing to Zebulun and Naphtali from the coast: "For the wealth of the sea shall suckle thee, and so shall the marts of them that dwell by the sea-coast".

Jdg 4:7 I will draw to you, to the river Kishon-

This 'drawing' points forward to Gog, the chief (military?) prince of Meshech and Tubal (parts of Assyria?), being drawn into Israel with hooks in his jaws (Ez. 38:4,8). The Kishon is little more than a muddy trench. But God uses the little things, and made it swell and flash flood the plain so that the chariots and horses, Sisera's super weapon, became useless.

Sisera the captain of Jabin's army with his chariots and his multitude, and I will deliver him into your hand'-

The apparently insuperable strength of Sisera is recognized, but within that recognition there is the encouragement that God would deliver it all into the hand of Barak. He disbelieved this, and so the victory was given into the hand of a woman. Thus God set up a potential which a man didn't realize, and in this case, He transferred it into the hands of another (:9).

Jdg 4:8 Barak said to her, If you will go with me then I will go, but if you will not go with me I will not go-

If Yahweh had commanded him (:6), then Yahweh would be with him. But just as Israel wanted a human king rather than Yahweh, so Barak wanted a human manifestation of God to be with him. Just as Asa is recorded as serving God just as well as David, when actually this wasn't the case; but God counted him as righteous (1 Kings 15:11), so the incomplete faith of men like Baruch was counted as full faith by later inspiration (Jud. 4:8,9 cp. Heb. 11:32). Sometimes the purges of idolatry by the kings is described in undoubtedly exaggerated language- such as God's joy that at least something was being done? Barak is listed in Heb. 11:32 as one of "those who through faith subdued kingdoms... from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens". As with Samson, we ponder whether the record presents his weak side. But God saw the faith that was also within him, and noted that for us all to see in Hebrews 11. But "I will not go..." could be read as a defiant refusal of the Divine call ["go to mount Tabor", :6; "Arise Barak and lead away captives",

Jud. 5:12] unless Deborah 'goes' with him. Yahweh has gone out before him, but still he refuses to 'go' unless Deborah 'goes' with him. Many of the calling narratives feature this weakness of response to the call to "go". Moses objects "Who am I that I should go... they will *not* believe me" (Ex. 3:11; 4:1). Jeremiah and Ezekiel both protest their inadequacy to "go". Gideon opines that his clan is the smallest in Manasseh and he isn't the right man (Jud. 6:15); Saul likewise objects that he is from a poor family and the smallest tribe (1 Sam. 9:15). We too are called, for the language of calling is applied to us all in the New Testament. Not only to the Kingdom, but to "go" into all the world around us with the Gospel. And our responses likewise will be faltering. We as men balk at God's call. Clearly enough, from all these examples of Old Testament men doing so.

We can compare Barak's desire for Deborah the prophetess to "go with" him with Moses, Aaron and Hur praying for Israel on a hill, whilst Joshua down below was fighting the battle. Or the prophet Elisha being present during battles. Barak on one level believed God's word through Deborah, because he does muster 10000 men for an apparently suicidal encounter with Sisera. But like so many of us, he still wanted the physical embodiment of that word to be with him visibly.

LXX adds: "For I know not the day on which the Lord prospers his messenger / Angel with me". We have here another allusion to Angelic involvement in the victory, which we have noted elsewhere and on Jud. 5:23. But at this point, Barak is unsure whether this will happen. And yet he is counted in Heb. 11:32 as a man of faith. This not knowing is then alluded to in :9 LXX "but know that thy honour shall not attend...". See on :14.

Jdg 4:9 She said, I will surely go with you; nevertheless the journey that you take will not be for your honour, for Yahweh will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh-

The potential was that the enemy was to be sold into Barak's hands (:7). But Barak didn't fully believe that, and so the potential was applied to another. This is still how God works. This opens up the question of whether God automatically reassigns a task and possibility to another; or whether if we let the ball drop, His intention will not be realized. We think of Mordecai's comment to Esther in Esther 4:14 [see commentary there] that if she doesn't speak up for the Jews, deliverance will come from another quarter. And yet the original is unclear- it could equally be saying "And shall deliverance come from another quarter?". As if it might not. The lack of clarity is intentional. We are to appreciate the degree to which we matter. The Lord's parables speak of Him giving His wealth to His servants to trade with. How far His work prospers is over to them; for He has 'gone into a far country', He is far away in the sense that He has delegated to us authority to do His work on His behalf, and will review that work at His return. To have your life's mission done by a woman, to be shown to have been less brave than a woman, and to be presented as having been spiritually inferior to a woman... all this would have been shameful and humbling to Barak. But he is the one mentioned by name in Hebrews 11, and not Deborah nor Jael. His humiliation may well have developed his faith. Or perhaps the women were brave but without the faith that he had, for people can be very brave for reasons other than faith in God. And he was humbled whereas Deborah was proud. We note that Barak is listed as judge in 1 Sam. 12:11 rather than Deborah: "Yahweh sent Jerubbaal and Barak and Jephthah and Samuel and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies". I note on Jud. 5:7 ["The rulers ceased to rule in Israel. They ceased until I, Deborah, arose; until I arose, a mother in Israel"] that Deborah's victory song hints at excessive pride in herself; and perhaps that is why the apparently weaker Barak is seen by God as the greater hero than Deborah. Deborah's statement that Yahweh would "sell Sisera into the hand of a woman" may indeed have been a prophetic word of Jael's murder of Sisera. But we can also accept the possibility that the "woman" Deborah had in view was herself.

And her prophetic word was fulfilled through another woman, not herself as she perhaps imagined.

"Deborah arose" is to be connected with how the Divine word was "Arise, Barak, and lead away your captives" (Jud. 5:12). Barak didn't make this response. Deborah did it for him. And yet he is counted as a man of faith (Heb. 11:32).

"I will surely go with you" sounds like Yahweh's assurance to a nervous Joshua (Josh. 1:9) and Israel (Dt. 1:30; 20:4). But Deborah rather arrogantly puts these words in her own mouth to the nervous Barak, facing the same essential enemies as Joshua.

Jdg 4:10 Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali together to Kedesh and he went with ten thousand men following him; and Deborah went with him-

Heb. 11:32 seems to imply that Barak did this in faith, although not to the ideal level possible for him. Heb. "Ten thousand men at his feet", perhaps meaning 'Ten thousand footmen'. He had no chariots; his army was all composed of infantry, facing a vast multitude with 900 chariots of iron. We note the contrast in :13 between these foot soldiers, and the chariots of iron- whose iron scythes were specifically designed to kill foot soldiers: "Barak *summoned* Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up by foot with ten thousand men behind him" (4:10)... "Sisera *summoned* all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the troops who were with him" (4:13).

Jdg 4:11 Now Heber the Kenite had separated himself from the Kenites, from the children of Hobab the brother-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent by the oak in Zaanannim which is by Kedesh-

Kedesh, 'holy place', was an example of the pagan names still being used by the Israelites. Likewise Zaanannim is LXX "the oak of the covetous ones", and we recall the association of oaks with idolatry. Again we are getting the impression of strength coming out of surrounding spiritual weakness. Heber's separation from the Kenites is here not presented in a very positive light. See on :17. Probably it was motivated by personal betterment; hence he chose to live by LXX "the oak of the covetous ones". Jael's faithfulness to Israel is the more remarkable; because her family were on the side of Sisera, and had fallen out with the Israelites. Previously, the Kenites had been part of Israel: "the descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah from the city of palms into the wilderness of Judah, which lies in the Negeb near Arad, and they went and settled with the people" (Jud. 1:16). But Heber at least had now fallen out with Israel, seeing he was in alliance with Jabin; yet clearly his wife had retained her personal faith in Yahweh despite the family politics around her. She was in any case distantly related not to Moses directly, but to Moses' Gentile wife. But clearly she had faith in Israel's God, or else she wouldn't have done the hugely counter cultural thing that she did, reversing the hospitality code and going against her husband and clan to slay their ally Sisera. She acted totally alone to do so, and showed thereby her faith and personal relationship with Yahweh.

The "Oak in Zaanannim" next to Kedesh, 'the holy place', is surely a sign of idolatry, and stands in contrast to Yahweh's woman Deborah prophesying His word beneath "the palm tree of Deborah" (:5). Heber had gone away from Yahweh; yet within his camp, his wife was strongly faithful to Yahweh. "Kenite" is literally, one from Cain; and is the word for "spear" (s.w. 2 Sam. 21:16). Israel won their victory without sword or spear, as Deborah will later sing. Even from the family like Cain, there was at least one faithful woman. Here we see the power of a new creation, of how our background and surrounding environment need not railroad us into unspirituality.

Jdg 4:12 They told Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor-
The battle plans seemed all the wrong strategy in human terms. The dreaded chariots were at

full advantage on the flat land around the Kishon. Barak took his men up into the mountain, which was logical, as chariots couldn't be used there. But then they are told by God to come down from mount Tabor and fight with the chariots (:14). As with the capture of Jericho, God's strategy is seen as unwise humanly. But this is the 'foolishness of the thing preached' which Paul says confounds the might of this world.

Jdg 4:13 Sisera gathered together all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people who were with him, from Harosheth of the Gentiles to the river Kishon-

This 'gathering together' is spoken of in latter-day passages - Zech. 14:2 and Rev. 16:14. These previous invasions which typify those of the future, also mention this 'gathering together': Sisera's forces did this (Jud. 4:13), as did those of Ammon (Jud. 10:19; 1 Chron. 19:7), the Amorites (Jud. 11:20), the local powers with Assyria in Hezekiah's time (Mic. 4:11), Gog's forces (Ez. 38:7), the Arab-Canaanite tribes (Gen. 34:30) and especially the Philistines (Jud. 16:33; 1 Sam. 13:5,11; 17:1; 25:1; 28:1; 29:1; 2 Sam. 23:11). This is quite some emphasis. Thus while we can expect to see greater potential Arab unity developing around the Israel issue and perhaps a common allegiance to charismatic 'Nebuchadnezzar' figure for a brief period, their complete meeting of minds will not be until the final push against Jerusalem.

Jdg 4:14 Deborah said to Barak, Go, for this is the day in which Yahweh has delivered Sisera into your hand-

"This is the day" would connect with Barak's complaint in :9 LXX: "I know not the Day in which God will send his angel to give me prosperity: come with me that you may direct me in this respect". She did come with him, and now tells him the precise time in which he was to make the attack: "*This is the day*".

But as explained on :7,9, Yahweh's plan was indeed that ideally Sisera would be delivered into Barak's hand. But his faith wasn't up to it, so the enemy was to be delivered into a woman's hand. But it seems Deborah, as a prophet, knew that it was still potentially possible for Barak to have the victory through the enemy being delivered into his hands.

Just as all the animals and everything in the *eretz* promised to Abraham was 'delivered into the hands' of Noah (s.w. Gen. 9:2), so the nations of that *eretz* were delivered into the hands of Israel (s.w. Ex. 6:8; 23:31; Dt. 2:24; 3:2,3; 7:24; 21:10; Josh. 2:24; Jud. 1:2). Tragically, like Adam in Eden [perhaps the same *eretz* promised to Abraham] and Noah in the new, cleansed *eretz*, Israel didn't realize this potential. What was delivered into the hand of Joshua (Josh. 2:24) actually wasn't delivered into their hand, because they disbelieved (Jud. 2:23); and this looks ahead to the disbelief of so many in the work of the Lord Jesus, who has indeed conquered the Kingdom for us. They considered the promise of the nations being delivered into their hand as somehow open to question, and only a possibility and not at all certain (Jud. 8:7; Num. 21:2 cp. Num. 21:34). Some like Jephthah (s.w. Jud. 11:32; 12:3), Ehud (Jud. 3:10,28), Deborah (Jud. 4:14), Gideon (Jud. 7:15) did, for a brief historical moment; but as individuals, and their victories were not followed up on. Instead they were dominated by the territory. And so instead, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies within the *eretz* (s.w. Lev. 26:25; Jud. 13:1).

Hasn't Yahweh gone out before you? So Barak went down from Mount Tabor and ten thousand men after him-

See on :12. To come down from mount Tabor to where the chariots could be used was the very opposite of good strategy. Deborah in Jud. 4:14 quotes the words of Dt. 9:3 concerning the Angel going before Israel to drive out the nations to Barak, to inspire him with courage in fighting them: "Yahweh your God is He who goes over before you as a devouring fire. He

will destroy them and He will bring them down before you; so you shall drive them out and make them perish quickly". She recognized that the work the Angels did when they went out many years ago to do all the groundwork necessary for Israel to destroy all the tribes of Canaan was done for all time. It was not too late to make use of that work by making a human endeavour in faith. So with us, the smaller objectives in our lives as well as our main goal of reaching the Kingdom have all been made possible through the work of Christ and the Angels in the past. Deborah's recognition of this is shown in her song- Jud. 5:20: "They (the Angels) fought from Heaven; the stars (Biblical imagery for Angels) in their courses fought against Sisera". In passing, note that the Hebrew for 'courses' is almost identical with that for 'ladder' in the account of Jacob's vision of a ladder of Angels. Strong specifically defines it as meaning 'staircase'. See on Ex. 14:24.

Other implications that a repentant Israel will be used to win this great victory, are to be found in the mention of "the river Kishon" and "Harosheth", which was near Mount Carmel. These places feature in the record of Elijah's great appeal to Israel; the apostate element among them were slain at the Kishon (1 Kings 18:40), as the faithless in Israel will be in the last days. The typical inference here in Judges that the invader will be destroyed at this same place would suggest that they will share in the judgments that come upon God's enemies, and therefore perish in the same geographical location. Yet it was also in this same place that Israel repented, finally responding to Elijah's ministry. The work of the Elijah prophet of the last days will likewise culminate in a spiritually revived Israel defeating their enemies.

Jdg 4:15 Yahweh routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the sword before Barak, and Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot-

This stress on chariots, both in the record of the attack and of God's defeat of them, takes the mind back to the Egyptian chariots which pursued Israel and were destroyed in the Red Sea. "The Lord routed Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host" (Jud. 4:15) recalls how God "troubled (same Hebrew word translated "routed" / "discomfited") the host of the Egyptians, and took off their chariot wheels... so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee... and the Egyptians fled" (on foot, Ex. 14:24-27), just as Sisera "lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet" (Jud. 4:15), due to the mud produced by the hail (Ps. 83:9).

Deborah will later exalt that Israel had no shield nor spear (Jud. 5:8). The "sword" here may therefore refer to Yahweh doing this rout with *His* sword.

Jdg 4:16 But Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth of the Gentiles, and all the army of Sisera fell by the sword; there was not a man left-

"There was not a man left" matches the comment concerning the Egyptians, that "there remained not so much as one of them" (Ex. 14:28). We find the essence of the Red Sea deliverance repeated in life after life, situation after situation, in Israel's history. This happens to the extent that some of the Psalms can speak as if we were there present; and Paul stresses how that passage through water remains a type of the baptism of every believer to this day (1 Cor. 10:1). Just as Yahweh confounded Israel's enemies at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:24,25), so He did in Deborah's victory over Sisera (Jud. 4:15); and likewise "not one was left".

"Not a man left" may allude to how Canaanites were to be totally destroyed as *herem* to Yahweh, devoted as a burnt offering in totality. One of many examples in Dt. 7:2: "When the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them". See too Dt. 7:16,17,24; 9:1,3; 11:23; 33:27 etc.

Jdg 4:17 However Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite- The wives of Bedouin chiefs have their own tent.

For there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite- Jabin / Hazor is listed in Joshua 11 as one of the kings overcome by Joshua earlier, and now Heber has made peace with Hazor. LXX adds "...the Kenite his friend", pointing up Jael's bravery in murdering the friend of her husband under the guise of friendly hospitality. For a wife was expected to uphold the political alliances of her husband. This would suggest Heber had moved away from the things of God and was now in league with Jabin, rather than maintaining the connection between the Kenites and Israel. We recall that Moses' wife was a Kenite. See on :11. Again we are getting the impression of strength coming out of surrounding spiritual weakness.

Jdg 4:18 Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; don't be afraid. He came in to her into the tent and she covered him with a rug- LXX "Hid him behind the curtain". Here again, as with Rahab, Ehud and the Gibeonites, we have deception used as an expression of faith. "The curtain" would have been the curtain which separated her sleeping space from the rest of the tent. To invite another man into her tent and invite him into her personal sleeping space was unheard of. She was very brave to do this, and was desperately thinking outside the box of her surrounding culture and all the expectations upon her as Heber's wife. Because she wanted to rise to the moment and *carpe diem* for the Lord's work. Sisera was surely heading towards the tent of the male head of the family, Heber. But Jael goes out to meet him and urges him to turn in to her tent. Men never entered the tent of another man's wife; even Amnon had to ask his father's permission for his half sister to come into his bedroom. So quite possibly he perceived that Barak was hot on his heels chasing him, and there was not a moment to be lost. Hence he tells her to stand at the tent door and inform any man looking for him that there is no man in her tent. And this would explain the violation of custom in entering the personal tent of the wife of a married man. Sisera is expecting pursuit and expecting tents to be entered in search of him. All the examples of the hospitality culture include footwashing (Gen. 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; Jud. 19:21). She doesn't do this because time is of the essence- Barak is hot on the heels of Sisera. All this highlights Jael's bravery and quick thinking. Women lived in separate tents to their husbands, often because the husband had more than one wife. We recall Laban searching the tents of Jacob and also the tents of his wives (Gen. 31:33).

"Turn in, my lord, turn in to me" is the language of the hospitality culture. It repeats the words of Lot to the Angels in Gen. 19:2: "My lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house". And yet she bravely subverts and goes against that hospitality culture; instead of protecting her guest with her life, she kills him. And thus stands as an example of rejecting our surrounding culture and even subverting it, for the sake of the Lord's work. And so it is used in Prov. 9:15,16; 7:5-23). Indeed, for a married woman to invite a male in to her tent and cover him with a blanket / invite him beyond the curtain into her sleeping space... was most definitely seen as a very forward thing to do. Whilst I fail to see solid evidence that they had a sexual encounter, it does seem to me that she was giving him the come on... and that helped him to make that split second decision to go into her tent for refuge. When her plan was to kill him. We note too that the invitation from a woman to turn in to her personally [Lot invites his guests to turn in to his house] could be read as having a hint of sexual invitation. Hospitality culture always involved the male head of family making the offer to the visitor. But Heber was a friend of Sisera; and he was not consulted. Jael invites the guest- and that was unheard of in their hospitality culture.

Jdg 4:19 He said to her, Please give me a little water to drink for I am thirsty. She opened a skin of milk and gave him a drink and covered him-

The cameraman of Divine inspiration is zoomed close in here upon the two people in the tent. She gives him more than he asks, not water but milk, and butter (Jud. 5:25), perhaps thinking that dairy products would make him more sleepy. She did what she did on the spur of the moment, for she was surely not expecting Sisera to come stumbling in to her tent. Although she had her own tent, there is no evidence that the other people in the encampment, including her husband, agreed with her actions. Like Ehud, she acted completely alone, quite against the expectations of her surrounding family and environment. And for all time we have an example of a woman far from the battle front, "a woman of the tents" (Jud. 5), in an unspiritual environment, surrounded by children and domestic issues, suddenly given a chance to do a major thing for God. And she rises to the call magnificently, grabbing what she had to hand [a tent peg] and using it. The comment has been made that "Now as then the work of pitching tents fell to women among the Bedouin". The tools of her workaday life were transformed into God's instruments in her hand. Just as a delivery driver or hairdresser on a British council estate rises up to lead woman after woman to the saving Truth of Jesus Christ.

As we see from Lot and the old man in Jud. 19 being willing to sacrifice their daughters for the sake of hospitality culture, the woman was bound by that culture of hospitality to have defended his life, even at the risk of her own. So what Jael did was powerfully and radically counter cultural. She thought well beyond the narrow confines of her social situation.

Deborah responds to a request for something to drink, gives milk and covers Sisera with a blanket. Possibly in her own bed. This is very much the image of a mother. I suggest this quietly subverts Deborah's proud claim to be a "mother in Israel", and Deborah's implication that the glory for killing Sisera would go to her as a true "mother in Israel". The glory goes to Jael, also presented as a mother figure, who was not in fact an Israelite.

Jdg 4:20 He said to her, Stand at the door of the tent and when any man comes and asks you 'Is there any man here?' say 'No' -

The theme of gender continues. She surely had children and other women in her tent. She was to speak of Sisera as if he were not even a man, but a woman. The whole story is a deconstruction of the male glorifying narrative of those times. And this was not purely for the sake of it, rather is it part of a wider theme that God works through the despised in order to achieve His greatest victories.

Jdg 4:21 Then Jael Heber's wife took a tent peg and a hammer in her hand and went quietly to him and hammered the peg into his temples, and it pierced through into the ground-

"Heber's wife" is noted because what she was doing was so countercultural, against the will of her husband who was in league with Sisera. And the inspired record takes note of that. "Jael" can mean 'wild deer', and we note that "Naphtali [source of most of Barak's soldiers] is a hind [*yaelah*] let loose" (Gen. 49:21)- suggesting she was on the side of her husband's enemies. A sleeper cell, even perhaps of just one woman, within the tents of Israel's enemies. Just as so many of the Lord's people today.

We too easily assume that a nail was made of iron or some metal, as we are used to. But all archaeological evidence is that tent pegs were wooden. And so were hammers. Metal was at a premium. To kill a man with a wooden peg was an act of faith by Jael. The way he apparently rose up against her three times is thereby more understandable if the peg was only wooden. Ez. 15:3 is specific that a pin or nail (s.w.) was made out of wood. The word for nail is also rendered "stake" in Is. 33:20; 54:2. We note that some pointings of the Hebrew in Jud.

3:31 have Shamgar killing 600 Philistines with an ox goad or "mattock" [as LXX]- again, using whatever came to hand in workaday life. Likewise Samson killing 1000 men with the jawbone of an ass (Jud. 15:14,15).

"In her hand" is added, whilst obvious, to show the fulfilment of the prophecy that Sisera would be given into "the hand" of a woman (Jud. 4:9; 5:25,26). He ran to the encampment and was enticed by Jael's hospitality; but through that, Yahweh was putting him into Jael's hand. But if Jael had remained within the very narrow horizons of her tent life, if she had remained just a woman of her time and station... then the potential gift 'into her hand' wouldn't have happened.

This is clearly intended to be understood as the seed of the woman smiting the seed of the serpent in the head. Jael smiting off Sisera's head may be the basis of Ps. 110:7: "therefore shall he lift up the head". It also connects with David cutting off Goliath's head in an encounter full of echoes of the latter-day conflict between Christ and Israel's enemies. In the same way as Israel then had to follow up David's token victory, so they had to do the donkey-work in the wake of Sisera's death, and so they will also engage in a process of subduing the nations after Christ's initial dramatic victory at Armageddon - the landing of the stone upon the feet, the killing of Goliath, the nailing of Sisera's head. "The hand of the children of Israel prospered ('going, went and was hard', A.V. mg.), and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin" (Jud. 4:24) definitely speaks of a subsequent process of subjugation.

For he was in a deep sleep; so he died-

LXX "darkness fell upon him and he died". But the idea seems to be that he swooned, and then died. She didn't kill him outright, according to Deborah's song of praise for Jael, he rose up and then fell down dead at her feet (Jud. 5:27). This makes Jael's bravery all the more commendable, especially in that her husband was in league with Jabin. Indeed Jud. 5:26,27 could suggest he sank down three times: "She sent her hand to the tent peg and her right hand to the workmen's mallet; she struck Sisera; she crushed his head; she shattered and pierced his temple. Between her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still; between her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell—dead". She hammered the peg through his skull and into the ground [NIV "She drove the peg through his temple into the ground"], implying his head was on the ground. If she had first struck him while he was lying down asleep, covered with a blanket, then there would have been some cushion or mattress between his head and the ground. So it makes sense to understand she had a struggle with him, he fell to the ground [as in Jud. 5], and she at that point nailed his head into the ground [Jud. 4:21]. We can read with LXX "darkness fell upon him and he died" rather than that he was asleep. Or "he was in a deep sleep" [NEV] may mean he was stunned and unconscious when he fell the last time.

Jdg 4:22 As Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him and said to him, Come and I will show you the man whom you seek. He came to her and there lay Sisera, dead; and the tent peg was in his temples-

In Jud. 5:15 LXX, Deborah comes over as in command in the field, sending Barak on foot to find Sisera: "And princes in Issachar were with Deborah and Barak, thus she sent Barak on his feet in the valleys into the portions of Reuben". We wonder whether Barak pursuing Sisera personally was because Barak wanted the glory of killing him. He would thereby have been disregarding Deborah's prophecy that "Yahweh will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman" (:9). Despite constantly being presented as not being of the highest spiritual caliber, Barak is the one listed in Hebrews 11 as the man of faith. We aren't told how Barak felt as he saw Sisera's body in Jael's tent and realized the brave act she had performed. He would have been filled with deep respect for her. But also a deep sense, surely, of how foolish he had been to pursue the glory of killing Sisera himself. Naturally he would have remembered

Deborah's words to him, and realized that he had wasted his effort in running after Sisera seeking to kill him. Just as so much of our human endeavour we suddenly realize to have been so misplaced. If we had been more sensitive to God's word, we'd have saved ourselves so much exertion.

Jdg 4:23 So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the Israelites-
The nations in the land being "subdued" was the outcome of Israel being obedient to the covenant (s.w. Dt. 9:3). We read this word "subdued" used of how the land was at times subdued before Israel (Jud. 3:30; 4:23; 8:28; 11:33). But each time it is clear that the people generally were not obedient to the covenant. One faithful leader was, and the results of his faithfulness were counted to the people. This is what happened with the Lord's death leading to righteousness being imputed to us.

Jdg 4:24 The hand of the Israelites prevailed more and more against Jabin the king of Canaan until they had destroyed him-
All this is but one of several hints that after Christ's latter day destruction of the military arm (cp. Sisera) of the enemies in the land of Israel, the campaign is then taken to the civil headquarters (represented by 'Babylon' in the Apocalypse?), typified here by Jabin.

JUDGES CHAPTER 5

Jdg 5:1 Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang this song-
It is clearly Deborah's song, and it is very critical of those in Israel who didn't respond to her prophetic call to arms. And Barak would have been humbled by the fact that women like Deborah and Jael had gotten the glory rather than himself. So the way he sings along with it is a sign of his humility, which meshed with his faith [although incomplete] which Paul notes in Hebrews 11.

Jdg 5:2 Because the leaders took the lead in Israel, because the people offered themselves willingly, blessed be Yahweh!
But the song will go on to lament that the leaders of Israel didn't take the lead (:7 especially), and neither did Barak. But Deborah, a woman, took the lead and was the true leader. Elders can shut up, or open, the Kingdom to men. They watch "in behalf of" the souls of the ecclesia (Heb. 13:7 RV). Their very examples can influence the flock positively or negatively- for "like priest like people" is a Biblical idea. When the leaders "offered themselves willingly", so did the people (Jud. 5:2,9). LXX "A revelation was made in Israel when the people were made willing" would refer to the specific prophetic word given to Deborah in Jud. 4:6,7 that victory was possible- if the people were willing. Which Barak wasn't, completely.

"The people offered themselves willingly" to Deborah perhaps forms the basis for the description of Christ's people in the last days, being "willing in the day of your power" (Ps. 110:2).

Deborah praises God for the freewill of His warriors, as in :9; as if it was a gift from Him. The fact she praises God and not them reflects how God still works in human freewill decisions. And therefore those who didn't come to Yahweh's "help", even though not invited, are condemned by Deborah.

Jdg 5:3 Hear, you kings! Give ear, you princes! I, even I, will sing to Yahweh. I will sing praise to Yahweh the God of Israel-
LXX "I will sing, it is I who will sing to the Lord, it is I, I will sing a psalm" emphasizes "I"; perhaps the song was sung specifically by Deborah, as she glorifies that she, a woman and

despised prophetess who had to teach under a palm tree as she had no premises to do so, had had her prophetic word justified. Barak would then show his humility by singing along with her. "Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes" sounds like the appeal to the nations that goes out after Christ's victory (cp. Ps. 2:10). But the kings and princes could simply refer to the leaders of Israel, whom effectively Deborah is rebuking later in the song (:7).

Jdg 5:4 Yahweh, when You went forth out of Seir, when You marched out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, the heavens poured. Yes, the clouds poured down water- LXX "the heaven dropped dews". There was apparently a downpour of water from Heaven which led to the Kishon swelling and carrying away some of the enemy (:21). This is the language of Hab. 3, Ps. 68 and other prophecies of the last days. Deborah is feeling she has become, by default, another Moses; for the victorious march of Israel is like theirs from Sinai (:5), which she calls "Seir", alluding to Dt. 33:2. She feels a similar theophany has occurred, along with the rainfall then experienced (Ps. 68:8,9).

The language of storm and melting mountains (:5) clearly riffs on Baal, the storm god of Canaan. Yahweh is shown as superior to Baal- the god of the Canaanites, and the god adopted by His own people. It was the storm which gave Israel victory; and so Yahweh and not Baal is presented as the storm God.

Jdg 5:5 The mountains melted at the presence of Yahweh, even Sinai at the presence of Yahweh the God of Israel-

The mountains melted means that from the mountains flowed down streams.

Literally, "this is Sinai", as if Deborah was nodding towards mount Tabor as she sung. We might say, 'Sinai all over again'. Heb., as AV, "this Sinai", as if Deborah felt herself back there standing before Sinai witnessing the great theophany there, in that she has seen it before her eyes, as it were, in what God has now done in giving her victory against Sisera. This is the power of Biblical history. There is a living word which continues to speak to us; the historical victories of God are replicated, in essence, in our own experiences.

Jdg 5:6 In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were deserted, the travellers walked through byways-

The idea is that the situation in Jael's time is as it was in the days when Shamgar delivered Israel (Jud. 3:31). Whilst this describes the broken down infrastructure of the land, with people using byways because they feared being attacked on the main roads, there is the implication in LXX of spiritual weakness: "they deserted the ways... they went in crooked paths". And this may speak of the latter day Israel in a state of devastation and collapse, with highways unoccupied (cp. motorways wrecked by bombing). It's also possible they avoided the highways so as to avoid paying taxes to the Canaanites. Yahweh by contrast (:4) marched straight ahead and powerfully, and so did Barak and those marching in step with Him. Deborah's point seems to be that Shamgar's deliverance didn't change the fact that Israelites still feared to walk along the highways. But Deborah's deliverance had achieved that. She is comparing herself favourably to Shamgar, as if she is an even greater judge / deliverer. And yet later references to the judges mention Barak as a judge and not Deborah. Such comparisons again smack of pride.

Jdg 5:7 The rulers ceased to rule in Israel. They ceased until I, Deborah, arose; until I arose, a mother in Israel-

Rulers is LXX "the mighty men ceased". Deborah's song is really a lament at the failure of Israel's leadership, and Barak, who had also failed to provide this leadership when empowered to do so, was very humble to have sung this song with her (:1). She was a

"mother in Israel", providing leadership in a family bereft of male headship- because none of the men provided it. "Ceased" can be rendered 'deserted'. Deborah is very critical of others in Israel, to point up her own exalted opinion of herself. Perhaps she alludes to how her namesake Deborah who was Jacob's nurse and was buried beneath an oak tree (Gen. 35:8). Quite possibly the palm tree under which she sat was that same tree. She was the mother of Jacob / Israel. Perhaps she calls herself a mother in Israel to compare herself with Sisera's mother (:28). We wonder if there isn't some pride here; which may explain our observation on Jud. 4:9 that it is the apparently weaker Barak who is seen by God as the greater hero than Deborah. Certainly :3 LXX has too many personal pronouns, as if it's all about her: "I will sing, it is I who will sing to the Lord, it is I, I will sing a psalm". And here again: "I Deborah arose, until I arose". Other examples of her pride are noted on :13,21,28. The imagery of "mother" suggests protection of children unto death. Deborah is presenting herself as the saviour of the children of Israel; but it was really Barak's faith [although it was imperfect] and huge bravery, coupled with that of Jael- rather than Deborah. She isn't recorded as doing much at all in the battle.

Jdg 5:8 They chose new gods, therefore war came to the gates-

Gentile nations didn't change their gods; but God's people did, ever seeking a little extra material benefit from some new religion; see on Jer. 2:8,11. Israel are therefore likened in Hosea to a sexually addicted woman, ever seeking new partners. In this sense Israel were worse than the other nations, who only changed their gods when forced to by the military dominance of neighbours.

Was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?-

"Thousand" when used in a military context usually means some military subdivision rather than a literal 1,000. The idea may be that although they had shields and spears, none of the 40,000 in view got their weapons out in response to Deborah's prophetic call. The reference to 40000 unarmed men may be to Josh. 4:13, where Joshua had 40000 soldiers who went to fight against Jericho- and defeated Jericho without fighting, because God gave the victory. Deborah is perceiving the similarity. The allusion must surely be to Joshua's conquest of Jericho because Barak's force was of 10000 not 40000 (Jud. 4:6,10).

Jdg 5:9 My heart is with the governors of Israel, who offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless Yahweh!-

"Offered" can be translated 'responded'. LXX "You that are willing among the people, bless the Lord". Deborah now praises the few leaders who did respond to her prophetic call to arms. The Hebrew for "governors" can mean a law-giver or teacher, literally "an engraver of laws"; she may have in mind the faithful scribes, who supported her prophetic call to arms. Perhaps in the latter day context this speaks of a minority of faithful amongst latter day Israel, with God's law engraved in their hearts as it was on stone previously (Jer. 31:33). Remember that Elijah will be calling for a revival of true interest in the Mosaic law during his ministry, which may well coincide with Israel's period of downtreading (Mal. 4:4-6).

Jdg 5:10 Speak, you who ride on white donkeys, you who sit on rich carpets and you who walk by the way-

This seems a criticism of those in Israel who were not "willing" to assist in the battle. LXX "Ye that mount a she-ass at noon-day, ye that sit on the judgment-seat, and walk by the roads of them that sit in judgment by the way". It was Deborah who sat by the roadside giving judgment from God's word, and who was largely ignored (Jud. 4:5). Or we can read this as

saying that the wealthy and the poor, who walked rather than rode expensive donkeys, would unite in praising Yahweh.

Jdg 5:11 Far from the noise of archers, in the watering places, there they will recite the righteous acts of Yahweh, the righteous acts of His rule in Israel. Then the people of Yahweh went down to the gates-

The idea may be that those who didn't respond to God's command to fight Sisera would in the future, far from the noise of war, recite at the wells the great acts which Yahweh had wrought through women. And those who recited things at the watering places were largely women. We recall how women were found at wells in the lives of Abraham's servant, Jacob and Moses. In the latter day context, Ez. 39:3 stresses how Gog will rely on his archery to terrorize Israel in the last days: "I will smite your bow out of your left hand, and will cause your arrows to fall out of your right hand". Assyrian bas-reliefs frequently show them posing with their bows. The importance of archery in warfare can easily be overlooked by us, who tend to lump bows, arrows, swords and shields etc. together as obsolete weaponry. Yet the ability to strike from a distance without personal combat was a vital innovation. The highlighting of the fact that the enemies of Jud. 4 and Gog of Ez. 38 both used archery suggests that this may have a latter day equivalent - which must surely be in the use of missile power? The vials of Revelation being poured out from the air onto the earth (land - of Israel) may also indicate that latter day judgments literally descend from the air.

AV "even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel". God saved Israel at this time by grace alone, and yet Deborah prefers to see that salvation as just or righteous. Perhaps she failed to grasp grace. Or possibly we are to perceive as does Paul in Romans, that God's saving by grace is still 'just' and fair in His morality. The women assembled at wells to chat and gossip, just as folks do today in online groups and coffee shops. But their talk was not to be the usual stuff of chit chat. It was to be of Yahweh's great salvation through the weak instruments He used. And so our social talk should be likewise focused.

Jdg 5:12 'Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, sing a song! Arise, Barak, and lead away your captives, you son of Abinoam' -

This seems to be a quotation from the prophetic word which came to Deborah. "Awake" is 'arise'. But Deborah says that she "arose" a mother in Israel, rather glorifying her own obedience to the call. Perhaps the first sentence in this verse was sung by Barak (see on :1), and the second by Deborah, in a kind of part singing. Ps. 68:18 quotes this verse with reference to the latter day work of the Lord Jesus. Taking captivity captive (Heb.) means 'take prisoner those who took you prisoner'. This is the language of the latter day victory over Babylon (Is. 14:2).

Jdg 5:13 Then a remnant of the nobles and the people came down. Yahweh came down to me against the mighty-

She laments that only a remnant had responded to her call to arms. LXX "Then went down the remnant to the strong". But this again is a theme of God's workings with men. The left handed, the women, the minorities, those whom man despises, are used by Him to work His great victories.

'The remnant' presumably means that only a minority of God's people got involved in the battle. And so it has ever been.

We perhaps have another hint of Deborah's self focus when she exults [in the Hebrew] that "the people of the Lord came down for me against the mighty". "For me" leaves us wondering about her level of humility; see on :7. Dominion over the mighty was achieved by

Jael, but Deborah likes to see herself as the victor. This confirms our hunch that her earlier comment that a woman would get the glory, and not Barak, had herself in view.

Jdg 5:14 Those whose root is in Amalek came out of Ephraim after you, Benjamin, among your peoples. Governors came down out of Machir-

LXX "Ephraim rooted them out in Amalek, behind thee was Benjamin among thy people: the inhabitants of Machir came down with me searching out the enemy". Machir may recall the daughters of Zelophehad, who joined Deborah in personally fighting the enemy. Being rooted in Amalek means they had taken over Amalekite territory.

Machir and Gilead refers to the two halves of Manasseh, one on each side of the Jordan.

Those who handle the writer's quill came out of Zebulun-

The idea is that instead of drawing their quills from their pouches, they drew swords.

God asked goldsmiths to do the manual work of building the wall of Jerusalem, bruising their sensitive fingers against lumps of rock (Neh. 3:8,31); and Barak's victorious warriors were civil servants and writers (Jud. 5:14), not military men. Paul was sent to the Gentiles and Peter to the Jews, when we'd have thought that naturally speaking, they would have been far more comfortable in the reverse roles. Judas was put in charge of the money amongst the twelve; when Matthew the tax collector would presumably have been the obvious man for the job. Naaman wanted to do some great act, but was asked to do the hardest thing for him- to dip in Jordan.

Verses 14-18 mention the tribes of Israel, and their responses to the battle. The tribes are listed in order according to their mothers: by Rachel, then by Leah, then by Bilhah and Zilpah. This is clearly intentional. The Rachel tribes are mentioned first in that Joseph was represented by Ephraim, then Benjamin, then Machir (a grandson of Joseph and grandfather of Gilead). It's as if all Jacob's sons are paraded before us and receive their judgment. Perhaps this feature is because Deborah has declared herself the "mother in Israel" and thereby feels able to judge Israel, as her sons. But again, we wonder whether Deborah is not rather over exalting herself. And it is she rather than God who declares herself the mother in Israel, a matriarch on a par with Jacob. We note that later scripture doesn't make any comment upon Deborah. Barak is mentioned later as judge at this time, rather than Deborah; and Barak not Deborah is mentioned in the roll call of the faithful in Hebrews 11 as having through faith turned to flight a huge army. Jael was really the woman who should have been glorified more than Deborah. Whilst Deborah does praise her, unlike Rahab or Ruth, she has no abiding record in Israel's history. And Deborah seems to have far more to say about herself than about Jael. And so we have in Jael one of many true heroines who never got much reward for their heroism- in this life.

Jdg 5:15 The princes of Issachar were with Deborah. As was Issachar, so was Barak. They rushed into the valley at his feet-

LXX "And princes in Issachar were with Deborah and Barak, thus she sent Barak on his feet in the valleys into the portions of Reuben". Deborah comes over as in command in the field, sending Barak on foot to find Sisera (Jud. 4:22). LXX "Barak also sent forth his footmen into the valley". To leave the heights of Tabor and charge into the flat valley, with no shield nor spear, where the 900 iron chariots could be used most effectively, was against all military sense. But Yahweh caused a flash flood of the Kishon (:21), swept many of them away, and made the land muddy so the chariots got stuck in the mud. But the charging down into the valley, following Barak, was an act of pure faith.

By the watercourses of Reuben there were great divisions of heart-

She rightly mocks how the men of Reuben claimed to struggle in their hearts as to whether or not to support her call to arms. So often we hear the phrase "It's difficult to decide" or talk

about struggles of heart- when the call to rise up in obedience is obvious and clear. But God's unambiguous calls are often made difficult by our struggles of the heart against them. "The divisions of Reuben" could refer to how they were divided among themselves into factions, which prevented their co-operation with their brethren; or they were divided in their judgment within their own hearts.

Jdg 5:16 Why did you sit among the sheepfolds, to hear the whistling for the flocks? At the watercourses of Reuben there was much searching of heart-

As noted on :15, they were claiming that the decision to follow God's calling was 'so difficult' and required much internal agony of heart searching. In reality, it involved them sitting amongst their sheep, listening to the bleating of the flocks (LXX). She asks "Why...?". And the answer was, because they didn't have faith and devotion to God's clear prophetic word which had called them to arms. Or we can read as GNB "Yes, the tribe of Reuben was divided; they could not decide to come". They operated on the false basis that there had to be unanimity before they could agree; and because they were divided over the matter, even those willing to fight actually didn't. Because they put their own desire for unanimity or "unity" with their brethren above the need to be loyal to God's word personally.

Jdg 5:17 Gilead remained beyond the Jordan. Why did Dan remain in ships? Asher remained still at the haven of the sea, and lived by his creeks-

Asher "lived" or [LXX] 'remained in his tabernacles', perhaps implying devotion to false gods; see on :18. The Hebrew for Gilead 'remaining' can mean 'pottered about', and that's how it is for so many believers. Likewise LXX "Dan pottered about in ships". The call to rise above their limited horizons is refused because they are too busy pottering about, 'just needing' to do this or that, preoccupied with their own immediate concerns... until life and opportunity is frittered away. Jud. 4:6 records the call to arms as only for Naphtali and Zebulun. But the other tribes are criticised for not entering into the spirit of the event. The need is the call, and no legalistic arguments can stop that call. Gilead could be read as the tribe of Gad. Dan's territory included the port of Joppa (Josh. 19:46), from where they likely traded with the Phoenicians. And they didn't want to leave their lucrative business to fight the Lord's battles up north.

Jdg 5:18 Zebulun was a people that jeopardized their lives to the death; Naphtali also, on the high places of the field-

The reference to the pagan high places could be in contrast to the hint in :17 that Asher remained serving idols, whilst Naphtali won victories for Yahweh on the pagan high places.

Jdg 5:19 The kings came and fought, then the kings of Canaan fought at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo-

Taanach was in either Issachar or Asher (Josh. 17:11,12,25; Jud. 5:19). But this town was also given to Ephraim (1 Chron. 7:29). As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the whole nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. But the precise nature of that reward is as it were negotiable by us now, according to our spiritual ambition. Just as Caleb chose Hebron and secured it for himself.

The battle was fought "at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo". 'Taanach' meaning 'place of fasting' is another hint at *repentant* Israel taking part in the final defeat of their latter day enemies. Joel describes a call to fasting during the period when the land lies totally devastated during the initial period of enemy domination (Joel 2:15).

"Megiddo" and the descriptions of Sisera *gathering* his chariots and God *drawing* them into battle must link with the nations being *gathered* to Armageddon, the valley of Megiddo (Rev. 16:16). If this connection is valid, then "the kings of the earth (land - of Israel?) and of the whole world" which are gathered (Rev. 16:14) would primarily refer to the kings of the *eretz* promised to Abraham, those within the 'land' at its maximum promised extent between the Nile and Euphrates.

They took no plunder of silver-

If the "they" is the victorious Israelites, the idea may be that unlike Achan, they devoted the spoil to Yahweh. Or LXX "they took no gift of money" might imply they refused to be bought off by the Canaanites, but rather slew them. If the "they" is the Canaanites, then Deborah may be rejoicing that the faithful Israelites refused to pay tribute to them. Or perhaps the idea is that the Canaanites expected much booty from their victory but were disappointed. Or the idea is that the Israelite warriors didn't fight motivated by plunder.

Jdg 5:20 From Heaven the stars fought. From their courses they fought against Sisera- Israel's fighting is paralleled with the Heavens and stars [=Angels] fighting for them. The Lord of Hosts of Angels was working in tandem with the hosts of Israel. And it's the same for the new Israel. Heb. 12:22 speaks of how we, the hosts of the church, are paralleled with hosts of Angels: "...to innumerable hosts, the general assembly of angels, and the church of the firstborn" (RVmg.). See on :22.

Deborah in Jud. 4:14 quotes the words of Dt. 9:3 concerning the Angel going before Israel to drive out the nations to Barak, to inspire him with courage in fighting them. She recognized that the work the Angels did when they went out many years ago to do all the groundwork necessary for Israel to destroy all the tribes of Canaan was done for all time. It was not too late to make use of that work by making a human endeavour in faith. So with us, the smaller objectives in our lives as well as our main goal of reaching the Kingdom have all been made possible through the work of Christ and the Angels in the past. Deborah's recognition of this is shown in her song- Jud. 5:20: "They (the Angels) fought from Heaven; the stars (Biblical imagery for Angels) in their courses fought against Sisera". In passing, note that the Hebrew for 'courses' is almost identical with that for 'ladder' in the account of Jacob's vision of a ladder of Angels. Strong specifically defines it as meaning 'staircase'. See on Ex. 14:24.

This verse is the only one that seems to mention God's part in the victory. The classic songs of praise for deliverance (Ex. 15; Ps. 18; Hab. 3 etc.) continually speak of Yahweh as having wrought a great deliverance. But Deborah's song has not a single reference to Yahweh as the deliverer, the One actually doing the work, although there is the oblique reference to "the stars", presumably the Angels, fighting alongside Israel. Instead, the song praises Yahweh for how wonderful His servants have been; it glorifies Deborah, and briefly mentions the roles of Barak and Jael. It's hard not to see it as Deborah's self glorification. And we note Barak's humility in singing along with it. When he is the one noted by God later as the man of faith in the whole saga.

Jdg 5:21 The river Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. My soul, march on with strength-

The NIV Study Bible locates the area of Gideon's victory in Jud. 7:1 as being just south of Mouth Tabor between the Jordan River and the end of the Kishon River. This is the very same area where God would later give Barak a dramatic victory. Barak was encouraged in his faith by the fact Gideon had been given a huge victory against far greater odds, in the very same area. Barak of course may not have perceived this, just as we may not perceive the hints

God is giving us that we in essence are going through the same experiences as Biblical characters.

The flooding of the Kishon made the chariot wheels drive heavily and slowed the horses; and made flight on foot very difficult. Just as happened at the Red Sea. "The fate of Sisera's host finds a parallel in the battle of Mt Tabor between the army of Napoleon and the Turks, Apr. 16, 1799, when many of the latter were drowned when attempting to escape across a part of the plain inundated by the Kishon". The "ancient river" recalls the historical associations of Kishon with the repentance of Israel at Elijah's time. It seems some of the enemy were swept away trying to ford it. LXX "my mighty soul will trample him down" presents Deborah as a glorious warrior on horseback; although we wonder if she is not being a tad lifted up in pride in speaking like this (see on :28). There was apparently a downpour of water from Heaven which led to the Kishon swelling and carrying away some of the enemy (:4). Or "my soul march on with strength" may have been a kind of pause for her to regain her breath to sing the next stanzas.

Jdg 5:22 Then the horse hoofs stamped because of the prancing, the prancing of their strong ones-

The picture may be of the muddy conditions and flooding causing the horses to come unhitched from the chariots, and then galloping away. LXX "When the hoofs of the horse were entangled", recalling the horses of the Egyptians entangled in the mud of the Red Sea. The idea is that the horses and chariots of Sisera, like those of Pharaoh, were in conflict with those of the Angel cherubim.

The chariots of Egypt and Sisera will finally be seen as a poor match for the Angel-cherubim "chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof". "Then were the horsehoofs (of Sisera's chariots) broken by the means of the pransings, the pransings of their mighty ones", i.e. the Angel-cherubim. If there was a manifestation of the Cherubim on that occasion, this would accord well with the gentle hint that there will be a Cherubim appearance associated with the second coming (Mt. 24:30), and this would also be the means of putting the latter day Arab 'chariots' out of business.

Jdg 5:23 'Curse Meroz', said the angel of Yahweh. 'Curse bitterly its inhabitants, because they didn't come to help Yahweh, to help Yahweh against the mighty'-

Meroz was a village on the borders of Issachar and Naphtali, on the route taken by the fleeing enemy soldiers, but the inhabitants refused to participate in attacking them. The bitter cursing, specifically by an Angel, shows how much God notes and hates sins of omission, of doing nothing when the need is clearly the call to arms. We note the other tribes who refused to help aren't cursed as Meroz is bitterly cursed. Meroz was perhaps a village which Sisera fled through, and Meroz didn't apprehend him. Unlike Jael. Likewise we will soon read how Succoth and Penuel refused to give Gideon assistance (Jud. 8:5-9). Such sins of omission are laboured in the Bible. They are our most likely kind of failure.

Deborah was a prophetess and may have been given her prophetic words directly by an Angel. In one sense God 'requires not help from man'. But in another sense, 'God is in need of man', as Avraham Heschel put it. He never forces His ways upon us, and always acts with respect to human freewill. In this sense He 'needs' our "help"; even if it is the "help" which a father asks from his young son in doing a job. Meroz may have been a village through which Sisera or his men had fled, and they feared to join in the fight. The same situation was to recur when Succoth and Penuel refused to help Gideon (Jud. 8:5-9). The history of Meroz and the Israelites who refused to help Deborah was a lesson not learnt by Succoth and Penuel.

Jdg 5:24 Jael shall be blessed above women, the wife of Heber the Kenite; blessed shall she be above women in the tent-

Deborah's words reflect some bitterness at the way that women were secluded "in the tent" with apparently no role in public life. But Jael had risen above that. When unexpectedly Sisera came stumbling into her tent, she paid no respect to the league her husband had made with him and his king Jabin. She deceived him and slew him. She rose above all the apparent constraints upon serving Yahweh which were upon her.

Jdg 5:25 He asked for water and she gave him milk. She brought him butter in a lordly dish- She did this in sarcasm, recognizing him for who he was, and treating him as a lord- until she slew him.

Jdg 5:26 She put her hand to the tent peg and her right hand to the workmen's hammer. With the hammer she struck Sisera. She struck through his head. Yes, she pierced and struck through his temples-

LXX "She stretched forth her left hand to the nail" would be another example of left handed people, or ambidextrous, being used by God; or at best, the victory is ascribed to the use of the left hand. Left handed people were considered strange and often relegated to the periphery of society in primitive societies; we see again how almost all the judges had something which made them despised and rejected. And yet it was exactly that group which God delighted to use to save His people (Jud. 3:15). We notice how God used left handed people to give David victory (1 Chron. 12:2), and to punish their hypocritical brethren (Jud. 20:16). He seems to rejoice in using those whom man despises.

We note again how Jael uses the man's hammer. She does the work a man was supposed to do. This is clearly intended to be understood as the seed of the woman smiting the seed of the serpent in the head.

Jdg 5:27 At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay. At her feet he bowed, he fell. Where he bowed, there he fell down dead-

The idea of Jud. 4:21 seems to be that he swooned, and then died. She didn't kill him outright, he rose up and then fell down dead at her feet. This makes Jael's bravery all the more commendable, especially in that her husband was in league with Jabin.

Jdg 5:28 Through the window she looked out and cried; Sisera's mother looked through the lattice. 'Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why do the wheels of his chariots delay?'

Whilst Deborah was full of faith and God's word, there is a discernible element of bitterness and arrogance in her, now she has won the victory; see on :21. And we must beware of this kind of thing. From a distance, she mocks Sisera's mother and rejoices in that woman's pain and bitter disappointment. The song concludes somewhat strangely with this mockery of Sisera's mother- by the Deborah who has self proclaimed herself "a mother in Israel". She is seeking to heighten the contrasts between herself and Sisera's mother.

Jdg 5:29 Her wise ladies answered her, yes she answered herself-

This again is a mocking at the supposed wisdom of the enemy. Their wise women were sure Sisera delayed because he was busy gathering the spoil. And their wisdom is derided as foolishness.

Jdg 5:30 'Have they not found, have they not divided the spoil? A girl, two girls for every man; to Sisera a spoil of dyed garments, a spoil of dyed garments embroidered, of dyed

garments embroidered on both sides, on the necks of the spoil? '-

Deborah mocks this woman and her female friends, as women who would glorify the way Sisera was delaying because he was busy raping pretty girls and dragging them back with him. In the latter day context, "Prey... spoil" is Ez. 38 language: "To take a spoil and to take a prey... Are you come to take a spoil... a prey?" (Ez. 38:12,13). Thus the motivation for the average invader is quite clear- although this will most likely be wrapped up behind some pseudo-religious reasoning provided by a latter day 'Jabin' (see on Jud. 4:2). Such total confidence in victory is yet to be seen in a Middle East scarred with the memories of Israel's victories over the last decades. "Girl" is literally "womb". Sisera's mother exalts that her son is probably delaying because he is raping some virgins and getting them pregnant with her future grandchildren. She is presented by Deborah as a most unpleasant woman; maybe she was, but Deborah is totally fabricating what she likes to imagine was in the mind of this woman. And Deborah has presented herself as a mother, a mother in Israel- and she is relishing the contrast with Sisera's mother, to Deborah's own glorification.

Jdg 5:31 So let all Your enemies perish, Yahweh, but let those who love Him be as the sun when it rises forth in its strength-

This takes on an ultimate fullness of meaning when this battle is read as typical of Armageddon, when all God's enemies will perish once and for all. "But let them that love him be as the sun when he goes forth in his might" is using the common figure of the dawn as being representative of Messiah's second coming (Mal. 4:2; 2 Sam. 23:4; Ps. 19:4,5). Those who truly love the appearing of that sunrise will themselves be a light to this dark world of flesh; they shall personally go forth as the rays of sunlight, in whatever way, just as the light of knowledge of the person of Jesus will do. These words are clearly applied to all the faithful in Mt. 13:43; Dan 12:3.

Then the land had rest forty years-

The forty years rest of Jud. 3:11; 5:31; 8:28 may not be a literal period. I have elsewhere noted that the forty year reigns of Saul, David and Solomon create chronological problems if read literally. The idea may be that forty years was a time of testing, as it was for Israel in the wilderness. We think of the Lord's 40 days of testing too. In this case, they were tested by peace. And they consistently failed, as God's people often do.

JUDGES CHAPTER 6

Jdg 6:1 The children of Israel did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and Yahweh delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years-

The events of these chapters are to be read as typical of Israel's latter-day conflict with her enemies. Psalm 83 is a well-known description of the final invasion of Israel to "cut them off from being a nation", concluding with the imprecation "Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb; yes, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna" (Ps. 83:11) - whom Gideon destroyed. Isaiah 9 is set in the context of the Assyrian invasions of the land, the last of which they were saved from by Hezekiah, the primary fulfilment of the "great light" which appeared to an Israel under Assyria's dominance. The destruction of the invaders was to be "as in the day of Midian" (Is. 9:4), i.e. it would be typified by Gideon's destruction of Midian previously. The context in Isa. 8:12, 19-22 speaks of Israel living in fear of an Arab confederacy, having thrown off their faith in God, stubbornly refusing to seek "to the law and to the testimony", and with the land full of "trouble and darkness" so that "they shall pass through it, hardly bested and hungry", due to the invaders destroying the crops. This

language recalls the scenario portrayed in Jud. 5:6,7, where the Jews creep around their own land after a total collapse of infrastructure.

Is. 9 then speaks of how God "lightly afflicted the land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali (in the first Assyrian invasion - 2 Kings 15:29) and afterward did more grievously afflict her" (Is. 9:1) in the second invasion. The suffering of Israel at this time is spoken of in terms of their abuse in Egypt, which is clearly typical of the last days: "You have multiplied the nation (as God did in Egypt - Ex. 1:7), and not increased the joy... You have broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder (the language of Israel in Egypt), the rod of his oppressor (s.w. "taskmaster" in Ex. 1:11) (Is. 9:3,4).

This was to be "as in the day of Midian" (Is. 9:4) when Israel's saviour was Gideon. Yet Is. 9:2 speaks of their saviour as "a great light" arising in the darkness, and this is quoted in Mt. 4:15,16 as referring to Jesus. Gideon therefore becomes a type of Christ's breaking of the yoke of sin, and also of His latter-day deliverance of Israel from sin's political manifestation. Similarly the account of David's victory over Goliath has reference to our Lord's victory over sin on the cross, and also over "the man of sin" who will oppress Israel in the last days.

"The children of Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh" is a refrain which occurs seven times in Judges (Jud. 2:11; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1), recalling how Israel both over history and in the last days were to be punished "seven times" for their sins (Lev. 26:23,24).

It is possible that a 'time' may also refer to a year, so the fact that "the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years" (Jud. 6:1) may refer to this "seven times" punishment for sin, which was to come after their refusal to be reformed by their previous sufferings (Lev. 26:23,24). A seven-year duration of Israel's final holocaust is hard to square with hints elsewhere that this will last for three and a half years. But Dan. 9:25-27 implies that after 69 weeks ('sevens') there would be a final week of punishment for Israel's sins, which would be split into two halves of three and a half years each. The first three and a half years may apply to the AD 70 period, and the latter to the last days. See on :25.

Jdg 6:2 The hand of Midian prevailed against Israel, and because of Midian the Israelites made themselves dens in the mountains, the caves and the strongholds-

"Yahweh delivered" Israel "into the hand of Midian" (:1) uses the same Hebrew word as in Lev. 26:25, "I will punish you yet seven times...ye shall be *delivered into the hand of the enemy*". To fulfil this, "the hand of Midian became strong (Hebrew) against Israel". Such a revival of Israel's enemies coupled with increasing military success against Israel is a process which is already beginning, and which, despite short-term fluctuations, we should expect to continue.

Identical language of hiding in caves is found in 1 Sam. 13:6 concerning Israel's pining away when under attack by the Philistines. There can be no doubt that these incidents are the focus of Heb. 11:37,38, which describes nameless men of faith as being "slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins... being destitute, afflicted, tormented... they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth". This therefore teaches us that there were definitely some in Israel at those times who had a remarkable degree of faith, and it surely follows that the final tribulation which these previous invasions typify will likewise lead to the existence of a minority of faithful in Israel.

The Hebrew word translated "caves" occurs again in Ez. 33:27 in a passage speaking of the final desolation of the Land which will lead to Israel's repentance. "They that be in the forts and in the *caves* shall die of the pestilence (cp. the plagues to come upon Israel in the last days, Lev. 26:25). For I will lay the land most desolate... none shall pass through (cp. "the highways were unoccupied", Jud. 5:6). Then shall they know that I am the Lord, when I

have laid the land most desolate" (Ez. 33:27-29). All this suggests a desolation of the land physically and a state of total breakdown of infrastructure.

The Israelites who fled to the dens and caves are described as heroes of faith because of what they did (Heb. 11:38). And yet their domination by the Philistines was a result of their idolatry. They were idolatrous, and yet some had faith; and it was this faith when surrounded by weakness which was perceived by God.

Jdg 6:3 So when Israel had sown their seed, the Midianites, the Amalekites and the people of the east came up against them-

This is exactly what one would expect from the allusion to Lev. 26:26, speaking of the curses to come for breaking the covenant: "If... you break my covenant I *also* will do this unto you (i.e. break My side of the covenant, in that) I will even appoint over you terror, consumption... and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it".

Jdg 6:4 and they encamped against them, and destroyed the crops as far as Gaza, and left no sustenance in Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey-

Note that the initial motive for the raids was to spoil the land and steal cattle. The Ezekiel 38 latter day invader has similar motivation, "To take a spoil... to take a prey... to take away cattle and goods" (Ez. 38:13). It should be noted, however, that such connections do not necessarily indicate that the invasion prefigured in Judges 6 is to be equated with that of Ezekiel 38. The point is that all the latter-day invasions of Israel have broadly similar motives, and all consistently involve the neighbours of Israel, rather than nations like Russia.

The descriptions of what the Midianites did to the land are all expressed in terms of being the very opposite of the blessings for obedience to the covenant. If Israel were obedient, they would eat bread until they were full, live in safety without fear (cp. :5), and the land would be free of conflict (Lev. 26:5,6). Israel were suffering the curses for disobedience. They cried to Yahweh for help, but there is no record of their repentance, even when they are told to quit idolatry (:10). The cycle so far in Judges has been of sin-suffering-repentance-deliverance-sin-suffering etc. But the repentance element is noticeably missing here. The subsequent account of Gideon's fairly typical family encampment at Ophrah and Abiezer shows that they continued their idolatry. But still God saved them through Gideon, an act of grace. And yet when Gideon cuts down the image of Baal in his village, there is a surprising willingness to go Yahweh's way, as shown by his father's sudden taking of Gideon's side, and the local people responding to Gideon's call. Perhaps there was some level of subconscious repentance in the people, although unexpressed and not resulting in any actual change. But God noticed even that, and raised up Gideon to be the catalyst for the outward expression of a faith and repentance that existed *sub rosa*. And He works in the same way today. So often converts realize that they had subconsciously been there with the Lord all along, repentant in their hearts, but God raises up a situation which triggers them to come out openly.

Jdg 6:5 For they came with their livestock and their tents; they came up as locusts for multitude; both they and their camels were without number, and they came into the land to destroy it-

They brought their animals with them in order to graze them, which would've left Israel bare afterwards. This 'scorched earth' policy of the invaders is the prototype for Joel's latter day prophecy of the locust / grasshopper invaders leaving the land physically empty before Israel are forced to their final repentance. We note how the destruction as if by locusts means that Israel were treated as Egypt, to where they returned in their hearts and whose gods they had taken with them. See on :7.

Jdg 6:6 Israel was brought very low because of Midian and the children of Israel cried to Yahweh-

"Very low" is the word used about Israel's latter day humiliation which leads to their final repentance (Is. 17:4). It's not that God willingly humiliates; it's that humility is necessary for relationship with Him, and pride leads to sin. And it is this humiliation which leads to our crying out to God. David uses the word of himself (Ps. 79:8; 116:6; 142:6), as if he saw in Israel at this time something of himself. As we can.

Jdg 6:7 When the Israelites cried to Yahweh because of Midian-

Their crying to Yahweh is twice emphasized (:6,7). The phrase is used of how Israel did so in Egypt (1 Sam. 12:8), and of how they will in the last days (Joel 1:14). We noted the allusion to Joel in :5.

Jdg 6:8 Yahweh sent a prophet to them, and he said to them, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, 'I brought you up from Egypt and brought you out of slavery-

The response to their crying to Yahweh is not deliverance, but rather a prophet coming to them and attempting to convict them of their sin and failure to respond to God's wonderful deliverance of them from the Gentile world. Their repentance is therefore presented as utterly critical to their further deliverance. But there is no record of this repentance being forthcoming. Instead, a weak man who doubts his own faith is chosen and strengthened to deliver them. This was absolutely a case of salvation by grace.

The salvation from the Egyptians was at the Red Sea, long ago (Ex. 14:30). The Israelites were repeatedly reminded of this (Jud. 2:1; 6:8; 10:11). But they failed to perceive that God's actions in history were in fact their personal salvation, an act of grace shown to them also. David grasped that point, and his Psalms often thank God for the exodus, as if it had happened to him personally. But the problem is that Israel like all people tended to only see what was before their face at that moment. They had no sense of God's historical salvation of them, and the guarantee that He would likewise come through for them, if they remained faithful to Him.

In the latter day context, this must have a connection with the suggestion that Elijah will be "*sent*" to Israel during their suffering, "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5). This "dreadful day" must be that of the final destruction of Israel's invaders rather than simply the return of Christ. Joel similarly speaks of how during the time when the Jewish heavens and earth are turned into "blood and fire, and pillars of smoke", the Jews will possess the Spirit gifts "before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come" (Joel 2:28-31). This connection between Joel and Malachi would hint that the possession of these gifts is associated with the work of Elijah.

Jdg 6:9 and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, drove them out from before you, and gave you their land-

"Oppress" is the word used of how Israel were oppressed in Egypt (Ex. 3:9). But the intention, as with Israel's latter day oppression, is that it would lead them to cry out for Yahweh's salvation, 'Jesus': "For they will cry to Yahweh because of oppressors, and He will send them a saviour and a defender, and He will deliver them" (Is. 19:20 s.w.). All the judges were therefore types of the ultimate deliverance of Israel by the Lord Jesus in the last days.

Jdg 6:10 I said to you, I am Yahweh your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But you have not listened to My voice'.

And so the message ended. There is no record of this repentance being forthcoming. Instead,

a weak man who doubts his own faith is chosen and strengthened to deliver them. This was absolutely a case of salvation by grace.

"Fear" is a major theme of Gideon's early life. The word "fear" is used so often of 'not fearing' the pagan gods. "Fear" can mean simply to worship or revere, but it is all the same the word for "fear". Gideon's fear and timidity (Jud. 6:23,27; 7:1,3,10) is therefore to be associated with his fear of the power of the pagan gods. And this is indeed the result of worshipping anything other than the one true God- fear and nervousness. Peace is only in whole hearted devotion to Him.

In the latter day context, the prophet reminding Israel of the covenant they made with God in Horeb (Jud. 6:10), is precisely the work of Elijah (Mal. 4:4).

Jdg 6:11 The angel of Yahweh came and sat under the oak which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash, the Abiezrite, and his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites-

As noted on :10, this further initiative to save Israel without their repentance is a Divine movement of absolute grace. We have a picture here of Israel's desperation and poverty, as well as the extent of the domination by the Midianites. They had to hide even their wheat and flour from the marauding bands. We deduce that the winepress is not in use- for one of the curses for breaking the covenant was that the vintage would cease, and wine would be cut off from Israel.

Note the parallel between an Angel sitting under an oak and a prophetess sitting under an oak (Jud. 4:5; 6:11). In Jer. 23:18,22 we find prophets standing in the "council of the Lord" (RV) to receive His word; and yet this sounds very much like Angels standing in the court of Heaven to receive God's word of command. "The God of the spirits [Angels] of the prophets sent his Angel" to the prophet John (Rev. 22:6 RV); implying that as God had sent His Angel-Spirits to inspire the prophets, so now He did to John. Ps. 147:15,18 speak of the sending out of God's word to melt snow and send rain; this must surely refer to the Angels being sent out from the court of Heaven to do these things. The way the "watcher and holy one" came down from Heaven is paralleled with the word of Divine command likewise coming down from Heaven (Dan. 4:23,31). The universe is not just ticking away on clockwork; the Angels are actively being sent out from Heaven to perform what may appear the most mundane and repetitious of things. Thus God sends out His Angels; He sends out His word; and He also sent out His prophets (Haggai- Hag. 1:12; Ezekiel- Ez. 3:5,6). God rose up and sent out His prophets (2 Kings 17:13; Jer. 7:25 and many others). He is described as doing this because those prophets likewise identified with the word and became part of their own message.

Grain was usually threshed on a special floor, but the word used here means to beat with a stick. This was what poor gleaners did, as in Ruth 2:17. Just beating out a few ears for a small amount of flour. It is the picture of poverty and fear, of the weak cowed by the strong. And at just that point, Gideon was called. This is God's style, to call and use the small, timid, under performing and fearful.

Jdg 6:12 The angel of Yahweh appeared to him and said, Yahweh is with you, you mighty man of valour-

The Angel assured Gideon that "Yahweh is with *you* [singular]"; and yet Gideon seems to have intentionally misunderstood this by arguing back that if Yahweh is really with *us*, then why are they suffering so much (Jud. 6:12,13). He flinched at the personal call to action- just as we can, seeking instead to take refuge behind the community. Yet God Himself turns to Gideon and bids him "go in the strength of this one"- the Hebrew grammar referring to the Angel. Robert Boling comments: "The referent of "this one" is the Yahweh envoy [i.e. the

Angel], presumably in his capacity as commander of Yahweh's army". And this is the same call to us- to go in the strength of the Angel which goes before us, and seek to replicate Him, Heaven's plan for us, on this earth. And God backed up this call to Gideon to follow the Angel by saying he should go out in faith, "because Ehyeh is with you" (Jud. 6:16)- a direct quotation from the Angelic manifestation to Moses in Ex. 3:12. It's an interesting exercise to follow the parallels between the Angelic commander of Yahweh's armies, and Joshua as the human commander of them on earth. And one doesn't have to be a military leader in iron-age Israel to feel that same call to follow the Angel.

Jdg 6:13 Gideon said to him Oh, my lord, if Yahweh is with us why then has all this happened to us? Where are all His wondrous works which our fathers told us of, saying 'Didn't Yahweh bring us up from Egypt?' But now Yahweh has forsaken us and delivered us into the hand of Midian-

See on :12. Gideon is focusing upon the statements that Yahweh had brought Israel out of Egypt- and ignoring the consequences of Israel's sin of returning to Gentile domination by worshipping Gentile gods. This is typical of human 'difficulties' with God. They focus upon one aspect of the equation, and refuse to factor in the consequence of human sin.

The reference to "Which our fathers told us of" make us wonder whether this was not Passover time. The prophet had just spoken of Egypt in :8,9. Just as at the breaking of bread we can wonder whether all this is really true for me, so Gideon doubted. Gideon is actually being called to be a new Moses to deliver Israel; when he felt so inadequate and was apparently unqualified. We must remember that Moses was seen as the pinnacle of Hebrew spirituality. And Gideon was being called to be like him. The call was introduced by the phrase "The Angel of Yahweh appeared to him" (:12); and that is just the phrase used of Moses' call at the burning bush (Ex. 3:2). It is a theme of most of the 'Divine call' narratives that the called person resists and feels inadequate [Gideon's resistance on the grounds of being the smallest of the smallest clan is repeated by Saul when he was called, 1 Sam. 9:21]; and it is the same in every human life. Moses felt "Who am I that I should go and deliver Israel?" (Ex.3:11); and Gideon felt "How can I deliver Israel?" (:15). "Who am I to do this?" is in fact the qualification of every truly called servant of God. We think of Jeremiah and many others. "Go and save Israel from the hand of [their enemies]" (:14) was the same calling as Moses had. And Gideon is reassured in :16 that Yahweh will 'surely be with' him; in exactly the same words as spoken to Moses in Ex. 3:12: "Surely I will be with you. This will be the token to you, that I have sent you". They are both given a "token" of this. Divine calls often come whilst engaged in daily work; Moses was keeping his father in law's sheep, Gideon was threshing his father's grain, Saul was searching for his father's donkeys, Peter was working in his father's fishing business when the Lord called him. Both Gideon and Moses had their call authenticated by fire- in the burning bush, and in consuming Gideon's offering. As Gideon feared because he had 'seen God' (:22), so did Moses (Ex. 3:6 Moses was afraid because he had looked upon God, Heb.). Israel were under abuse by Gentiles and needed deliverance.

We note that in relatively recent history, God had done great miracles for Israel through the judges. But Gideon ignores all them, suggesting that Yahweh has done no miracle for Israel since the Exodus. His attitude is not at all good. But God still works with him.

We need to realize that God deals with us as individuals. No matter how functional and holy, or dysfunctional and evil, is our church, we are still treated by the Father as His individual children. So many have struggled with this, tending to see themselves rather as inevitably part of a community, faceless cogs in a machine. And this is actually quite attractive to humanity- hence the popularity of Roman Catholicism. Reflect a while on how God told Gideon: "I will be with thee" [you singular], and yet Gideon responds: "Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with *us*..." (Jud. 6:12,13). Gideon had to be taught that God saw him as a

separate, unique individual, and didn't deal with him automatically merely as part of a community as a whole. But it was a slow process. When Gideon saw in a dream a man saying that God had delivered Midian into *his* [singular] hand, Gideon then tells Israel that God had delivered Midian into *their* hands (Jud. 7:14,15). He still found it so hard to believe that God treated *him* as so important to Him.

Gideon's questions go unanswered because to ask them was to perceive the answer: 'Because Israel sinned and turned to other gods'. The Divine silence to many 'Why...?' questions reveals the same answer. The Divine silence provokes us to realize the answer was known to us in our conscience all along.

Jdg 6:14 Yahweh looked at him and said, Go in the strength of this One and save Israel from the hand of Midian. Haven't I sent you?-

I prefer the AV / ESV: "Go in this might of yours and save Israel". There is a purposeful juxtaposition between Gideon's whining weakness, and God's statement that this is his "might" and by this strength / might, Gideon is to deliver Israel. All within us cries out that Gideon is not strong in faith; indeed he goes straight on to express his lack of faith that he could save Israel (:15). And that is exactly the point. Gideon is a parade example of those [like ourselves] who out of weakness are made strong (Heb. 11:34). It continues the theme of God rejoicing to save Israel by the weak, the left handed, the women, those who consider their faith is weak.

Or "Go in the strength of this One" could be God speaking directly to Gideon whilst the Angel stood there; as if bidding him follow his Angel in the path to victory which had already been potentially enabled.

Gideon in Judges 6 and 7 presents as a child, desperately wanting God to hold His hand. Wanting reassurance after reassurance, even though God had given it him. As a child, you instinctively put your hand out for someone to hold it as you approached a road. You earnestly implored the adult steadying your bicycle as you learned to ride and balance "You won't let go, will you?". Or as you learned to swim without a board. Gideon comes over as this, time and again. And God used him. But just as we now have crossed thousands of roads alone, he grew old and brave, whipped Israelites who didn't support him, appeared as a mighty warrior, fearless and confident in pursuit of his enemies. But the key is to remain in contact with the little child within you, to stay small in your own eyes, to always have that need for God, that instinctive putting out of your hand to Him. It is for this reason that we have the incident of Gideon telling his young son to murder the captured kings, when [LXX] he was too young to wield a sword. He wanted to brutalize his own son at an early age by getting him to commit murder. As Gideon looked at his little boy, shy and so unsure and pining away from the challenge... he should have seen his real self. It is the loss of that little child within which is so tragic in spiritual terms. And it happens in life, as observed by so many. "Now we're old and brave, Fernando". "When I was a child, I caught a fleeting glimpse, out of the corner of my eye. I turned to look but it was gone, I cannot put my finger on it now, the child has grown, the dream has gone. And I have become, comfortably numb". Remember yourself as a small child, so unsure and humble in the sense of not caring about others' opinion and desperately seeking a hand to hold. That must be, and can be, how we ever are. The Lord held up one such child as the hero of faith and spirituality; whereas men hold up mighty warriors like Gideon in their moments of prowess and triumph as the image to inspire and seek to attain. The Lord exemplified all this, by constantly addressing God as His *abba*, daddy, the term of childhood endearment and dependence. Even in Gethsemane and to the cross. His usage of the term is startling, especially in the context of Judaism at His time.

O Lord, thy sovereign aid impart
To save me from low thoughted care;

Chase this self will from all my heart,
From all its hidden mazes there;
Make me Thy duteous child that I
Ceaseless may "Abba, Father" cry.

"I am weak but Thou art mighty, hold me with Thy powerful hand...
When I tread the verge of Jordan bid my anxious fears subside"

Jdg 6:15 He said to him, O Lord, how can I save Israel? My family is the poorest in Manasseh and I am the least in my father's house-

LXX Be gracious to me. Gideon saw the connection between grace and salvation and confessed that such a salvation could only be by God's grace to the powerless. This is the more impressive when we consider that Gideon was physically the very image of a warrior king. But he is so aware of his frailty.

"Poorest" could be as LXX and Hebrew, "my thousand is weakened", or diminished. This is evidence enough that the Hebrew term "thousand" doesn't mean literally 1,000, but a group of some kind; for the 1,000 is here diminished, and yet still remains a "thousand". This helps explain the otherwise very high numbers which we find in some places in the Hebrew Bible. The family had been brought down very low. But this was so that God might use Gideon in his weakness, and through him manifest His saving strength. The answer as to "How can I save...", is 'through Yahweh's saving', Yahoshua, 'Jesus'. So many questions are effectively posed by God in our lives through our experiences, which have the same answer: Yah's salvation, Jesus.

Gideon argued that his "thousand" in Manasseh was diminished or reduced. But he was to learn that this was the kind of "strength" which he was to go against the Midianites with. And when he does, he finds that his strength is greatly diminished again, twice; from 32,000 to 10,000, and then from 10,000 to 300. But this theme of diminishing his strength had begun when his "thousand" was diminished.

We note the consistent theme of initial resistance to the Divine call (Ex. 3:11; 4:10,13; 1 Sam. 10:21,22; Jer. 1:6; Am. 7:14,15; Lk 5:8). We can too easily excuse our lack of devotion by saying that we are unfit and unworthy. But this is a lack of faith in His forgiveness and grace.

Gideon was in fact continuing the theme of Judges- that deliverers were from the weak and unqualified for the job. Ehud, the left-handed man (Jud.3:15-30), Deborah, a woman (Jud. 4-5), Samson the sexaholic etc. And now it is Gideon the fearful (Jud. 6:27 destroying the altar at night as he feared to do it by day; 8:23 etc.); even his son Jether is presented as fearful. But God knew his fear, and even offers him the chance of going near the Midianite camp in chapter 7 in order to get assurance that they are in fact fearful of him. Yet by chapter 8, Gideon's dialogue with the men of Succoth and Peniel reveals him as confident of success and not at all fearful, and he threatens to tear down their tower (Jud. 8:9). This is very different to the Gideon who had feared to tear down his father's Baal altar. His judgment of Israelites who didn't support him in Jud. 8:14-17 is a reflection of his changed character. And this leads him to the poor behaviour with which he ended his life; spiritually, it would've been far better had he remained timid and desperate for God to hold his hand, rather than to become old and brave and self confident. So many stumble once they have a taste of power and success. We are set up to hope for a tale of a man moving from fear to faith, but instead the path is from fear to self-assertion. Yet despite this failure, Heb. 11 still lists him as a Kingdom person.

Jdg 6:16 Yahweh said to him Surely I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man-

Gideon was bidden rise up to the example of Moses- for there were many similarities between his call by the Angel, and the Angelic calling which Moses received at the burning bush. Thus Gideon was called to follow the Angel in faith, "because Ehyeh is with you" (Jud. 6:16)- a direct quotation from the Angelic manifestation to Moses in Ex. 3:12. And yet he responds: "Alas! For I have seen Yahweh's envoy face to face!" (Jud. 6:22). Gideon knew full well that Moses had seen the Angel "face to face" (Dt. 34:10). Gideon's fear is therefore rooted in a sense that "No! I'm simply *not* Moses!". And it's the same with us. We can read of all these reasons to believe that Moses is really our pattern, and respond that "No! This ain't me...". But there, in the record of Gideon and his success, lies our challenge to rise up to the spirit of Moses.

The huge numbers of the Midianites are spoken of "as one man". Gideon was perhaps confident to fight a single Midianite in one on one combat, for he appears to have been a physically strong warrior. And God is saying that fighting the Midianites will be no more difficult than that for Gideon.

Jdg 6:17 He said to Him, If now I have found grace in Your eyes, then show me a sign that it is really You Who talk with me-

Gideon perceives he is being led as Moses was (see on :16,22). And so he uses the phrase Moses used, "If now I have found grace in Your eyes". But he does so without attention to context, for Moses said that when being almost sarcastic to God in his effectively refusing the way God wished him to go in.

God eating with man was a sign of grace in Gen. 18:3, where Abraham asks the Angels to eat with him if had found grace in their eyes. And so it was here, Gideon saw he needed grace, as noted on :15. And he is encouraged that he had received it. We likewise find assurance of that grace by eating with the Lord at the breaking of bread.

Jdg 6:18 Please don't go away until I come to you and bring out my present and lay it before you. He said, I will wait until you come back-

Circumstances repeat within our lives, and between our lives and those of other believers. This incident was to repeat in Jud. 13:15. Such connections are why we meet together, why we share our lives with others; and one of the reasons why we read the Bible, which is God's selected choice of various biographies which He knows will speak to each of us in a unique way.

Jdg 6:19 Gideon went in and prepared a young goat and unleavened cakes of an ephah of meal. He put the meat in a basket and he put the broth in a pot and brought it out to him under the oak and presented it-

Oaks were typically associated with idolatry, and the altar of Baal was apparently standing on the property belonging to Gideon's father. It was as if the Angel is demanding that Gideon and his people no longer serve Baal, but Yahweh; and give to Yahweh what they had intended for Baal (see on :25).

Jdg 6:20 The angel of God said to him, Take the meat and the unleavened cakes and lay them on this rock and pour out the broth. He did so-

That there was a rock altar beneath an oak (:19) makes it clear enough that the family sacrificed to idols at this point. But as explained on :25, they were now to quit that and sacrifice instead to Yahweh. Tragically it was probably upon the rock upon which Gideon first sacrificed to Yahweh (Jud. 6:20) that his seventy sons were to be slain by Abimelech, with the help of men who worshipped Baal Berith (Jud. 9:5).

Jdg 6:21 Then the angel of Yahweh stretched out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes, and fire went up out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes, and the angel of Yahweh departed out of his sight- Gideon being told to "pour out the broth" upon his offering, making it wet so that the consumption by fire from heaven was clearly miraculous (Jud. 6:20,21 cp. 1 Kings 18:33,34), was encouraging Gideon to see himself as the prototype Elijah-prophet. This would provide the basis for Elijah dousing his sacrifice with water before it was accepted in an identical way. Gideon still doesn't learn, for he proceeds to ask for a repeat of this miracle concerning wetness; he asks that there should only be dew upon the ground (or perhaps even upon the whole land of Israel, see Hebrew text) according to his word of faithful prayer (Jud. 6:37-39). Elijah saying that "there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word" (1 Kings 17:1) is surely a conscious replica of this. It is quite possible that we, too, may be given certain prompts in life by reason of particular experiences repeating those of a Biblical character.

Jdg 6:22 Gideon saw that he was the angel of Yahweh, and Gideon said, Alas, Lord Yahweh! I have seen the angel of Yahweh face to face!-

See on :16, where we saw how Gideon is being set up as Moses. His panic at having seen the face of an Angel is therefore due to failing to appreciate this. For Moses saw the Angel's face, and lived. And there was no reason why Gideon couldn't. We see in his panic a man struggling with the calling he was being given. And yet despite all his wriggling, he does finally accept it, and does act in faith, as Heb. 11 makes clear.

I suggest that Gideon is transferring his real guilt into a form of false guilt, as often happens within the human mind. He realized his family, Israel and probably himself were guilty of idolatry. But he can't quite bring himself to confess that to himself, and so instead he feels guilt stricken over something which wasn't a sin, i.e. seeing the face of an Angel. For Moses and others had done so, and it was no sin.

It was no random chance that Gideon was later led to victory at Penuel (Jud. 8:9). Penuel was so named to celebrate how Jacob had seen the face of God and lived (Gen. 32:30). Gideon had earlier thought he would be slain as he had been so unworthy to see the face of the Angel. As with our lives, God was leading him to perceive ever more His grace. See on :23.

Jdg 6:23 Yahweh said to him, Peace! Don't be afraid. You will not die-

"Peace" in the Bible usually refers to peace with God through forgiveness. The assurance that he will not die was because he had been forgiven. I explained on :22 that he did have a conscience of sin, but he couldn't quite bring himself to confess it, and transferred that true guilt into a false guilt. But this was enough for God; that movement of conscience within Gideon was accepted as repentance, and he is assured peace with God. And he perceives this and memorializes that peace in the name of the altar he will build.

I noted on :22 that Gideon was later reminded at Penuel of how he like weak Jacob had seen the face of God and lived. And he at that time tells the men of Penuel that he will "come again in peace" (Jud. 8:9). Coming "in peace" reflected how he had learned the lesson from seeing the face of the Angel; for he had built an altar called 'Yahweh is peace', and now he was confident that indeed he was at peace with God despite all his weaknesses.

Jdg 6:24 Then Gideon built an altar there to Yahweh and called it Yahweh is Peace-

As explained on :23, this was a celebration of peace with God; and it implies therefore his repentance and forgiveness. What was required in order to lift the Midianite oppression was

repentance; and Gideon's very weak repentance was as it were used by God to enable Him to lift it.

This altar is likely that of :26. It is mentioned and then we are given the details as to how it was built. Gideon's motivation in building it was because he had experienced peace with God through grace. Just as Paul says we have too. There was no grace and no peace with God through Baal. As Jonah noted, those who observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. Grace and peace with God are concepts unique to the one true faith.

To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites-

I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

Jdg 6:25 The same night Yahweh said to him, Take your father's bull, the second bull seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that your father has and cut down the Asherah that is by it-

The seven year old bull represented the seven years of Midianite domination of Israel (:1). "The second bull" may have been an animal which was being raised especially for sacrifice to Baal. It was only by ending this Baal worship that the seven years of domination would be ended. And the seven year old bull was therefore to be seen as a kind of atonement sacrifice for those seven years of apostasy.

'Gideon' means 'hacker' or 'cutter / thrower down'. The root is used in the Mosaic commands to cut down the pagan idols of Canaan (Dt. 7:5; 12:3). He was being asked to live up to his name, to realize that he had been set up in advance to do what seemed to him so impossibly difficult. We too have good works prepared for us to do from the foundation of the world. And we struggle to accept this, making excuses, looking for signs etc.

We note that Gideon's father had the Asherah grove by the altar (Jud. 16:25). This was studied disobedience to Dt. 16:21: "You must not plant for yourselves an Asherah of any kind of tree beside the altar of Yahweh your God, which you shall make for yourselves". His repentance, apparently overnight, is therefore the more remarkable. We also see how Yahweh worship had become mixed with pagan worship. "The altar" in view was that of Yahweh, but it had become the altar of Baal because of the mixing of truth and error, of Yahweh and pagan worship. This worship of the flesh in the appearance of Yahweh worship is in fact our abiding temptation, as it was for Israel. They never abrogated Yahweh worship, but worshipped idols in the name of Yahweh worship. We, e.g., may gossip in the name of "truth" or "love"; purchase luxury items or property in the name of worshipping God or serving Him.

Dt. 16:21 was one of a whole series of apparently 'minor' commands which were designed to make obedience easier to the others already given. Thus he tells them in Deuteronomy not to plant a grove of trees near the altar of God - because he knew this would provoke the possibility of mixing Yahweh worship with that of the surrounding world (Dt. 16:21). There was to be no possibility of worshipping idols in the name of Yahweh worship; there was not even to be the possibility of some subliminal suggestion of it arising from having a grove of trees near an altar.

Jdg 6:26 build an altar to Yahweh your God on the top of this stronghold in the proper way, and take the second bull and offer it as a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you cut down-

"This stronghold" may refer to the heap of stones under the oak tree which they had used for worshipping idols. I suggested on :25 that the "second bull" [it could be translated just "the other bull"] was one being bred for sacrifice to Baal.

Jdg 6:27 Then Gideon took ten of his servants and did as Yahweh had spoken to him, and because he feared his father's household and the men of the city, he could not do it by day, so he did it by night-

Again we see his weakness, and yet his desire to respond, however weakly. And God eagerly used that. Clearly his family were idolaters and the altar was on his father's property, so it would be surprising if Gideon was not also an idolater.

Jdg 6:28 When the men of the city arose early in the morning, the altar of Baal was broken down and the Asherah was cut down that was by it and the second bull had been offered on the altar that was built-

The record presents Gideon's complete (if nervous) obedience through the eyes of the observers early that morning. Gideon knew they would soon find out that he had done it. But he doesn't flee the village. He did it at night because he feared the other people would forcibly stop him from doing it.

Jdg 6:29 They said one to another, Who has done this? When they inquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash has done this-

We note that Gideon doesn't call them out on their idolatry. Rather he lets them come to him. He was no fearless prophet, denouncing idolatry in God's Name.

Jdg 6:30 Then the men of the city said to Joash, Bring out your son that he may die, because he has broken down the altar of Baal and because he has cut down the Asherah that was by it-

They were twisting the Mosaic laws of apostasy to apply them to Gideon for desecrating Baal's altar. They were psychologically able to do this because they considered that Baal worship was a form of Yahweh worship. And it was this continual mixture of flesh and spirit, of truth and error, which was and is the abiding weakness of God's people.

"Bring out... that he may die" recalls the behaviour of the Sodomites (Gen. 19:5). And again there is a refusal to agree. I suggest that Gideon perceived the similarity; because in :39 he asks God for yet another sign, prefaced with "Do not be angry with me if I speak one last time". And he is quoting verbatim the words of Abraham when he had pleaded for Sodom in Gen. 18:32. This is how familiarity with the text of scripture works; we perceive a connection between our experience and that of God's people historically. And then, working it through, thinking about life and its connections with Biblical precedent, we are inspired to continue the spirit of the Biblical narrative in our own lives.

Jdg 6:31 Joash said to all who stood against him, Will you contend for Baal? Or will you save him? He who will contend for him, let him be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because someone has broken down his altar-

Joash had presumably been a committed Baal worshipper; for the altar was on his territory, and the village would have been quite small. He responds not at all as we, or probably Gideon, expected. We can be encouraged that there is a spiritual conscience within all people,

and when they see someone like Gideon have the courage to stand up and be counted, they are relatively easily motivated to do the same. Thus the Gospel penetrates strongly Islamic or atheistic communities- because one person within them stands up and is counted for Christ.

Self-expression, or even self-manifestation, is one of God's features, and so He intends it to be in us who are made after His image. God manifestation doesn't in that sense mean the destruction or ignoring of the individual human person; rather, the very opposite, in that the real character, the new life, will be eternally developed and preserved. This is where Hinduism is so wrong, as wrong as any monolithic, apostate version of Christianity- the person disappears into the great Whole. Joash understood where 'God manifestation' can be taken too far; he told the Baal worshippers to let Baal plead for himself, rather than them pleading for him. This needs thinking through. He was saying that they were assuming that they had to 'play God' for Baal; they had to mindlessly, unthinkingly manifest the god they thought existed. Joash says that if Baal really exists, he himself will act for himself, openly. And this of course is where the One True God excels; He does act for Himself, and doesn't rely *solely* upon manifesting Himself through men in order to achieve anything. Note the intentional surprise for us in Is. 43:1: "Thus says the Lord that created you... I have redeemed you, I have called you by *your* name; you are Mine". We expect the creator, owner and redeemer of someone or something to name it with *His* name. But God dashes that expectation- He says instead that we are called by *our* name.

Jdg 6:32 Therefore on that day he named him Jerub-Baal, saying, Let Baal contend against him because he has broken down his altar-

We see here how names were given to people because of life experiences; this explains why the same person or place can have several names. Joash was struck by the power of the logic which had occurred to him; Baal ought to argue for himself if he were a real god. Baal's total dependence upon men for his actions was evidence enough that he had no real existence. And Joash was grateful to Gideon for pointing this out.

Perhaps the point is that Baal must be really so weak, because he was unable to 'contend' with someone as weak and doubting as Gideon, who had cut down his image and thrown down his altar.

Jdg 6:33 Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east assembled themselves together and they crossed over and encamped in the valley of Jezreel-

People who had been yelling for Gideon's blood now go strangely silent. Joash was perhaps the elder of the village, and his logic was hard to argue back against. The eastern peoples then crossed over Jordan, all set to now wipe out the Israelites and take their land. This was indeed the punishment for breaking the covenant, and only the weak faith and shaky repentance of Gideon was going to stop it.

Jdg 6:34 But the Spirit of Yahweh came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered together after him-

This language is picked up in Is. 61:1,2: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me... to preach good tidings... liberty to the captives...to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God". Primarily this refers to Isaiah preaching an inspired message of deliverance to an Israel threatened by the Assyrian invasion, whilst it is also quoted in the Gospels concerning the work of Christ. Both these applications have their basis in the Spirit of God coming upon the judges, showing that they typify both the work of Christ and of the Elijah prophet, of which Isaiah was an early manifestation.

Abiezer, his home village, gathered loyally around Gideon; when just recently they had demanded his death for apostasy against Baal. We see here how fickle people are; and yet

more positively, how relatively easy it is for people to change. Because there is a spiritual conscience in everyone, and it often needs just one person within their family or community to step out for Christ, and they will too.

Jdg 6:35 He sent messengers throughout all Manasseh and they also were gathered together after him, and he sent messengers to Asher, to Zebulun and to Naphtali and they came up to meet them-

The idea may be that all Manasseh supported him, but the three other tribes came up to discuss with him, just "to meet them". Or it could be that they all responded, at least eventually (Jud. 7:23). We recall how Deborah's appeal for support from Asher and some of the leaders of these tribes had been refused. And after God gave the great victory, she taught everyone the song of Deborah in Jud. 5 which lamented their lack of response. So perhaps that had worked, and now they responded. We may fail a call the first time, but then it is repeated, and we accept it. Just as Gideon had motivated the village of Abiezer, so now Abiezer motivated "all Manasseh" and perhaps they in turn motivated Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali.

Jdg 6:36 Gideon said to God, If You will save Israel by my hand, as You have spoken- Gideon's fragile faith is in fact a great encouragement to us. He nervously kept on in his spiritual path, although ever wanting visible evidence of God's presence with him. Gideon comes over as repeatedly trying to avoid God's claims and call; and yet God kept on with him, and so it is with each of us. We need to enquire and clarify what our mission is in this world- for we each have a calling, and the lesson of Gideon is for us all, not just a few.

Jdg 6:37 I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that You will save Israel by my hand as You have said-

Quite possibly there was a drought and water was precious, hence Gideon took a bowl in order to fill it with the valuable water from the fleece. The giving or withholding of dew was a reflection of whether or not Israel were receiving the blessings or cursings of the covenant. One of the blessings of the true Israel was that of dew (Gen. 27:28,44). The signs of the dew demonstrated that God would save by grace- giving the blessings for obedience when there had been no obedience, giving and taking those blessings by His sovereign power. The miracles addressed Gideon's unspoken question: 'We have been disobedient, so how will God bless us with the blessings of obedience, such as dew and victory over larger armies?'. They deserved no dew, for they had sinned. Elijah was to be inspired by Gideon's weak faith in later asking for dew and rain to be withheld (1 Kings 17:1). We too are to be motivated by the faith of others, no matter how weak. The threshing floor is also a symbol of judgment. If God gave His blessings, the dew, to Gideon's fleece but not to the ground / land of Israel generally, then Gideon would know that indeed God was uniquely with him, even if the rest of Israel deserved judgment and the withholding of the covenant blessings. "Ground" is *eretz*, the usual word for the land of Israel. If just the soil around the fleece were in view, a different word would have been used.

Baal was supposed to be the god of dew. So having destroyed Baal's altar, Gideon asks God to demonstrate at least just to himself, that He is indeed the controller of dew rather than Baal. "Can any of the false gods of the nations give rain? Can the skies of themselves give showers? Only you are He, O Yahweh our God! Therefore we will wait for you, for you made these things" (Jer. 14:22). We see how a man can publically profess faith in God, and do great things in His Name and in criticism of error. And yet himself be very frail in faith and desperate for confirmation. The fighting of apostasy and brave declaration of the error of

the wicked, can so easily be done whilst our real spiritual man is so weak and frail and in such need of confirmation.

Jdg 6:38 That is what happened, for he got up early the next day and squeezed the fleece together and wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water-

There is a much repeated characteristic of God's servants: that they 'rose up early in the morning' and did God's work. In each of the following passages, this phrase is clearly not an idiom; rather does it have an evidently literal meaning: Abraham (Gen. 19:27; 21:14; 22:3); Jacob (Gen. 28:18); Job (1:5); Moses (Ex. 8:20; 9:13; 24:4; 34:4); Joshua (Josh. 3:1; 6:12; 7:16; 8:10); Gideon (Jud. 6:38; 7:1). This is quite an impressive list, numerically. This can be a figure for being zealous (Ps. 127:2; Pr. 27:14; Song 7:12; Is. 5:11; Zeph. 3:7). God Himself rises up early in His zeal to save and bring back His wayward people (Jer. 7:13,25; 11:7; 25:3,4; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:14,15; 44:4). Yet the above examples all show that men literally rose up early in their service to God; this was an expression of their zeal for God, in response to His zeal for us. I'm not suggesting that zeal for God is reflected by rising early rather than staying up late; but it wouldn't be too much to suggest that if we are men of mission, we won't waste our hours in bed. Get up when you wake up.

Jdg 6:39 Gideon said to God, Don't let Your anger be kindled against me and I will speak but this once-

Gideon is inspired by the words and spiritual ambition of Abraham (Gen. 18:32). Perhaps he feared it was just a coincidence, seeing that fleeces naturally attract dew.

Fleeces naturally attract and retain moisture, so Gideon may have felt on reflection that the first sign was not in fact that great, and so he asked for something harder in the second sign. Again he presents as so very weak and faltering in his faith. As Hebrews 11 says, Gideon is really the classic case of a man whose weakness was made strong.

Please let me make a trial just this once more with the fleece. Let it now be dry only on the fleece and on all the ground let there be dew-

I suggested on :37 that Gideon specifically understood the dew as covenant blessing from God, which the ground / land of Israel didn't deserve. He had asked God to show him that he, Gideon, was going to receive those blessings, even if the land didn't. But his faith still faltered. By asking for it to now be done the other way around, Gideon was effectively asking for all Israel to be blessed with dew- because of his lack of faith, and needing everything to be demonstrated to him again. Again we note that "ground" is *eretz*, the usual word for the land of Israel. If just the soil around the fleece were in view, a different word would have been used.

Jdg 6:40 God did so that night, for it was dry on the fleece only and there was dew on all the ground-

The Hebrew word for "fleece" is literally 'that which is cut down / cut off', and it can also effectively mean that which is destroyed (s.w. Nah. 1:12 "thus shall they be cut down"; "they are soon cut off", Ps. 90:10). Israel had indeed been cut down by the Midianites. Gideon had just cut down the symbols of Baal worship (same idea, although a different word is used- Jud. 6:26,28,30). I suspect he simply asked for the miracle to be done again, in reverse order, because of his own weak faith and not because he saw any great symbology in the whole scene at the time. But later, he may have perceived that he had been asking God to place His blessing of dew upon that which was cut down, or retract it. And indeed God demonstrated that He could do this with ease- and do it at Gideon's word. The blessing or cursing of Israel was to depend upon Gideon and his faith. For generally Israel had not repented, and that was what was necessary for the Midianite domination to end. But Gideon's weak repentance was

going to be accepted by God as it were for all Israel. This was how eager God was to save them from Midian, despite their idolatry. And it looks ahead to His eagerness to save us, through the work of the Lord Jesus and His far greater righteousness being imputed to us, who are more willing to receive it than were Israel. Arguments like this make us have every confidence that we shall indeed be saved, by His amazing grace.

The two miracles are reversible miracles- wet on the fleece, dry on the ground; then dry on the fleece, wet on the ground. A reversible miracle was done again to prove to a doubting Israel, and a doubting Moses, that God was truly going to save them by grace: Moses' rod was made a snake and then a rod again; Moses' hand was made leprous and then sound again. This kind of reversible miracle was common in the surrounding idol cults. In the *Enuma Elish*, Marduk is challenged by the other gods to destroy a garment and then recreate it- and he does, to prove his power. In Homer's *Odyssey*, in the 10th book, the goddess Circe changed the comrades of Odysseus into pigs and then restored them. We see here how influenced Israel were by surrounding paganism, yet God worked through that to still confirm them. We can compare how the waters of both the Red Sea and the Jordan were driven back, and then made to return as before. Reversible miracles were to confirm weak faith. And God went along with that, having told Gideon at the start that He considered him a mighty warrior who had the faith to do his mission.

JUDGES CHAPTER 7

Jdg 7:1 Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon-

"Gideon" is the word used for the command to cut down the idols of the land (Dt. 7:5; 12:3). It seems Gideon was named this after he cut down the pagan grove on his family property, and his father then also called him "Jerubbaal", 'let Baal contend [for himself]'. We see here how men came to be called by various names which reflected their life experiences. This is why often people have a number of different names in the Hebrew Bible.

And all the people who were with him rose up early-

There is a much repeated characteristic of God's servants: that they 'rose up early in the morning' and did God's work. In each of the following passages, this phrase is clearly not an idiom; rather does it have an evidently literal meaning: Abraham (Gen. 19:27; 21:14; 22:3); Jacob (Gen. 28:18); Job (1:5); Moses (Ex. 8:20; 9:13; 24:4; 34:4); Joshua (Josh. 3:1; 6:12; 7:16; 8:10); Gideon (Jud. 6:38; 7:1). This is quite an impressive list, numerically. This can be a figure for being zealous (Ps. 127:2; Pr. 27:14; Song 7:12; Is. 5:11; Zeph. 3:7). God Himself rises up early in His zeal to save and bring back His wayward people (Jer. 7:13,25; 11:7; 25:3,4; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:14,15; 44:4). Yet the above examples all show that men literally rose up early in their service to God; this was an expression of their zeal for God, in response to His zeal for us. I'm not suggesting that zeal for God is reflected by rising early rather than staying up late; but it wouldn't be too much to suggest that if we are men of mission, we won't waste our hours in bed. Get up when you wake up.

And encamped beside the spring of Harod-

"Harod" means trembling, and may have been named after the trembling of Gideon and the people (:3). Constantly he is portrayed as weak in faith and fearful, and yet not giving up and going forward in the path given to him.

And the camp of Midian was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh, in the valley- Moreh was the name of a Canaanite, so the continuing place name reflects how it had not been conquered by the Israelites and renamed as it should have been. We have the persistent

impression of strength despite an environment of such weakness, and this we respect about Gideon.

"Moreh" means "oracle". The vision given to the Midianites was that oracle.

The NIV Study Bible locates the area of Gideon's victory in Jud. 7:1 as being just south of Mount Tabor between the Jordan River and the end of the Kishon River. This is the very same area where God would later give Barak a dramatic victory. Barak was encouraged in his faith by the fact Gideon had been given a huge victory against far greater odds, in the very same area. Barak of course may not have perceived this, just as we may not perceive the hints God is giving us that we in essence are going through the same experiences as Biblical characters.

Jdg 7:2 Yahweh said to Gideon, The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast against Me saying, 'My own hand has saved me'. In all Israel's great military victories, there was some element of God's hand (e.g. hailstones, earthquake) to stop them thinking that their own strength alone had saved them. And this is major theme in God's working with us. Gideon had earlier argued that his "thousand" in Manasseh was diminished or reduced (see on Jud. 6:15 *My family is the poorest in Manasseh* = My thousand is the most diminished). But he was to learn that this was the kind of "strength" which he was to go against the Midianites with. And when he does, he finds that his strength is greatly diminished again, twice; from 32,000 to 10,000, and then from 10,000 to 300. But this theme of diminishing his strength had begun when his "thousand" was diminished.

We should be unsurprised when our own strength is diminished; by financial or health crisis, by rejection until we are virtually alone. God was now developing his understanding that the diminishing was necessary for faith in Him. We too find our natural strength diminished, that we may learn that when we are weak humanly then we are strong in God. There is entropy in everything, and this is why- be it health, physical strength, relationships etc. Gideon likely would have carefully calculated his number of troops and compared it against his enemies. And he thought he had a fighting chance of success, in his own strength. But what God now does is to force him to *abandon all rational calculation* and trust totally in God. And He works likewise with us. The whole incident with drinking from cupped hand or lapping as a dog was perhaps to indicate that it was the hands of just 300 men who would be used by God's hand.

This passage is alluded to in 1 Cor. 1:26-29, where Paul explains that for this same reason God has chosen "not many" to bring about His way of salvation, through a small remnant of weak people bringing to nothing the mighty things. This would equate Gideon's 300 with the true believers of both natural and spiritual Israel.

Jdg 7:3 Now therefore announce to the people, 'Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead'. Twenty-two thousand of the people returned and ten thousand remained-

In all, three and a half tribes had sent men to support Gideon- half Manasseh, Naphtali, Asher and Zebulun (Jud. 6:35). According to Num. 1, each tribe had around 30,000 fighters. So only a few of their warriors had come anyway. These were the supposedly brave who had come to Gideon. And even of them, most were fearful. As always, it's a case of a minority of a minority of a minority...

This was strictly according to the law of Moses, which required commanders to invite their fearful soldiers to leave before conflict (Dt. 20:8). "Thousand" may refer to a military unit; see on Jud. 6:15. 32,000 were reduced to 10,000, and 10,000 to 300. The proportion of

reduction the second time was far greater than the first time; about two thirds of the men returned, i.e. about 30% remained. But then just 3% remained. And overall, only about 1 % of the force was required by God. There would have been thousands of troops moving away from the front, rather embarrassed to tell the villages they passed through that they had moved away from the front because they were fearful. To turn their backs before their enemies was one of Israel's curses for disobedience to the covenant. So the whole thing was set up to show them that indeed they had been disobedient to the covenant, and God was gently punishing them for this. And condemnation, turning backs before enemies, is in fact ultimately self inflicted by the condemned.

"Mount Gilead" is hard to understand. There may have been a Mount Gilead on the western side of Jordan, but it is not mentioned anywhere else. "Gilead" and "Gilboa" differ by one letter in Hebrew. Perhaps Gideon was to undo Saul's defeat, and was encamped on Mount Gilboa. Or we could read *maher*, 'in haste', for *mehar*, "from the mount", giving the sense "let him return in haste to Gilead" i.e. go home.

Jdg 7:4 Yahweh said to Gideon, The people are still too many. Bring them down to the water and I will test them for you there. Those of whom I tell you, 'This one shall go with you' shall go, and those of whom I tell you, 'This one shall not go with you' shall remain-

"The water" was presumably the spring of Harod, meaning "trembling" (:2,3). Those who apparently weren't trembling were to be tested as to whether they were weak enough to be used for the great salvation God was to achieve. Only Gideon was aware, it seems, of this basis for reducing the people further. It was a very personal move from God to him, to yet further reduce his trust in human strength. In the eyes of all his commanders and men, Gideon's behaviour at this point was bizarre and bound to lose them the battle. It says a lot for him that he went ahead with the idea.

Jdg 7:5 So he brought down the people to the water and Yahweh said to Gideon, Each one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, set him by himself; likewise each one who bows down on his knees to drink-

"Laps" is *yalok*, the very sound a dog makes when drinking. Only Gideon at this point knew the basis upon which he was dividing his men. It would have taken him some time to pass by ten thousand men [although "thousand" may mean a military subdivision rather than 1,000] and pick out the 300 who lapped. At the time, he may have had no idea why this was being made so significant. Quite possibly it isn't significant, it was just a way of severing a majority of odd thinkers and awkward, counter instinctive non-logical behaviors from amongst the majority. For this is a big theme of the story. Those who drank in a more natural and normal manner are described as acting like dogs. Even though it has been well observed that "humans are in fact physically incapable of lapping water like dogs, in that the human tongue is not flexible enough to make the cupshaped form necessary to raise water into the mouth". So the likeness to a dog is pointed and is making a point, that they were acting in a crude way. By behaving 'normally'. Perhaps bowing on the knees recalled idol worship, and the more sensitive would not have done this. The word is used in 1 Kings 19:18 for those who bowed the knee to Baal. Those who lapped were acting like despised dogs. And it is by the dogs, like 'Caleb' [= 'dog'] who followed Yahweh faithfully [as a dog does a man], that God would save His people. Those who acted like dogs were the ones used, lapping like a dog laps, rather than drinking from cupped hands as men usually do.

The difficulty is that a dog laps on all fours. The majority also knelt down but used their cupped hands to get the water. So it is problematic to assume that some refused to kneel down because of the association between kneeling and idolatry. Both categories used their hands; those who lapped still put their hands to their mouths (:6). "Lap with the tongue from

the water as the dog laps” and “lap putting their hands to their mouth” appear contradictory. Dogs don't lap from their hands / paws.

One solution is to see two groups spoken of here. Those who cupped their hands and then lapped water out of their hands; and those who lapped direct from the water as a dog laps. Or it could be that the lappers lapped out of their cupped hands whilst crouching [as a dog does], but not kneeling.

The LXX offers: "Everyone who laps with his tongue from the water as the dog laps, set him apart and everyone who crouches on his knees to drink set him by himself. And it was: the total number of lappers with their tongue was 300 men and all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water". This removes the issue of “lap putting their hands to their mouth”.

We can translate "likewise" as 'even...' or 'that is to say' [same construction in Gen. 4:4; Ex. 24:12; 25:12; 1 Sam. 17:40; 28:3], so the group spoken of in :5 are one and the same—those who were not chosen. They lapped as a dog laps, bowing down on their knees to get the water into their hands but lapped the water from their hands. A two legged being has to bow down on his knees to drink. But the other group in :6, the 300 who were chosen, drank not as a dog drinks. They drank with their hands to their mouths. Which is exactly not how a dog drinks. They did *not act as if* lapping like a dog. So we would translate: "Everyone who laps with his tongue from the water as the dog laps, set him apart, that is to say everyone who crouches on his knees to drink" [Those thus set apart were those rejected]. Now the number of the lappers with their hand to their mouth was 300 men, whereas all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water [as dogs lap]. So the difference was between those who used their hands as a cup, and those who used their tongues. Those who used their hands were the hands chosen to be God's hand (:7). So my suggestion is to replace NEV "likewise" with "that is to say". This is exactly how the same Hebrew is translated in Gen. 4:4; Ex. 24:12; 25:12 ["cast for it four rings of gold, *that is to say* two rings on the one side and two rings on the other side"]; 1 Sam. 17:40 ["he put them in the shepherds' container that he had, *that is to say* in the pouch"]; 28:3 ["All Israel had mourned for him and had buried him in Ramah, *that is to say* in his city"]. And this would continue an undoubted theme of Judges—that God uses the odd, the cack-handed, awkward, often the subject of the comment "some mothers do have them", the dyspraxic and the otherwise marginal for His purpose, the dog-like in this case, who had a most unusual way of drinking water from hands, lapping rather than sucking it up. Those who lapped used their hands (:6)- and perhaps the idea was that it was to be *by the dysfunctional hands* of God's people that victory would be achieved. We could note that eating [or drinking, in this case] in an unusual way is typical of some forms of autism. The autistic think differently and act differently. And they are [wrongly] despised. But it was those whom God chose. I have spent my ministry working with people who are generally out of church Christians, spiritual but not religious. And so many of them were autistic, and great believers they were, the ones God used just like Gideon's 300. They met daily like issues in an out of the box, different way to the majority. Three hundred out of 10000 is 3 % which was likely roughly the percentage of the group who were autistic.

Jdg 7:6 The number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouth, was three hundred men, but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink-
Gideon's faith would have been fully stretched. Although the exact round number, 300, would have confirmed to him that this indeed was what God intended.

Jdg 7:7 Yahweh said to Gideon, By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the other people go, each to his own place-
They were not to be kept as some kind of reserve force, they were to be sent home. The

demand for faith was total, and we are sometimes put in similar positions, where we have only faith in God and all possibility of human help has been removed.

135000 Midianites had faced Gideon's 300 men (Jud. 8:10). That works out at precisely 450 of the enemy for every one of Gideon's men. And it cannot be coincidence that Elijah describes himself as facing off as one man of God against 450 prophets of Baal on Carmel (1 Kings 18:22). Despite his arrogance and spiritual weakness, Elijah learned the lesson from Gideon's courageous example. This is how the Bible becomes a living word, the history is not dead but alive, because it has been carefully selected by God to show us that man is not alone, God is with us, no circumstance we face is in essence unique; others have trodden this path before.

This is why we so need each other; and we need to get to know each other and to share our stories in detail. The parts of the body of Christ are made for each other.

Jdg 7:8 So the three hundred men took food and their trumpets, and he sent all the rest of them to their tents; and the camp of Midian was beneath him in the valley-

The NASB follows the Hebrew best in suggesting that the 300 took the food brought by the other fighters who had either left or been forced to go home. They had come bringing their own food- but the 300 somehow took that food for themselves: "And so they took the provisions of the people in their hand". Quite possibly the 300 had not brought their own food with them- maybe suggesting they were forgetful, not well organized, hardly elite troops, or without much background support at home. No women in the family lading them with food to take with them... and they were the ones God used.

We expect to read of warriors taking weapons in their hands. But instead they take food and trumpets. Again we see how God's strategy is totally different to human strategy. It would have been a fair test of their faith to continue with an apparently bizarre plan which had no human hope of success. The spiritually minded would have recalled the conquest of Jericho with trumpets. "Their trumpets" would have been those of the 300 trumpeters amongst the 10000 men. They handed over their trumpets, perhaps each platoon of around 33 men had a trumpeter amongst them. Originally, perhaps the 32,000 had 300 trumpeters amongst them. And he handed his trumpet to one of the 300.

AV: "And he sent all the rest of Israel every man unto his tent, and *retained* those three hundred men", using the same word as in :11 for "strengthened". Perhaps Gideon strengthened their faith in the intention of God to use them to save Israel from such overwhelming odds.

Jdg 7:9 The same night Yahweh said to him, Arise, go down into the camp; for I have delivered it into your hand-

The Israelite troops were mustered on a hill with a commanding view, so that they would see the vast army of their enemies. And now Gideon was told to go down to them, clinging on to his faith in those words that "I have delivered it into your hand", maybe repeating them over and over.

Jdg 7:10 But if you are afraid to go down, go with Purah your servant down to the camp-

God knows our frame and remembers that we are dust. He sets an ideal standard that He knows we can reach- in Gideon's case, to go down to the camp of the enemies. But He knew Gideon's weakness and so by grace delayed the plan for a day, to allow Gideon to get more support for his weak faith. Rather like He didn't send Israel on the direct route to Canaan, lest they see war and lose heart. We can therefore never complain that we are forced by overpowering circumstance into lack of faith. God knows our levels and will not test us beyond that which we can bear, but will make a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13). This is a

wonderful promise, and it removes any excuse of 'circumstantial ethics' for our lack of response to God's challenges to faith.

Jdg 7:11 and you will hear what they say. After that your hands will be strengthened to go down into the camp. Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outskirts of the armed men who were in the camp-

See on :12. Purah, 'boast of Yah', would have been one of Gideon's servants who bravely helped him cut down the altar of Baal and the Ashtaroth on another night not so long ago. See on :10; the same phrase for strengthening hands is used of how God graciously strengthened the hands of Lot to leave Sodom (Gen. 19:16), when he like Gideon had some faith but not enough to rise up to the simple command to 'go out' as commanded by God.

Gideon had strengthened the 300 men (see on :8), but clearly his own faith needed strengthening. He would have strengthened them whilst himself doubting. This is absolutely true to real human experience. The record has every psychological and spiritual credibility.

Jdg 7:12 The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like locusts for multitude, and their camels were without number, as the sand which is on the seashore for multitude-

The same description is used of Saul's Philistine enemies in 1 Sam. 13:5. Gideon was Saul's hero-see on 1 Sam. 14:28,31. Saul tried to externally imitate Gideon when he prohibited the men to eat anything while they were pursuing the Philistines (1 Sam. 11:11 = Jud. 7:16; 1 Sam. 13:5 = Jud. 7:12; 1 Sam. 14:24,28,31 = Jud. 8:4,5).

The enemy were "as the sand by the sea side for multitude", using the words of the Abrahamic promises (Gen. 22:17,18). These people were therefore a pseudo-Israel, having the appearance of being Abraham's true seed. Hagar had been promised "I will multiply your seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude", after the pattern of the promises to Abraham (Gen.16:10). This is confirmed by their description as being "by ranks of five" (Jud. 7:11), using the identical Hebrew phrase as used in Ex. 13:18 and Josh. 4:12 concerning Israel's marching against *their* enemies. The aptness of this to Israel's present enemies is obvious- their local enemies claim *they* are the true seed of Abraham.

Jdg 7:13 When Gideon had come, there was a man telling a dream to his fellow. He said, I had a dream: a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian and came to the tent and struck it so that it fell, and turned it upside down so that the tent lay flat-

Gideon is likened to a loaf of barley bread tumbling into Midian, overturning it - pointing forward to Jesus, the barley-bread loaf (Jn. 6:35 cp. :9), falling as the little stone on to the image (Jud. 7:13). Barley bread was despised as the most desperate kind of food a man could eat to stay alive. And this was how Gideon felt- he was God's most desperate plan. His faith was weak, his repentance for idolatry had been secret and nervous, and yet God was going to use him.

We note that Gideon had very little bread when the Angel first appeared to him and commissioned him; he was beating out a few grains of wheat for a little bit of flour. In Jud. 8:5, he and his men lack bread. But it was Gideon as the tiny humble loaf of barley bread, the bread of the poor, that overturned the tent of Midian in Jud. 7:13. Again and again, Gideon was being shown that it is through the diminished and weak that God will bring victory. And we think of the five barley loaves of the little boy used by the Lord to feed thousands of people.

"Tumbled" is used to describe the sword of the cherubim which "turned every way" (Gen.3:24); another hint that Gideon and his men were a replication of the cherubim on earth; see on :20.

"The tent" is the usual word for 'tabernacle'. They had carried the tabernacle of their god with them into battle, and Gideon overturned it. The victory was therefore to be against their gods, and thereby demonstrating the supremacy of Yahweh. Gideon and Purah had overturned the altar of Baal in Abiezer, and as with events in our lives, this was to prepare him for the far greater overturning of the pagan tabernacle of the Midianites. The same phrase is used for the tabernacle of David which "fell", s.w. "lay flat" (Am. 9:11).

The tent may refer specifically to a kingly tent, as if the ruling house of Midian was to be destroyed.

Jdg 7:14 His fellow answered, This is none other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel. God has delivered Midian into his hand with all the army-

But Gideon's men were not to use swords, only trumpets and earthenware... and to proclaim the sword of Yahweh. Gideon now understood that Yahweh's sword was his sword, Yahweh's sword was men who didn't use swords. It's rather like the nervous, doubting Gideon being told "Go in this your might... you mighty man of valour". God sees things which are not as though they are; He sees maturity before it has developed. And our eye of faith is to see likewise. If the Midianites believed that they were delivered into Gideon's hand, and God believed it, then Gideon had to believe it.

Jdg 7:15 When Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshipped, and he returned into the camp of Israel. He said, Arise, for Yahweh has delivered the army of Midian into your hand!-

We need to realize that God deals with us as individuals. No matter how functional and holy, or dysfunctional and evil, is our church, we are still treated by the Father as His individual children. So many have struggled with this, tending to see themselves rather as inevitably part of a community, faceless cogs in a machine. And this is actually quite attractive to humanity- hence the popularity of Roman Catholicism. Reflect a while on how God told Gideon: "I will be with thee" [you singular], and yet Gideon responds: "Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us..." (Jud. 6:12,13). Gideon had to be taught that God saw him as a separate, unique individual, and didn't deal with him automatically merely as part of a community as a whole. But it was a slow process. When Gideon saw in a dream a man saying that God had delivered Midian into *his* [singular] hand, Gideon then tells Israel that God had delivered Midian into *their* hands (Jud. 7:14,15). He still found it so hard to believe that God treated *him* as so important to Him. Or we could argue that Gideon was not out for personal justification, but for the victory of Israel.

Just as all the animals and everything in the *eretz* promised to Abraham was 'delivered into the hands' of Noah (s.w. Gen. 9:2), so the nations of that *eretz* were delivered into the hands of Israel (s.w. Ex. 6:8; 23:31; Dt. 2:24; 3:2,3; 7:24; 21:10; Josh. 2:24; Jud. 1:2). Tragically, like Adam in Eden [perhaps the same *eretz* promised to Abraham] and Noah in the new, cleansed *eretz*, Israel didn't realize this potential. What was delivered into the hand of Joshua (Josh. 2:24) actually wasn't delivered into their hand, because they disbelieved (Jud. 2:23); and this looks ahead to the disbelief of so many in the work of the Lord Jesus, who has indeed conquered the Kingdom for us. They considered the promise of the nations being delivered into their hand as somehow open to question, and only a possibility and not at all certain (Jud. 8:7; Num. 21:2 cp. Num. 21:34). Some like Jephthah (s.w. Jud. 11:32; 12:3), Ehud (Jud. 3:10,28), Deborah (Jud. 4:14), Gideon (Jud. 7:15) did, for a brief historical moment; but as individuals, and their victories were not followed up on. Instead they were dominated by the territory. And so instead, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies within the *eretz* (s.w. Lev. 26:25; Jud. 13:1).

Jdg 7:16 He divided the three hundred men into three companies and he gave each of them a trumpet and an empty pitcher, with a torch inside the pitcher-

The pitchers would have been used for carrying water, for water supply was critical to the movement and sustenance of an army on the move. To have empty pitchers, they would have had to empty the water out of them. Now they had no water, they had to trust fully in Yahweh. They had to get down from the mountain, destroy the enemy, and then they would again be able to lap of the water. The earthenware pitchers represented men, made of clay, but with the torch of God's Spirit burning within them. And that potential was to be revealed by breaking the pitchers. "Empty" translates the common Hebrew word for vain or worthless. They had no strength of their own.

This is the whole message of the Gideon story, that men are made strong out of weakness, but it is their weakness and emptiness which is used; for truly we come to God with nothing in our hands.

Jdg 7:17 He said to them, Watch me, and do as I do when I come to the outermost part of the camp-

Gideon and Purah had been to the outermost part of the camp the night before. Gideon had been so fearful, but now he has been made strong out of that weakness. True leadership is only from those who were once weak and have thus been made strong. Israel would only be delivered from the Midianites if they repented, and Gideon's repentance was being treated as symbolic of the nation. And so the people with him had to act as if 'in him'. He was their representative, as the Lord Jesus is for us.

Jdg 7:18 When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then blow your trumpets too, on every side of the camp, and shout 'For Yahweh and for Gideon!'

See on :17. AV "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon". He had learned the lesson from :14, that his sword was that of Yahweh. And yet they were not to use swords, but just to have torches and worthless [s.w. "empty"] pitchers in their hands. Yahweh's sword was not a visible one in the hands of His people. And that is an abiding lesson.

Jdg 7:19 So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch, when they had but newly set the watch. They blew the trumpets and broke in pieces the pitchers that were in their hands-

To break an earthenware pitcher was a symbol of death (Ecc. 12:6). Through their human frailty, for the pitchers were "empty" (s.w. vain, worthless), the torch fire of God's Spirit was to be revealed.

The blowing of trumpets by the 300 points forward to the resurrection. The breaking of the clay to reveal the burning lamps within the pitchers, is clearly at the root of 2 Cor. 4:6-8: "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness (cp. the sudden appearance of those lights on that night)...we have this treasure in earthen vessels (cp. Jud. 7:19), that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us (cp. Jud. 7:2). We are troubled on every side" (cp. "on every side", :18 and Jud. 6:2-6). All this would suggest that the 300 men are to be connected with the resurrected of the new Israel, whose "earthen vessels" are broken (by means of resurrection and judgment) at the end of Israel's latter day downtreading and immediately prior to the great destruction of their enemies by them. To break an earthenware pitcher was a symbol of death (Ecc. 12:6).

Jdg 7:20 The three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers and held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands with which to blow, and they shouted,

The sword of Yahweh and of Gideon!-

Literally, they strengthened the torches in their hands, the very phrase used in :8,11 of God strengthening their hands. But their strength was in gripping on to the torches, not their human weapons.

"The sword of Yahweh", instead of their swords [for they held pitchers and torches, not swords] has been interpreted as a reference to the cherubim; see on :13. The point has been made that this whole scenario of flashing fire and swords was a conscious imitation of the cherubim. In this case, we see that true faith is a trust that we are in fact manifesting God, He is manifesting Himself through us, and therefore we are not going in our own strength. From this we can infer that the cherubim will be associated with the latter-day deliverance of Israel- perhaps the enigmatic "sign of the son of man in heaven" (Mt. 24:30).

Jdg 7:21 They each stood in his place around the camp and all the army ran, and they shouted and put them to flight-

The shouting was as in the conquest of Jericho- the victory cry uttered before they had won the victory. This was done in faith, acting as if they had received already that which they had asked for (Mk. 11:24).

Jdg 7:22 They blew the three hundred trumpets, and Yahweh set every man's sword against his fellow and against all the army, and the army fled as far as Beth Shittah toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel Meholah by Tabbath-

This is a prototype for how the latter day invasion by Israel's neighbours will be overcome (also 2 Chron. 20:23). Ps. 83 perfectly describes the Islamist unity as they attack Jerusalem in the last days (Ps. 83:3-5, 12), but concludes with the Psalmist praying that God would destroy them as He did Oreb and Zeeb (Ps. 83:11) - who were defeated as a result of God making their troops turn on each other.

The invaders massacred each other, as in 2 Chron. 20:23. They were a confederacy, and there were likely preexisting tensions and suspicions. This is a theme in the latter-days passages: Zech. 14:13; Jud. 7:22; 1 Sam. 14:22. We see that division is in fact from God as a form of judgment. Those who create division are therefore creating and living out their own condemnation. And the same will happen in the last days. Whilst such confusion is easily possible given modern high-technology warfare, it would seem more likely that a few initial mistakes of this sort could open up old rivalries which are then fought out to the death. Indeed, we could sensibly look for even more rifts to occur between Israel's enemies, e.g. over oil.

Jdg 7:23 The men of Israel were gathered together out of Naphtali, Asher and all Manasseh, and they pursued Midian-

We recall how Deborah's appeal for support from Asher and some of the leaders of these tribes had been refused. And after God gave the great victory, she taught everyone the song of Deborah in Jud. 5 which lamented their lack of response. So perhaps that had worked, and now they responded. We may fail a call the first time, but then it is repeated, and we accept it. We note that these men of Israel from these areas were probably those who had originally come with Gideon and then been sent back (Jud. 6:35). They would have reflected upon their own weakness of faith, and now would have been grateful to be called out to service again. God doesn't just dismiss people from His service because of their weak faith; He tries to use them again. Or we could conclude (see on :24) that Gideon's acceptance of them now as fellow soldiers was really a rejection of God's hand in sending those very soldiers home as unneeded in His plan.

Jdg 7:24 Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim saying, Come

down against Midian and seize the waters of the Jordan ahead of them as far as Beth Barah. So all the men of Ephraim were gathered together and took the waters of the Jordan as far as Beth Barah-

This would have been near to where Israel first entered the land under Joshua. The spiritually minded would have seen the hand of God again at work in the same locality. This was where John the Baptist was to baptize repentant Israelites (Jn. 1:28). And the whole victory was because of repentance.

It could be argued that this appeal for more human help reflects a lack of faith. He has just sent home the majority of his soldiers, having been taught how God works through much diminished numbers. And now he appeals for more soldiers to come to him. This could be seen as the start of a downward spiral of faithless behaviour, as if he had reached his spiritual peak and was now declining, although Heb. 11:32 assures us he will be in God's Kingdom. The idea of smooth, incremental spiritual growth is mythical, and was only seen in the Lord. In Gideon's case, his spiritually grew and declined... although he still died a saved man. His appeal for Israelites to come and support him led him to the sin of whipping and punishing his own brethren who didn't come and support him. That would have been avoided if he and his few soldiers had just gone onwards in God's strength, and accepted that God was clearly with him.

Jdg 7:25 They took the two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb and they killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb and Zeeb they killed at the winepress of Zeeb-

Zeeb had presumably tried to hide in a winepress. But he was slain there. And we recall how it was in a winepress, disused because there was no vintage because Israel had broken the covenant, that Gideon was first called whilst threshing wheat in it. Thus we see the triumph of the small, cowering, little man.

They pursued Midian, and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon beyond the Jordan-

The Philistines in 1 Sam. 29:4 recalled how David had carried the head of Goliath to Saul (1 Sam. 17:57). To carry the heads of a king's enemies was a way to get the king's favour, as in Jud. 7:25; 2 Sam. 4:8; 16:9; 20:21; 2 Kings 10:6-8. This appears another suggestion that although Gideon refused in so many words to be king, he acted as king and was treated as one. Challenging us, as to how much of our devotion and principle is in name and word only...

Again we see the inspired, historical record has consistency. It would have required a clever editor to insert this theme of beheading to curry a leader's favour throughout the entire Biblical record. But the histories were clearly written at different times; a later hand would not have thought of all these realistic touches to sprinkle so consistently throughout it. The internal harmony of the Bible is to me the greatest indication that it is what it claims to be, the Divinely inspired word of God, evidencing His editing throughout.

JUDGES CHAPTER 8

Jdg 8:1 The men of Ephraim said to him, Why have you treated us this way, that you didn't call us when you went to fight with Midian? They rebuked him sharply-

The Ephraimites came over as offended because they weren't invited to fight in a battle, even though they had shown no inclination; and they did this with both Gideon and Jephthah (Jud. 8:1; 12:1). Again we see absolutely credible characterization of people and families in the Biblical record. This is in sharp contrast to the mythical elements and exaggerated presentations in contemporary literature.

Here we have an example of a situation being stated, and then we have the explanation of how it came about. They made this complaint after the incident of :4, when they had captured the princes of Midian. So this is not strictly chronological.

Jdg 8:2 He said to them, What have I now done in comparison with you? Isn't the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?-

The Proverbs often comment upon historical situations in the Hebrew Bible, and "a soft answer turns away wrath" may well be based upon this incident (Prov. 15:1). We recall that Gideon was initially called by God whilst he was threshing wheat in the disused family winepress in Abiezer- disused because there was no vintage, as this was a curse for disobedience to the covenant. He is ever aware of how the victory began with the few men of Abiezer gathering around him, and only then did others come to his call to arms. He assumes Ephraim has a vintage, a wine harvest, which is incomparable to that of Abiezer. He treated even those apostates as more worthy of God's blessing than himself and his home village. We have a window here onto his deep and genuine humility, which is the more commendable as it seems he was a strong warrior in his own right (see on :18,21).

Gideon's idea is that they had had the honour of capturing the princes of Midian (:3), and this was far greater than his victory over the Midianite armies. Gideon's reply may appear a soft answer turning away wrath. But the better and more truthful answer would have been 'Because God saves by many or few and showed me that He doesn't need many men nor even swords in hands'. We sense Gideon slipping spiritually, more concerned with keeping in with people than challenging wrong positions. A far cry from the Gideon who cut down the pillar of Baal, willing to stand alone against his father, his family and the men of his town. Perhaps Gideon focused now upon personally capturing and slaying the two *kings* of Midian, Zeba and Zalmunah, motivated by the fact that he had lost the honour of slaying the two *princes*, Oreb and Zeeb. His apparently humble words were therefore only a cover for his hurt pride. And how much of our apparent humility is but a cover for hurt pride? We will later see that his apparently humble rejection of kingship was likewise not at all humble, and in reality he acted as a king.

Jdg 8:3 God has delivered into your hand the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb! What was I able to do in comparison with you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that-

God had delivered the enemy into Gideon's personal hand (Jud. 7:9), but Gideon speaks of the enemies having been given into Israel's hand (Jud. 7:15). Gideon was not out for personal justification, but for the victory of Israel. And so he has the humility to placate the Ephraimites by saying that they had the honour of having Oreb and Zeeb in their hands.

Jdg 8:4 Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over with the three hundred men, exhausted yet pursuing-

LXX "faint and hungry", hence their request for bread in :5. Saul tried to imitate this when he prohibited the men to eat anything while they were pursuing the Philistines (1 Sam. 11:11 = Jud. 7:16; 1 Sam. 13:5 = Jud. 7:12; 1 Sam. 14:24,28,31 = Jud. 8:4,5). But he was totally missing the point- he was trying to make a cardboard copy of another man's faith, following only the externalities, without Gideon's faith and humility.

The pursuit of the enemy east of Jordan repeats what Abraham did with his 318 servants, roughly the same number as Gideon had with him. He found himself, as we do, walking in the steps of his spiritual father Abraham; see on :32. David too was to pursue after his enemies exhausted, and so we see how circumstances repeat between the lives of God's people. This is how the Bible becomes a living word, the history is not dead but alive,

because it has been carefully selected by God to show us that man is not alone, God is with us, no circumstance we face is in essence unique; others have trodden this path before.

Jdg 8:5 He said to the men of Succoth, Please give loaves of bread to the people who follow me, for they are exhausted and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian-
To turn down a request for bread from travellers was a deep insult, according to the hospitality culture of the times. And it still is, in many such areas today. Zebah and Zalmunna had fled upon camels, and so it seemed they would not be caught by Gideon and his men. And the men of Succoth clearly feared they would survive and return to punish them if they supported Gideon. They failed to learn the lesson of Deborah's song, which castigated those Israelites who had failed to respond to her call to arms.

We note that Gideon had very little bread when the Angel first appeared to him and commissioned him; he was beating out a few grains of wheat for a little bit of flour. In Jud. 8:5, he and his men lack bread. But it was Gideon as the tiny humble loaf of barley bread, the bread of the poor, that overturned the tent of Midian in Jud. 7:13. Again and again, Gideon was being shown that it is through the diminished and weak that God will bring victory. And we think of the five barley loaves of the little boy used by the Lord to feed thousands of people.

We wonder whether Gideon was in fact intended to pursue the Midianites beyond the Jordan. They had left Israelite territory. Their weakness and exhaustion is emphasized. Gideon turns to human help rather than Divine help, and gets furious when he doesn't get that human help. This seems in contrast to how they so easily destroyed the Midianite army within the territory of Israel. Perhaps Gideon was now motivated not by a desire to glorify God, but to glorify himself and get vengeance for the deaths of his family at Tabor. And yet God still worked through his weakness, and gave him and his exhausted 300 men an amazing victory. "The people who follow me" perhaps reflects a growing desire to be leader and have a personal following. And yet at the same time he retains his sense that Yahweh will give him victory and not his own strength (:7).

Jdg 8:6 The princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your possession, that we should give bread to your army?-

Meroz was cursed bitterly by God in Jud. 5:23. It was a village through which Sisera or his men had fled, and they feared to join in the fight. The same situation was to recur when Succoth and Penuel refused to help Gideon. The history of Meroz and the Israelites who refused to help Deborah was a lesson not learnt by Succoth and Penuel.

Jdg 8:7 Gideon said Because of that, when Yahweh has delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers-

Gideon's faith is now so strong that he can be sure that he will catch those whom he was pursuing, even though they had camels. "Tear" is AVmg. "thresh", with all its connotations of judgment. The area around Succoth is famed for its thorn bushes. This is a far cry from the humble, insecure Gideon so desperate for a Divine hand to hold. He threatens even his own people with being thrown down on a bed of thorns, trodden by him on it and whipped on it by him with briers. He was presumably justifying his natural anger as being exercised in judging / threshing the enemies of God. But judging for God isn't the same as just pouring out your native anger on other men who all the same were made in God's image. The idea of threshing appears to be of bashing out flour from ears of corn. A far cry from the timid Gideon who was threshing ears of grain in this way, cowering from the Midianites. Now he boasts he will do this to his own brethren.

We may enquire why Gideon wanted specifically to "scourge" those Israelites who were disloyal to him. In Jud. 7:25 the men of Ephraim killed Oreb and Zeeb the princes of Midian. Even though they were riding on the back of Gideon's faith and courage. We learn in Is. 10:26 that they were scourged before their death. For in the last days, Yahweh "will raise up a scourge according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb". So we have a psychological classic. Gideon felt he was the one who deserved to scourge his enemies. But other men had gotten that glory. So he felt the need to scourge someone. And he picked on his own brethren. This kind of transference goes on all the time in human being. And again we see how the Biblical record is so psychologically credible.

Just as all the animals and everything in the *eretz* promised to Abraham was 'delivered into the hands' of Noah (s.w. Gen. 9:2), so the nations of that *eretz* were delivered into the hands of Israel (s.w. Ex. 6:8; 23:31; Dt. 2:24; 3:2,3; 7:24; 21:10; Josh. 2:24; Jud. 1:2). Tragically, like Adam in Eden [perhaps the same *eretz* promised to Abraham] and Noah in the new, cleansed *eretz*, Israel didn't realize this potential. What was delivered into the hand of Joshua (Josh. 2:24) actually wasn't delivered into their hand, because they disbelieved (Jud. 2:23); and this looks ahead to the disbelief of so many in the work of the Lord Jesus, who has indeed conquered the Kingdom for us. They considered the promise of the nations being delivered into their hand as somehow open to question, and only a possibility and not at all certain (Jud. 8:7; Num. 21:2 cp. Num. 21:34). Some like Jephthah (s.w. Jud. 11:32; 12:3), Ehud (Jud. 3:10,28), Deborah (Jud. 4:14), Gideon (Jud. 7:15) did, for a brief historical moment; but as individuals, and their victories were not followed up on. Instead they were dominated by the territory. And so instead, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies within the *eretz* (s.w. Lev. 26:25; Jud. 13:1).

Jdg 8:8 He went up from there to Penuel and spoke to them in the same way, and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered-

Spiritual weakness is easily contagious. They replied just as the others had, assuming Gideon would not achieve his Divinely empowered mission.

It could be argued that this appeal for more human help at Jud. 7:24 reflects a lack of faith. He has just sent home the majority of his soldiers. And now he appeals for more soldiers to come to him. This could be seen as the start of a downward spiral of faithless behaviour, as if he had reached his spiritual peak and was now declining, although Heb. 11:32 assures us he will be in God's Kingdom. His appeal for Israelites to come and support him led him to the sin of whipping and punishing his own brethren who didn't come and support him. That would have been avoided if he and his few soldiers had just gone onwards in God's strength, and accepted that God was clearly with him.

Jdg 8:9 He said to the men of Penuel, When I come again in peace I will break down this tower-

Penuel was so named to celebrate how Jacob had seen the face of God and lived (Gen. 32:30). Gideon had earlier thought he would be slain as he had been so unworthy to see the face of the Angel (Jud. 6:22). As with our lives, God was leading him to perceive ever more His grace. Coming "in peace" reflected how he had learned the lesson from seeing the face of the Angel; for he had built an altar called 'Yahweh is peace', and now he was confident that indeed he was at peace with God despite all his weaknesses; see on Jud. 6:23,24.

Gideon is presented in Jud. 6,7 as timid, doubting and fearful, always needing God to hold his hand, and tightly. Yet by chapter 8, Gideon's dialogue with the men of Succoth and Penuel reveals him as confident of success and not at all fearful, and he threatens to tear down their tower (Jud. 8:9). This is very different to the Gideon who had feared to tear down

his father's Baal altar. His judgment of Israelites who didn't support him in Jud. 8:14-17 is a reflection of his changed character. And this leads him to the poor behaviour with which he ended his life; spiritually, it would've been far better had he remained timid and desperate for God to hold his hand, rather than to become old and brave and self confident. So many stumble once they have a taste of power and success. We are set up to hope for a tale of a man moving from fear to faith, but instead the path is from fear to self-assertion. Yet despite this failure, Heb. 11 still lists him as a Kingdom person.

Jdg 8:10 Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor and their armies with them, about fifteen thousand men, all who were left of all the army of the people of the east; one hundred and twenty thousand fighting men having been killed-

This means that initially, 135000 were facing Gideon's 300. That works out at precisely 450 of the enemy for every one of Gideon's men. And it cannot be coincidence that Elijah describes himself as facing off as one man of God against 450 prophets of Baal on Carmel (1 Kings 18:22). Despite his arrogance and spiritual weakness, Elijah learned the lesson from Gideon's courageous example. This is how the Bible becomes a living word, the history is not dead but alive, because it has been carefully selected by God to show us that man is not alone, God is with us, no circumstance we face is in essence unique; others have trodden this path before.

Jdg 8:11 Gideon went up by the way of those who lived in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah and attacked the army, which was unsuspecting-

The way of the tent-dwellers' means the Bedouin route, he took the rough short cut, because those he was pursuing had camels and he was presumably on foot. Hence he came upon them whilst they were "unsuspecting".

Jdg 8:12 Zebah and Zalmunna fled and he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and routed all the army-

"Zebah" is the word for sacrifice, and the execution of Zebah in :21 may therefore be understood as an offering of them to Yahweh. Perhaps this is what he was named after the event, seeing that personal names were often given in response to life experiences.

Jdg 8:13 Gideon the son of Joash returned from the battle from the ascent of Heres-

"Heres", the sun, probably refers to some place of idolatry. The whole record of the victories is to show the supremacy of Yahweh over the gods of the peoples, whom Israel were worshipping.

Jdg 8:14 He caught a young man of Succoth and asked of him, and he described for him the princes of Succoth and its elders, seventy-seven men-

This was presumably in the form of a list of names.

Jdg 8:15 He came to the men of Succoth and said, See Zebah and Zalmunna, concerning whom you taunted me saying, 'Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your possession, that we should give bread to your men who are weary?'

Gideon preserved the kings alive in order to teach the men of Succoth. But we wonder, as always with Gideon, whether there was not an element of arrogance now creeping in to an otherwise humble man (see on :2) For surely there was no absolute need to humiliate his enemies and also go to such lengths to demonstrate the wrongness of the men of Succoth.

The loss of humility, humility morphing into pride, is one of the most tragic of spiritual declensions. We must constantly examine ourselves as to whether we are losing humility.

Jdg 8:16 He took the elders of the city and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth a lesson-

This kind of torture was perhaps not unto death. Perhaps it was all an unnecessary display of power and smacks of arrogance (see on :15). Or maybe he didn't slay them as he did the men of Penuel (:17) because he believed they could be "taught" from this. But "taught" is LXX "threshed"; see on :7.

Jdg 8:17 He broke down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city-

This is the language of Christ's return in judgment upon the people of Jerusalem, who are elsewhere likened to a tower in Zion (Mt. 22:7). In the latter day context, those Jews who survive the tribulation but still refuse to learn the lesson of total commitment to their Messiah / judge / saviour, will be destroyed at broadly the same time as their enemies.

We note that Gideon apparently "taught" the men of Succoth (:16), but slew those of Penuel. Perhaps they took refuge in their tower and refused to meet with Gideon nor repent, hence he slew them.

Jdg 8:18 Then he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, What kind of men were they whom you killed at Tabor? They answered, They were like you. Each one resembled the children of a king-

This massacre is not previously recorded. But clearly there had been the deaths of Gideon's relatives at Tabor. We note that Gideon had the air of a leader to him, resembling a king. His humility noted on :2 is therefore the more commendable. But we note what is so true to human experience and observation, that those who may exude authority and confident leadership skills are often terribly insecure, clinging on to God with a childlike faith and ever seeking His reassurance. See on :30. We learn from this that Gideon's body language was as if he were a king. This gives the lie to his later pious refusal to be a king. He effectively acted as one and felt as one, so his denial of this and apparent piety and humility were all merely an appearance. By various means, he dodged around the spirit of God's requirements; like Levites owning land in Cyprus. Possibly his sense of kingship began when he told his men to charge at the Midianites shouting 'For the LORD and for Gideon!' (Jud. 7:18). Because the idea of [for our god] and for [our king] has always been common from ancient times- "In the name of God and the King" was the catchcry of the British empire. The way Abimelech asks whether Israel want to be ruled by one man or by all his 70 sons (Jud. 9:2) is a tacit implication that Gideon had reigned as king, and now the question was about whether one of his sons rule them, or all 70.

Jdg 8:19 He said, They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As Yahweh lives, if you had saved them alive, I would not kill you-

The implication of :18 is that those slain at Tabor were Gideon's own children. See on :20. But it seems his brothers were also slain. The Divine command was to slay the Canaanites, so Gideon's statement here that he was only going to kill them because they had slain his relatives is therefore somewhat spiritually lacking. As is his materialistic demand for the spoil and making an ephod. And yet he died in faith. Just as Samson did, despite so many weaknesses.

Jdg 8:20 He said to Jether his firstborn, Get up and kill them! But the youth didn't draw his sword for he was afraid, because he was still a youth-

Although Gideon's brothers were slain (:19), it seems from :18 that his children were also

killed. This is why he asks his firstborn son, who was with him and had survived, to act as the avenger of blood and slay those who had killed his brothers. This however was somewhat of a twist of the law of blood revenge, which surely didn't apply to deaths in battle. Although the children may have been too young to fight. "Jether" means "excellency" and this was the meaning of Jacob's firstborn Reuben, who was the "excellency" of his power (Gen. 49:3 s.w.). In this we see Gideon being guided by Biblical precedent, despite his weaknesses.

Gideon in Judges 6 and 7 presents as a child, desperately wanting God to hold His hand. Wanting reassurance after reassurance, even though God had given it him. As a child, you instinctively put your hand out for someone to hold it as you approached a road. You earnestly implored the adult steadying your bicycle as you learned to ride and balance "You won't let go, will you?". Or as you learned to swim without a board. Gideon comes over as this, time and again. And God used him. But just as we now have crossed thousands of roads alone, he grew old and brave, whipped Israelites who didn't support him, appeared as a mighty warrior, fearless and confident in pursuit of his enemies. But the key is to remain in contact with the little child within you, to stay small in your own eyes, to always have that need for God, that instinctive putting out of your hand to Him. It is for this reason that we have the incident of Gideon telling his young son to murder the captured kings, when [LXX] he was too young to wield a sword. He wanted to brutalize his own son at an early age by getting him to commit murder. As Gideon looked at his little boy, shy and so unsure and pining away from the challenge... he should have seen his real self.

The reference to Gideon using a sword is another allusion to Gideon's earlier spiritual strength. But he and his 300 had won the victory by shouting The sword of Yahweh and of Gideon. Gideon's sword was that of Yahweh. And there had been no sword in his hand, just trumpet and empty / useless earthen vessels. But like David later wanting Goliath's sword, so Gideon reverts to human strength.

Jdg 8:21 Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, Get up and do it yourself, for as the man is, so is his strength. Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna and took the crescents that were on their camels' necks-

The implication could be that Gideon was indeed built as a strong and mighty warrior. His deep humility (see on :2) is therefore the more commendable. The crescents which he took remain the symbols of Israel's neighbouring enemies. But they had religious significance, and Gideon would have been better to destroy them. See on :12.

Jdg 8:22 Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, Rule over us, both you and your son and your son's son also, for you have saved us out of the hand of Midian-

Gideon had the deportment of a king, and had acted like one (:18). But we see here Israel's lack of faith in Yahweh as their king, and their desperate desire for the immediate, the human and the visual rather than the invisible things of God's rulership and kingship over them.

"You and your son's son" means hereditary kingship. But Dt. 17 had been clear, that they could only have any king over them whom Yahweh had chosen. That seems to outlaw the common idea of hereditary kingship. It could be that the apparent request of the people was actually a way of saying 'You want to establish yourself and your family as kings- and we now accept that, given the prowess you have demonstrated'. In Semitic thought, such 'requests' can be made in order to confirm acceptance of what has been demanded. Thus a subjected nation would formally request the conqueror to reign over them. It was a way of accepting what was being asked of them.

"You have saved us..." ought surely to have elicited from Gideon the response that he had not saved them- Yahweh had. Again, this is a far cry from the Gideon who began his

ministry by saying "Oh Lord, how shall *I* save Israel?" (Jud. 6:23). He fails to give glory to God; and as discussed on :2, he fails through sin of omission rather than commission.

Jdg 8:23 Gideon said to them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you. Yahweh shall rule over you-

Time and again, the Bible is full of warnings against doing what seems right before God, when our motives are far from Him. Take the way that Gideon was invited to be king over Israel, but he refused, citing the fact that Yahweh is Israel's King. All well and good... but the record goes on to record how he made an idolatrous ephod in his home town, to which all Israel came (Jud. 8:22-24). And he had a son, Abimelech- which means 'my father is king'! And indeed Abimelech did try to become King of all Israel (Jud. 9:2). The name Abimelech is stressed 37 times in Jud. 9, and we read multiple times there of how Abimelech 'reigned' [as king] (Jud. 9:6,8,10,12,14,16,18), when God was the 'reigner', the King of Israel. Abimelech's argument in Jud. 9:2 was that one leader was better than many, and he suggested himself as that one leader. He felt the man born to be king. Jotham chooses to claim that the Israelites wanted to anoint Abimelech as their king (Jud. 9:8). But all this was a failure to which they had been set up by Gideon wanting his son to become king. The fact all Gideon's 70 sons are slain by Abimelech shows how Gideon's hopes and projections upon Abimelech and for the establishment of his family as kings... all came to a tragic end. His family was not blessed, but he himself will be saved.

Our behaviour smacks of this time and time again. We do what is externally right, but our inward motives are impure. There's an urgent need for self-examination at depth within each of us... and yet the busyness of our lives, our poor time management and lack of rigorous regime in spiritual life, so easily leads us not to seriously attempt this. And we end up doing things which are only externally right. See on Jud. 9:18.

And yet we could quite understandably read this as Gideon's commendable refusal to replace Yahweh as their king. He resisted the temptation to misinterpret Dt. 17:14,15 as meaning that indeed he was the man who would be desired as king by Israel.

The parable of Jud. 9:8-11 implies that Israel repeated this request, but Gideon's sons refused, following their father's example. Only the illegitimate Abimelech accepted it.

Jdg 8:24 Gideon said to them, I would make a request of you, that every man would give me the earrings of his spoil. They had golden earrings because they were Ishmaelites- Midianites were Ishmaelites (Gen. 37:25,28,36). It seems that having overcome the temptation to be king (:23), Gideon succumbed to another temptation- to become wealthy, to effectively act as king by demanding wealth from his followers. We catch ourselves doing this; just as the alcoholic quits alcohol and takes to drugs. See on :26.

Although Gideon refused to be king, he called his son Abimelech, 'my father is king'. And he in other ways effectively declared himself as king, whilst on the other hand strongly and piously denying he was king. His request for a portion of the plunder was exactly what a king required from his soldiers (Jud. 5:30; 1 Sam. 30:19,20; 2 Sam. 12:30; 1 Chron. 20:2). Likewise taking many wives and having many sons, especially 70, was typical of the behaviour of men seeking to establish themselves as king. We think of how David took more wives and had children once he was king. Ahab also established his kingship by having 70 sons, and "seventy sons" may be another way of saying 'the sons of the king' in 2 Kings 10:1-7, where Jehu ends Ahab's dynasty by slaying "the sons of the king, seventy men". So having 70 sons was a way of claiming to be king.

Jdg 8:25 They answered, We will willingly give them. They spread a garment and each man threw the earrings of his spoil into it-

When Gideon received the golden earrings of the Ishmaelites (Jud. 8:24-27), his mind should have flown back to how golden earrings were turned into the golden calf (Ex. 32:2). He was potentially given the strength to resist the temptation to turn them into an idol. But he must have blanked out that Biblical precedent in his heart; he ignored his spiritual potential. The word for "earrings" in :24,26 only occurs in the golden calf incident (Ex. 32:2,3). Clearly what Gideon did is being paralleled with Aaron's creation of the golden calf. Like Aaron, Gideon never specifically repents, and yet is saved in the end. We wonder whether with some people, God accepts them because of outstanding faith and loyalty to Him at an earlier point in their lives. So long as they don't totally reject Him, He accepts them in the end despite their spiritual decline in later years. Or we wonder whether Gideon repented at the very end and is therefore saved on that account. We are not told, in order to exercise our minds.

Jdg 8:26 The weight of the golden earrings that he requested was one thousand seven hundred shekels of gold, besides the crescents, the pendants and the purple clothing that was on the kings of Midian, and besides the chains that were about their camels' necks- Purple clothing was the clothing of kings. As noted on :24, Gideon turned down being king- but he then as it were compensated for that by taking the clothing and wealth appropriate to a king. His victory over temptation in this area was therefore only external, and not from the heart. And we can do the same. We can contrast his being clothed with the purple clothing of Midian with the way he was clothed with God's Spirit in Jud. 6:34 (Heb.). We learn from Jer. 10:9 that purple clothes were associated with idolatry: "Their idols... are dressed in violet and purple cloth woven by skilled weavers" (GNB). The Midianite kings had purple clothing- because they were king-priests. When Gideon is asked to be king, he declines, but declares himself a priest- he had already made an altar to Yahweh at his home village, and now he places an ephod there. So by doing this he was effectively declaring himself also a king, given the understanding of king-priests.

1700 shekels of gold was a huge weight, about 43 pounds [20 kg.]. Demanding and receiving such huge wealth was behaviour appropriate to a king. It is noted in :18 that Gideon had the deportment of a King; his body language betrayed his self perception as a king. Gideon has moved far on from the man who was once young and so desperately unsure, describing himself as from the poorest family in the poorest tribe, as he beat out a few ears of grain in the disused family winepress.

Jdg 8:27 Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah, and all Israel prostituted themselves by worshipping it there; and it became a snare to Gideon and to his house-

Twice in 1 Timothy, Paul speaks about a snare; the snare of the devil (1 Tim. 3:7), and the snare of wanting wealth (6:9). The desire for wealth in whatever form is the very epitome of the devil, our inherent sin which we must struggle against. The idea of a snare is that it results in a sudden and *unexpected* destruction. The unexpectedness of the destruction should set us thinking: surely the implication is that those who are materialistic don't realize that in fact this is their besetting sin, and therefore their rejection in the end because of it will be so tragically unexpected. It's rather like pride; if you're proud and you don't know it, then you really are proud. And if we're materialistic and don't know it, we likewise really have a problem. The idea of riches being a snare connects with copious OT references to idols as Israel's perpetual snare (Ex. 23:33; Dt. 7:16; Jud. 2:3; 8:27; Ps. 106:36; Hos. 5:1). Paul's point is surely that the desire of wealth is the equivalent of OT idolatry.

The ephod was likely comprised of precious stones which had also been in the earrings of the Midianites and around the necks of their camels. He had built an altar to Yahweh in his home, and it seems this was an imitation high priestly breastplate. He was effectively setting

himself up as a priest. Gideon had a weakness for wanting signs from God, and it seems that the urim and thummim in the High Priest's breastplate flashed out yes / no binary answers to questions. So perhaps he never quite got over that desire to have visible signs, and this weakness [like all unvanquished weaknesses] expanded into something grotesque- a golden ephod that became a spiritual snare.

The language of Israel prostituting themselves reminds us of the golden calf incident, where again golden earrings are taken from the people, and an idol is made (Ex. 32:2-6). Clearly what Gideon did was as wrong as what Aaron did. He failed to perceive that he had been called in terms of being another Moses for Israel, as discussed on chapter 7. But he fails to keep perceiving that, and behaves as faithless Aaron. We too are to perceive which Bible characters we are being led to emulate. The fact he put about 20 kg. of gold into the "ephod" surely of itself suggests that this was more of an idol than an ephod. Although Heb. 11 assures us that Gideon will be in the Kingdom, seeing he "died in faith", we have to observe that he effectively rebuilt a pagan shrine in Ophrah, after having cut it down in his youth. We see the same spiritual entropy in David and others who will all the same be in the Kingdom. Spiritual entropy is a tragic thing to behold and it is a frequent sight. But Jud. 8:35 concludes his story with the comment that he did good to Israel- even though actually his vanity led all Israel to prostitute themselves against Yahweh. So in the final judgment of God, although Gideon laid a stumbling block to them in the form of the ephod, it was Israel who were more guilty than he was. We cannot judge, but seeing an example like this of how carefully God balances His judgment, we can be assured that His final judgment will be just and factor in everything. Without the comment of Heb. 11 and Jud. 8:35, we would likely have written off Gideon as a spiritual failure, one like Saul who started well but went wrong. We are taught here, as we are with Samson, that God's judgment is different to ours; we are not to judge exactly because we cannot judge, we do not see all the inner nuances of human minds and lives. But God does.

It is the surrounding Canaanite people who are repeatedly described as a "snare" to Israel. Just as Midianite women had been at the time of the golden calf, which incident is clearly alluded to in Gideon's creation of the ephod from earrings. All Gideon's hard work in delivering Israel from the Midianites was therefore undone by him- because his ephod became a snare to Israel, just as the Canaanite tribes had been. He left no good legacy, and his tragic family history after his death reflects that. Again we reflect that even if a man's work for the Lord is undone by his own foolish pride, he himself may still be saved as Gideon was. As Paul puts it, all a man builds may be burnt up, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire. Gideon means 'hacker down' and Jerubbaal means 'Baal fighter' or 'Let Baal plead'. Gideon ultimately failed to achieve his potential. He as it were built up idolatry. But still he will be saved. This is both comfort and challenge to us.

Jdg 8:28 So Midian was subdued before the Israelites, and they exalted their heads no more- The nations in the land being "subdued" was the outcome of Israel being obedient to the covenant (s.w. Dt. 9:3). We read this word "subdued" used of how the land was at times subdued before Israel (Jud. 3:30; 4:23; 8:28; 11:33). But each time it is clear that the people generally were not obedient to the covenant. One faithful leader was, and the results of his faithfulness were counted to the people. This is what happened with the Lord's death leading to righteousness being imputed to us.

The land had rest forty years in the days of Gideon-

The forty years rest of Jud. 3:11; 5:31; 8:28 may not be a literal period. I have elsewhere noted that the forty year reigns of Saul, David and Solomon create chronological problems if read literally. The idea may be that forty years was a time of testing, as it was for Israel in the

wilderness. We think of the Lord's 40 days of testing too. In this case, they were tested by peace. And they consistently failed, as God's people often do.

Jdg 8:29 Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and lived in his own house-

He commendably didn't try to establish himself with a palace, as he had rejected the possibility of becoming king. But he turned that house into a quasi sanctuary, having built an altar to Yahweh there, and now having made a breastplate. We see how his apparent resistance of the temptation to be king was not from the heart, because he acted like a king in other ways. Indeed it could be argued that the statement that he "lived in his own house" is tautological, in that of course people live in their own homes. The suggestion seems to be that he established his home as a kind of capital and religious center for Israel. The note that Gideon was buried in his own city in the tomb of his fathers (:32) is the same rubric used about the deaths and burials of Israel's later kings.

The mention of his name, Baal judger, is placed in juxtaposition with the fact he effectively made an idol and Israel worshipped it. As if he retained his name as a believer but didn't live up to it. Possibly he created an ephod because from it, the urim and thummim flashed out assurance and answers to questions. And Gideon had always been in such need of this from God. So we see some spirituality mixed with carnality in him, which was the consistent problem with God's people as it is to this day.

Jdg 8:30 Gideon had seventy sons conceived from his body, for he had many wives-

I suggested on :18,20 that some of Gideon's sons had been killed at Tabor, and this is why he asked his firstborn to act as the avenger of blood in slaying their killers. It is psychologically understandable that he sought to build up his family again, but his "many wives" hardly speak of spirituality, and having 70 sons looked ahead to the ungodly behaviour of Ahab (2 Kings 10:1). Ahab having 70 sons suggests that having 70 sons meant he was establishing himself as a king. The surrounding legends often feature a god / king as having 70 sons. We note that the record records Gideon's denial of kingship; but the inspired record gives many details which appear to show God's take on that, revealing that in fact he did act as king, despite his words to the contrary. The description of him having many wives, amassing gold to himself and leading Israel astray is all presented in terms of how Dt. 17:17-20 said that this was *not* what the King of Israel should do. We are left to conclude that he was the king who was never crowned, but his kingship was not as God wished. But again we note- that despite all this, he is listed in Heb. 11 amongst those who will be saved. The victory over Midian, and his transformation from a doubter to a man of faith, was surely over no more than a few weeks of his life. We are left to enquire whether this was so very pleasing to God that He saved him anyway. Despite all the spiritual entropy we observe in Jud. 8. We must enquire in what areas we protest our spiritual innocence, and yet in reality, act in the very way we deny. Are we materialistic? Do we really care about people? Are we really loving and devoted to love as we say we are?

Jdg 8:31 His concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son and he named him Abimelech-

Abimelech means 'my father is king'. And indeed Abimelech did try to become King of all Israel (Jud. 9:2). As discussed on :23, Gideon overcame the temptation to become king, but only on an external level. In reality his behaviour was as if was a king in all but name.

Jdg 8:32 Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father in Ophrah of the Abiezrites-

This is the same description used for the death of Abraham (Gen. 15:15; 25:8) in whose faltering steps of faith Gideon had followed; see on :4. He is presented, for all his moral weakness and faltering faith, as a seed of Abraham. And he is listed amongst the faithful in Heb. 11. We are thereby comforted in our own self doubt, as we review the weak nature of our own faith and commitment.

Jdg 8:33 As soon as Gideon was dead, the people of Israel turned again and played the prostitute after the Baals, and made Baal Berith their god-

Israel is so often set up as the bride of God (Is. 54:5; 61:10; 62:4,5; Jer. 2:2; 3:14; Hos. 2:19,20). This is why any infidelity to God is spoken of as adultery (Mal. 2:11; Lev. 17:7; 20:5,6; Dt. 31:16; Jud. 2:17; 8:27,33; Hos. 9:1). The very language of Israel 'selling themselves to do iniquity' uses the image of prostitution. This is how God feels our even temporary and fleeting acts and thoughts of unfaithfulness. This is why God is jealous for us (Ex. 20:15; 34:14; Dt. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15)- because His undivided love for us is so exclusive. He expects us to be totally *His*.

Baal Berith is literally the Baal of the covenant. Israel went wrong because they reasoned that serving Baal was a form of worshipping Yahweh and keeping covenant relationship with Him.

Jdg 8:34 The Israelites didn't remember Yahweh their God Who had delivered them out of the hand of all their enemies on every side-

They never formally abrogated Yahweh nor their covenant with Him, and would never have considered themselves atheists. Just as many of us never would. But they didn't "remember" Him nor His great salvation of them by grace; this was not constantly in their minds. And so it can be with us. This is why the breaking of bread service plays an important role in helping us not to forget these things.

Jdg 8:35 neither did they show kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, that is, Gideon, according to all the kindness which he had showed to Israel-

Gideon loved Israel. We recall how he showed kindness to them by not becoming their king but leaving Yahweh as their king. God had delivered the enemy into Gideon's personal hand (Jud. 7:9), but Gideon speaks of the enemies having been given into Israel's hand (Jud. 7:15; 8:3). Gideon was not out for personal justification, but for the victory of Israel. But ingratitude and failure to lastingly perceive such love toward us is sadly a feature of human nature.

JUDGES CHAPTER 9

Jdg 9:1 Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem to his mother's brothers, and spoke with them and with all the family of the house of his mother's father saying-

Abimelech means 'my father is king'; it was the dynastic title of the Philistine kings as we see from Gen. 20,26, Ps. 34 title etc. Kings named their sons Abimelech to continue their reigning dynasty. And indeed Abimelech did try to become King of all Israel (Jud. 9:2). As discussed on :2, Gideon overcame the temptation to become king, but only on an external level. In reality his behaviour was as if was a king in all but name. His weakness in this matter was repeated to a stronger degree in his son. Just as our weaknesses will be repeated and magnified in our children, as David's were in Solomon's love for horses and women. The comment was made about Gideon that he looked like the son of a king (Jud. 8:18 "They were like you. Each one resembled the children of a king"). Gideon was invited to be Israel's king,

but he declined, saying that God was their king. But he named his son Abimelech, my father is king, as if he was deeply impressed that he looked like a king. He felt he was the man born to be king, but resented having to turn it down for the sake of Yahweh. But he expressed his hankering for it by vicariously living it out through his son Abimelech, and thus he set his son up for spiritual failure. So much vicarious sin goes on in our age, through watching movies or playing games that enable us to vicariously do that which we ourselves would not do in real life. Although Gideon will still be finally saved, according to Hebrews 11. Abimelech absorbed all this. He was eager to be king, which his father externally declined although internally wanted it; and he tried to replicate his father Gideon by destroying the tower in Shechem (Jud. 9:49) just as Gideon had destroyed the tower of Peniel (Jud. 8:17). But Abimelech then tried to continue to replicate his father by seeking to destroy the tower in Thebez - and this cost him his life. He should have listened to Jotham's parable and let God be king in his life and in the collective life of Israel. His obsession with destroying the towers of Shechem and Thebez reflected how Gideon had burnt the tower of Peniel. But Gideon's murder of fellow Israelites at Peniel as punishment for not supporting him was surely wrong- and again, this set up Abimelech for failure. For he clearly thought there was nothing wrong in doing this.

Jdg 9:2 Please speak to all the men of Shechem and say, 'Is it better for you that all the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy persons, should rule over you, or that one rule over you?' Remember also that I am your bone and your flesh-

There is no evidence that the other sons were seeking to be king. Their father Gideon had been offered the kingship for himself and his sons, and he had refused it. Abimelech was likely responding to the fear that they might stop him from his plan, and so many crimes and sins are committed on the basis of eliminating possible opposition.

Time and again, the Bible is full of warnings against doing what seems right before God, when our motives are far from Him. Take the way that Gideon was invited to be king over Israel, but he refused, citing the fact that Yahweh is Israel's King. All well and good... but the record goes on to record how he made an idolatrous ephod in his home town, to which all Israel came (Jud. 8:22-24). And he had a son, Abimelech- which means 'my father is king'!. And indeed Abimelech did try to become King of all Israel (Jud. 9:2). Our behaviour smacks of this time and time again. We do what is externally right, but our inward motives are impure. There's an urgent need for self-examination at depth within each of us... and yet the busyness of our lives, our poor time management and lack of rigorous regime in spiritual life, so easily leads us not to seriously attempt this. And we end up doing things which are only externally right.

Abimelech claimed that he was of the same bone and flesh of the men of Shechem. His mother was a "concubine" from Shechem (Jud. 8:31). We can ponder whether the men of Shechem were in fact Gentiles, and whether Abimelech's mother was a Gentile prostitute from Shechem. Jud. 9:28 certainly implies they were Gentiles: "Be loyal to your ancestor Hamor, who founded your clan!". He is certainly playing on his mother having been from Shechem- for he now says he is of the same flesh and bone as the men of Shechem. And we ponder whether therefore his attempt to become king would have to fall short of the standard in Dt. 17:15: "You shall in any wise set him king over you whom the Lord your God shall choose; one from among your brethren shall you set king over you; you cannot set a stranger over you who is not your brother". In this case, Gideon should never have set up Abimelech to be king by naming him as he did, 'My father is king'. But Abimelech plays on his Shechem connections to be made king by them. And they accept this- "he is our brother" (:3). But Abimelech didn't work out well as king. Perhaps this incident happened to show Israel that if

they wanted a king, it must be a man chosen by God and not a half Gentile. For as Jotham's parable showed, they wanted a king.

Jdg 9:3 His mother's brothers told all the men of Shechem all these words, and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, He is our brother-

Shechem was apparently in the hands of the Hivites, so these men may not have been true Israelites. The idea is that their hearts were inclined (by God) to follow him (the same Hebrew phrase is in 1 Kings 11:3; Ps. 119:36; 141:4). Just as God inclined the hearts of the men of Shechem to follow Abimelech (Jud. 9:3), so He put an evil spirit / attitude of mind between them and Abimelech (:23). Clearly God can work directly upon the human heart according to His will. This is the basis of the way that the evil spirit (from the Lord) and the holy spirit work upon the hearts of men. We can pray that God "incline our hearts unto Him... incline my heart unto Your words" (1 Kings 8:58; Ps. 119:36 s.w.).

Jdg 9:4 They gave him seventy pieces of silver out of the house of Baal Berith, with which Abimelech hired reckless adventurers who followed him-

Abimelech was apparently an idolater. And yet Jud. 10:1 implies that he was also a judge who saved Israel. His work for Israel isn't much recorded, and therefore we sense that as with the record of Samson, we have here the down points in his life.

Jdg 9:5 He went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy persons, on one stone; but Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal escaped, for he hid himself-

Tragically it was probably upon the rock upon which Gideon first sacrificed to Yahweh (Jud. 6:20) that his seventy sons were to be slain by Abimelech, with the help of men who worshipped Baal Berith. Presumably the 70 silver pieces were payment for the death of the 70 people, a coin for each murder. The deaths upon one stone suggests it was done as a sacrifice- where Gideon had sacrificed to Yahweh. Abimelech possibly justified killing his brothers as being some kind of service to God. Just as many have done. It just shows that spirituality cannot be automatically passed on as if it is genetic, although it can be inculcated. Jotham being the youngest son may mean he was no more than a child or teenager, but his spiritual perception was very fine.

Jdg 9:6 All the men of Shechem assembled themselves together, and all the house of Millo, and went and made Abimelech king by the oak of the pillar that was in Shechem-

Oaks and pillars are associated with idolatry throughout the Old Testament. "The house of Millo" is likely also a reference to an idol temple. Yet Jud. 10:1 implies Abimelech was a saviour and defender of Israel. At some point he must have repented of all this and done work for God. His proclamation as king was however a rejection of Yahweh as king; the very thing his father Gideon had refused to do. Yet even such a spiritually weak man was used to save His people.

This oak near Shechem was where the fathers of Israel had jettisoned their idols (Gen. 35:4). But clearly this was just a surface level appeal to spirituality by Abimelech, for the people were clearly idolatrous. And this was the oak of Josh. 24:25,26: "Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a great stone, and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of Yahweh". Abimelech was having himself made king at Yahweh's sanctuary, as Saul would at Gilgal (1 Sam. 11:15). Abimelech was behaving in a totally fleshly way under the guise of alluding to spiritual principles. This kind of thing is frequently seen in religion gone wrong.

Jdg 9:7 When they told Jotham he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim and shouted to them, Listen to me, you men of Shechem, so that God will listen to you-

God listens to those who hear His word, there is a mutuality between God and man. We hear His word, He listens to us. This implies Jotham's words were Divinely inspired. Mount Gerizim was the scene of the reciting of the curses and blessings, and Jotham is surely reminding the people that they are breaking covenant with God and can only be cursed. Jotham taught that if Israel heard his parable then God would hear them; but He wouldn't if they rejected the parable. They rejected the parable, but by grace, God does hear their cry later in Jud. 10. He stands on Mount Gerizim which was from where the blessings were uttered [Dt. 11:29; 27:12; the curses were pronounced nearby from Mount Ebal "you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal"]; and yet his words became a curse on Israel (:57). They were perhaps pronounced from Gerizim because it was God's intention they should bring about repentance and thus bring blessing.

Jdg 9:8 The trees went out one day to anoint a king to be over them; they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us' -

The trees refer to the people who wanted a king, one of themselves, a tree like them, but with superior qualities. Gideon had remonstrated that God was their king, and so they should not seek a human leader, another tree like them, but accept Yahweh as king. Jotham perceives the desire for leadership, and that is a theme throughout Judges. In his parable, the trees ask other trees to reign over them, but this isn't directly recorded historically. They had asked Gideon to be king, but now it is Abimelech who goes to Shechem and asks them to let him be king. But the parable paints things as if the trees are desperate for a king over them; I believe this is the point, as otherwise the parable appears untrue to its interpretation. Jotham is perhaps seeking to reveal to the people that consciously or subconsciously, their desire was for a human king when God was their king. The men of Samson's time were content with the Philistines ruling over them rather than Samson, Micah pays the young Levite to be a father to him, "The people, the princes of Gilead, said one to another, Who will begin to fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead" (Jud. 10:18). Our sense of brave independence notwithstanding, we all have a desire to be led by another, to have a parental figure in our lives. And that desire is finally only met in the Father and Son.

Jdg 9:9 But the olive tree said to them 'Should I give up my oil with which they honour God and man to go and hold sway over the trees?' -

These trees refused the other trees' desire for their rulership. This perhaps refer to unrecorded times when the sons of Gideon had been approached and asked to be king; and they had each refused, in line with how their father refused to be king, and refused the invitation to his sons also (Jud. 8:23). It was the priests who were to offer oil in order to honour God (Lev. 2:1-16), and used it to anoint men for special purposes. Thus the olive who honoured both God and man with oil might possibly refer to a priest who was asked to become king, but refused it. It was more important to honour God and people, then to "hold sway over" people. And this is the point which those who desire leadership so often forget. Jotham's point is that spiritually minded people had already been asked to be king, but had refused- for Yahweh was Israel's king. The 'trees' who had refused the invitation were more interested in being of service to God and man; and they perceived that being a king was not going to achieve that.

Jdg 9:10 The trees said to the fig tree, 'Come and reign over us' -

These continual requests to men to "reign over us" reflect the basic tendency within human

nature, to want to be submissive; to desire a human leader. The fact Israel were specifically not given a king, because the invisible God was their king, was in fact right against human nature. We see the same tension, between personal spirituality and on the other hand, a desire to be within a denominational structure that provides human leadership.

Jdg 9:11 But the fig tree said to them, 'Should I give up my good, sweet fruit to go to hold sway over the trees?' -

A good fig tree bears good fruit. But this wouldn't be possible if the tree was "promoted" (AV) to sway around over the other trees. Leadership positions so often mean that a person cannot quite be the person they were intended to be; something of their real self is lost and compromised. And this is why we should never seek leadership over others, because God has a specific role for us; and we will only become true leaders as a result of His guiding hand, rather than our seeking it. This is why we must be leery of any who clearly set out to be leaders of God's people, as if it is their right or just their chosen career path.

Jdg 9:12 The trees said to the vine 'Come and reign over us' -

Olive, vine and fig tree are all trees representative of Israel. But they each refused the invitation to be king. The idea would be that the true Israel would not seek to be king over itself. For Yahweh was their true king. The vine here is perhaps a reference to Gideon, a descendant of Joseph, who was a fruitful vine (Gen. 49:22)- and who was invited to be Israel's king in these very words (Jud. 8:22,23).

Jdg 9:13 The vine said to them, 'Should I give up my new wine, which cheers God and man, to go to hold sway over the trees?' -

Wine was part of the offerings to God (Num. 15:7,10) which cheered God in that He was pleased with Israel's drink offerings.

Jdg 9:14 Then all the trees said to the thorn bush, 'Come and reign over us' -

This refers to Abimelech, the illegitimate son of Gideon; and we recall that thorns were part of the curse. The people were so desperate for human leadership, and so insistent that they didn't want God's invisible leadership, that they would have even a symbol of the curse to reign over them. We must remember that it was Abimelech who had offered to be the king of Shechem (:1-3), but in the parable, Jotham suggests they had asked him to reign over them. Jotham is right and wrong; for in Jud. 8:22 they had invited Gideon, his son and grandson to reign over them. Possibly the three better trees who rejected the invitation refer to unknown sons of Gideon; or to previous judges like Othniel, Deborah and Gideon. It could be that Abimelech made the offer he did to them because they had already made it clear that they were open to this. Quite likely Gideon had wanted his son Abimelech to be king, and the people responded to this.

We note the stress that *all* the trees wanted the thorn bush to reign over them. Possibly we are to infer that the olive, vine and fig were amongst them. In which case we are left to conclude that they were so focused upon themselves and their own immediate preoccupations that they were willing for an obviously bad leader to lead them. And that is indeed how bad men get into power. The idiom "each man dwelling under his own vine and fig tree" (Mic. 4:4 etc.) suggests a vine and fig were the personal possession of a man; there was no collective communal element in the vine and fig. For the parable speaks of them as individual trees and not a plantation of them like a vineyard. Perhaps the argument is that the three good trees ought to have accepted the invitation to be king, and because they didn't, the bramble became king and burnt them all up. Each tree refuses kingship with the excuse that they didn't want to "give up" their own fruit; and leadership of others does involve a personal 'giving up'.

They didn't want to do that for the sake of the community. That would fit a theme of Judges, that men were so focused on their immediate local needs and issues that they didn't think of the needs of the wider community. Judges 5 condemns those who didn't come to help Barak, and Gideon condemns those who refused to come and help him in his pursuit of the enemy. Their desperation for someone to rule over them is shown by otherwise superior trees begging an inferior to reign over them. The parable reflects how strong is human desire to be ruled over. When this need is not met in God, men make foolish choices which are not sincere in that they are themselves skeptical of their own choices.

Jdg 9:15 The thorn bush said to the trees, 'If in truth you anoint me king over you, then come and take refuge in my shade; if not, let fire come out of the thorn bush and devour the cedars of Lebanon' -

"If in truth..." suggests the thorn bush [Abimelech] was skeptical about the request for him to be king. Or it could be that the voice behind the parable, which is God's inspiration, is suggesting that the trees were not sincere in wanting the thorn bush to be king. They wanted a king, any king, and were so desperate for this that they would even choose someone they were skeptical of. Fire did come from the thorn bush and devour other trees, at least in literally burning 1000 people of Shechem. This means that the trees did not "in truth" / sincerely anoint Abimelech. They did so because they were so desperate for absolutely any leader. And thus God through Jotham is trying to get them to realize the strength of their human desire for a human leader rather than God. In the end, anyone would do. Even if they considered him not the best.

"Take refuge" is AV "put your trust". The Hebrew for "trust" usually means to trust in God. Jotham's point is that they were trusting in a human king rather than in God. The higher our trust in human leadership and structure, the weaker will be our faith in God. And this is the problem with all human leadership and religious structures.

The idea of shade is used of the shade / protection offered by God (Ps. 91:1; 121:5; Hos. 14:8); Lam. 4:20 recalls how Judah used to refer to their king by saying that "in his shade we will live among the nations". They meant that their king would protect them from the Gentile nations. And the surrounding nations used the idea of the shade/shadow of a king to refer to his protection. This was the context- the tribes wanted a king to save / shade them from their enemies. The other trees / options are presented as focusing on producing their own fruit; whereas the thorn bush has no good fruit but claims to offer shade when it cannot. Possibly Jotham's point is that no human leader can provide this shade- only by turning to God can they find this shade. Indeed we could understand the Abimelech experience as a warning to Israel of what to expect if they had a king. But their later demand for a king shows they didn't learn from this history. Jotham being the youngest son (:5) may mean he was no more than a child or teenager, but his spiritual perception was very fine. Cedars, vines, figs etc. would get no shade from a thorn bush.

But the thorn bush offers no shade. The Kingdom of God is likened to a tree giving shade (Mk. 4:32), but the thorn bush cannot do this. Abimelech's pretension at being king is therefore presented as at best unhelpful. He demanded miserable submission to himself, and if he didn't get it, he would burn up the fine cedars of Lebanon- possibly a reference to Gideon's sons whom he slew. This is where bad leadership leads- the destruction of that which is beautiful. This very figure is used in Zech. 11:1, of how the house / temple of the cedars of Lebanon was to be "devoured" (Zech. 11:1)- as a result of Judah's corrupt, spiritually illegitimate leadership. Cedars of Lebanon were seen as the best trees- so the idea may be that Abimelech would destroy the best candidates for leadership. Fire coming out of a thorn bush alludes to how forest fires are spread by thorn bushes near the ground, resulting in great trees catching fire. This is alluded to in Is. 9:18,19: "For wickedness burns like a fire, it

devours the briars and thorns; yes, it kindles in the thickets of the forest, and they roll upward in a column of smoke... the land is burnt up; and the people are the fuel for the fire. No one spares his brother". Abimelech had not spared his brothers; he was starting a forest fire that would destroy the whole land. However :20 interprets what was to be burnt up, the cedars, as "the lords of Shechem and Beth-millo". The parable ends with a curse from Abimelech / the thorn bush and "on them came the curse of Jotham" (:57), but the parable is uttered from Mount Gerizim not Mount Ebal, the mount of blessing not curse. It's as if Jotham offers Israel a choice between a blessing and a curse, but Israel choose the curse of Jotham in that their choice of him was not sincere. For Jotham predicates the curse upon their insincerely choosing Abimelech. How were Israel insincere in choosing Abimelech as king? Their insincerity was in that they were so desperate for a human king, that they chose just anyone despite being sceptical of their own choice. And it is this manic desire for any human leadership rather than God's which is the nub of the parable- rather than simply being a case of punishment for slaying Gideon's sons.

Jdg 9:16 Now therefore, consider whether you have done what is true and right in making Abimelech king, and whether you have done justly to Jerubbaal and his house as he deserves- This was an appeal for their repentance. Jotham however makes no mention of how they had thereby rejected Yahweh as their king. He doesn't repeat that argument of his father Gideon, and lacked Samuel's spiritual insight; for he saw that this was the worst implication of desiring any human king. Instead he argues that Gideon's family were worth more respect than to slay his sons at the whim of the worthless king whom they had chosen. Yet he calls Gideon "Jerubbaal", in allusion to how Gideon had put down the Baal worship which they indulged in (:4).

Jdg 9:17 (For my father fought for you and risked his life and delivered you out of the hand of Midian-

Jotham makes no reference to God nor Yahweh in his parable. As noted on :16, Jotham lacks spiritual insight here. For Gideon himself clearly saw the deliverance as worked by Yahweh and not himself. It was Yahweh's sword which had been his sword. And instead of emphasizing his father's human bravery as the basis for the deliverance, surely he ought to have stressed Gideon's faith in Yahweh. Yet despite this, Jotham was clearly a spiritual person; although as always with God's people at this time, his spirituality was very compromised by his humanity.

"Fought for you and risked his life" is the phrase Jonathan uses about David (1 Sam. 19:5). Yet Jonathan seems to have seen Gideon as his hero [compare 1 Sam. 14:10-20 with Jud. 7:3,10,11,14,22. Jonathan's son was called Merib-baal (1 Chron. 9:40), meaning 'rebellion against Baal', an epithet for 'Gideon']. Yet in 1 Sam. 19:5 he says that "David put his life in his hand", exactly as Gideon did (Jud. 9:17). In other words, Jonathan saw David as the perfect fulfilment of all he spiritually wished to be, he felt that *David* lived up to the example of his hero Gideon, whereas he did not.

Jdg 9:18 yet you have risen up against my father's house this day and have slain his sons, seventy persons, on one stone, and have made Abimelech the son of his female servant king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother)-

So many times has this been repeated in the history of God's people, to this day. Petty nepotism, the support of a close relative within the church, leads to the destruction and exclusion of other far more spiritual families. However Jotham reasons as if Gideon had in fact been king, and therefore his successor ought not to have been his illegitimate son, but one of his legitimate sons. I noted on Jud. 8:23 that although Gideon turned down being king,

he effectively set himself up as king in all but name. He took the wealth of Israel, clothed himself in kingly purple clothes and had a son called "My father is king", i.e. Abimelech. And Jotham appears to go along with this in how he reasons.

Jdg 9:19 If you have done what is true and right with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice in Abimelech and let him also rejoice in you-

As discussed on :18, Jotham implies that the right thing would have been to appoint one of Gideon's legitimate sons as king in his place. For he keeps on about how they should have treated his family / house far differently than they had. Doing what was "true and right" is a quotation from Josh. 24:14, where doing this involved quitting idolatry; which they evidently hadn't done (:4). So although Jotham reveals much human reasoning, his heart was very much with Yahweh rather than Baal worship.

Jdg 9:20 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-

The end result would be self destruction, of the kind which had characterized his father Gideon's great victory against the Midianites. Fire coming out of a thorn bush uses the very words of Ex. 22:6; and the one who did that was to make restitution and bear guilt. Jotham was aware of Bible verses and yet not all of his reasoning was completely spiritual.

Jdg 9:21 Jotham ran away and fled and went to Beer and lived there, for fear of Abimelech his brother-

Beer may be Beeroth in Benjamin's highlands (Josh. 9:17). Often the Bible leaves us with limited information about a person, such as Jotham, and we are to imagine how his life in exile ended, and whether, given the evidence we have, he held on in faith or not. We hear no more of Jotham. He was in the right, others were in the wrong; he was badly treated as were his family. He bravely and cleverly made his appeal to avoid the destruction of God's people, but his appeal went unheard. God worked to prove him right in the long term, for the inspired historian concludes that Jotham's words were fulfilled by God (:56,57). Yet he lived out his days in obscurity although, we can imagine, with the Lord. For his appeal was really to trust God as their king and not man. He is like so many, who live out their lives in obscurity having done the right thing, having held to God's way, were unappreciated and suffered for it. Awaiting a future reward.

Jdg 9:22 Abimelech was prince over Israel for three years-

It appears to have been in this period that he judged Israel and saved them from their enemies (Jud. 10:1), although he had not been a very spiritual person before that. The implication really is that he must have repented to some degree. All we read about is of his rise and fall, not his rulership "over Israel". Or it could be that the record here is written to reflect Abimelech's perspective. He imagined himself as king over all Israel when he only controlled Shechem and Ophrah. Ophrah, Arumah, Mount Zalmon, Beer and Thebez are all close together in the same region. We note he is called prince, not king. Unlike the other judges, Abimelech doesn't judge / save, he simply reigns and is made king (:6).

Jdg 9:23 God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem, and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech-

Although God created the division between Israel and Judah as a punishment for their apostasy (cp. how He gave Egypt and the Shechemites a spirit of disunity likewise, Is. 19:1,2,14; Jud. 9:23), God never essentially recognized that division; for there was one Israel,

one body. But division is indeed a sign of Divine judgment upon a community. Their hearts had been inclined (by God) to follow him (:3; the same Hebrew phrase is in 1 Kings 11:3; Ps. 119:36; 141:4). But just as God inclined the hearts of the men of Shechem to follow Abimelech (Jud. 9:3), so now He put an evil spirit / attitude of mind between them and Abimelech. Clearly God can work directly upon the human heart according to His will. This is the basis of the way that the evil spirit (from the Lord) and the holy spirit work upon the hearts of men. However, the 'evil spirit' is 'sent' from God. Quite possibly here a specific Angel / spirit is referenced; just as in 1 Kings 22 an Angel is sent forth as a deceptive spirit, to seduce Ahab to go and die at Ramoth. Here too there is deception- Zebul tries to deceive Abimelech (:31), Zebul tricks Gaal... and the end result is judgment upon the men of Shechem and Abimelech.

Jdg 9:24 so that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might be avenged, and that their blood might be laid on Abimelech their brother who killed them, and on the men of Shechem who helped him to kill his brothers-

God punished this massacre by putting a divided attitude in the hearts of those responsible, so that they killed each other. Just as He had destroyed the Midianites in the time of Gideon. Turning people against themselves is a common way God has brought about destruction of those under judgment; so division is indeed a sign of Divine judgment upon a community.

Jdg 9:25 The men of Shechem set an ambush for him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who came along that way. This was reported to Abimelech-

They didn't catch Abimelech himself, but robbed others. The division and falling out between Abimelech and the men of Shechem was revealed in the way they took to highway robbery, apparently against Abimelech's wish, and refused his authority. The mountain top road would have been that between Shechem and Ophrah, Gideon's town, which Abimelech would have treated now as his own, seeing he had slain all Gideon's sons and Jotham was in exile. Again we marvel at the internal corroboration of the Biblical records.

Jdg 9:26 Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brothers and went over to Shechem, and the men of Shechem put their trust in him-

Gaal, "loathing", was son of a slave. He may well have been a local Canaanite. That the men of Shechem wanted such a man as their leader says much about them. We note that Jotham accuses Abimelech's mother of having also been a servant of Gideon.

Jdg 9:27 They went out into the field and harvested their vineyards, trod the grapes and held a festival, and went into the house of their god, ate and drank and cursed Abimelech-

We note how pagan worship was associated with eating and drinking wine, getting drunk. The church at Corinth mixed Christianity and paganism to the extent that the breaking of bread service was turned into a time of feasting and getting drunk.

Jdg 9:28 Gaal the son of Ebed said, Who is Abimelech and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? Isn't he the son of Jerubbaal and Zebul his officer? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem, but why should we serve Abimelech?-

The idea may be, 'Who is Abimelech to rule over Shechem. We may as well serve Hamor the Gentile who was the first owner of Shechem (Gen. 34:2)'. Or we can take "Shechem" as a reference to Zebul. GNB suggests: "Gaal said, "What kind of men are we in Shechem? Why are we serving Abimelech? Who is he, anyway? The son of Gideon! And Zebul takes orders from him, but why should we serve him? Be loyal to your ancestor Hamor, who founded your clan!". In this case, Gaal is appealing to the men of Shechem to

serve the descendants of the Gentile Hamor, rather than a foreigner like Abimelech. The implication would be that Gaal is a descendant of Hamor. Possibly Gaal is saying that Gideon and Zebul were servants to Hamor, the ancient father of the town of Shechem (Gen. 34), whereas it was about time that Shechem became independent. They should no longer be under the thumb of Abimelech, through his servant Zebul whom he had appointed over the city (:30). Or he may mean 'Let us show our loyalty to ancient Hamor who founded this city, whom Jacob's sons wickedly destroyed- and I will be your leader, and let us shake off the yoke of the sons of Jacob'. This would make sense if indeed Gaal was a Canaanite and not an Israelite, and the population of Shechem was largely Canaanite.

Jdg 9:29 If only this people were under my hand! Then I would remove Abimelech. He said to Abimelech, Increase your army and come out!-

These things may all have been said whilst drunk (:27,28). Abimelech was apparently not in Shechem at the time, having left Zebul to govern Shechem (:30,31).

Jdg 9:30 When Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled-

We wonder if Zebul was also in the idol temple, and heard these words himself there (:27,38). Abimelech and his men are not portrayed as exactly spiritual people.

Jdg 9:31 He sent messengers to Abimelech secretly saying, Look, Gaal the son of Ebed and his brothers have come to Shechem and they are inciting the city against you-

"Secretly" could be "in Tormah", the name of a place, perhaps another name for Arumah in :41. For Abimelech was clearly not living in Shechem.

Jdg 9:32 Now therefore, go up by night, you and the people who are with you, and lie in wait in the field-

"Up by night" is the same words as found in the Divine command to his father Gideon, to "arise" by night and attack the Midianites (Jud. 7:9). But he was only imitating his father on a surface level; see on :34.

Jdg 9:33 In the morning, as soon as the sun is up, you can rise early and rush on the city, and when he and the people who are with him come out against you, then may you do to them as you see fit-

The battle strategy of Abimelech, setting an ambush (Jud. 9:32), rising early and rushing upon the city of his one time brethren (Jud. 9:33), was replicated by the Israelites in Jud. 20:37. The same Hebrew words are used. But it was a case of copying an example just because it was recorded in Divine history, following precedents which were in fact not at all good. Hollow imitation of the behaviour of others is an abiding temptation for us today.

Jdg 9:34 Abimelech and all the people who were with him got up by night and they laid wait against Shechem in four companies-

We get the impression he was trying to imitate his father Gideon, who made an attack upon the Midianites in three companies at night, having been bidden arise or 'get up' by night (s.w. Jud. 7:9). And he certainly imitates Gideon in :48. But he was totally missing the point- he was trying to make a cardboard copy of another man's faith, following only the externalities, without Gideon's faith and humility. His failure to exactly follow his father is perhaps shown in the fact he had four companies whereas Gideon had three.

Jdg 9:35 Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance of the gate of the city, and

Abimelech and the people who were with him got up from the ambush-

The men of Shechem had earlier tried to ambush Abimelech, and now he ambushes them- continuing the theme of wicked men destroying themselves.

Jdg 9:36 When Gaal saw the people he said to Zebul, Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains. Zebul said to him, You are seeing the shadows of the mountains as if they were men-

This may be as if to say to Gaal 'you're drunk, you're not seeing straight'. Perhaps Zebul remained in a drunken stupor for some days after the massive drinking session of :27. Zebul was trying to lull Gaal into a false sense of security, by saying that the approaching soldiers he thinks he sees are in fact just mountain shadows. We enquire why we have this detail of the conversation. Possibly we are to connect it with Abimelech's claim to be a man in whose shadow others could dwell (:15). Shechem is located beneath the shadows of Abimelech's men. And it will mean only the fire of destruction for Shechem- just as Jotham had prophesied.

Jdg 9:37 Gaal spoke again and said, Look, people are coming down by the middle of the land, and one company is coming by the way of the oak of Meonenim-

Oaks are usually associated with idolatry in the Hebrew Bible. "Meonenim" is the word for magician, sorcerer etc. These pagan place names should have been removed and renamed. Even in secular history, a new entity which comes to power renames the previous cities and streets, to eradicate the memory of the philosophy, history and culture which they have replaced. The USSR did this when they took over the republics. But Israel just didn't do this in the land- because they themselves believed in the idols of those whom Yahweh had given them victory over. We see here the Baal worshippers divided against themselves. Abimelech approaches from a pagan point of worship, assuming he would have blessing for doing so. And the men of Shechem are worshippers of Baal Berith. This is the kind of mutual destruction foretold by Jotham.

Jdg 9:38 Then Zebul said to him, Now where is your boast when you said 'Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?' Isn't this the people that you have despised? Go out now and fight with them-

This again suggests Zebul had been in the idol temple when Gaal had made his drunken boast (:27). Abimelech and his men are not portrayed as exactly spiritual people.

Jdg 9:39 Gaal went out before the men of Shechem and fought with Abimelech-

Gaal going "before the men of Shechem" suggests he got his brief moment of power and leadership which he had so craved- but just for a morning.

Jdg 9:40 Abimelech chased him and he fled from him, and many fell wounded, up to the entrance of the gate-

The same phrase is in 1 Chron. 5:22: "For there fell many slain [wounded], because the war was of God". This was indeed "of God", but it doesn't make Abimelech thereby righteous. He was used to judge the Canaanites living in Shechem and their would be leader Gaal, and perhaps that is one of the ways in which Abimelech was a judge of Israel who saved them from their enemies (Jud. 10:1). In this sense we see a similarity with Samson, whose following of his own natural desires was used in order to save Israel from their enemies.

Jdg 9:41 Abimelech lived at Arumah, and Zebul drove out Gaal and his brothers, so that they should not dwell in Shechem-

As often in the Hebrew Bible, this is a summary of the situation, and we will now read how this came about.

Jdg 9:42 Next day the people went out into the field and told Abimelech-

The men of Shechem who had succeeded in entering the gates of the city of Shechem (:40) now came out into the field, where they were attacked by Abimelech (:44). They truly hated him, and it was surely only Abimelech's pride which was leading him to punish them like this. See on :40. But it's hard to understand that the Shechemites came out of the city as if nothing had happened, when the day before they had suffered a severe defeat. And they are again defeated by a surprise attack just as had happened the day before. "Next day" is literally 'because of the tomorrow'. We could read this as a second account of Abimelech's attack on Shechem. Or we could read "the next day" as referring to the day after the treason of the Shechemites in :25. Or we could read "went out into the field" to mean that civilians returned to their daily work at harvest time- and Abimelech is thereby pictured as attacking and murdering civilians going about their daily work. This was the kind of destructive behaviour foretold in Jotham's parable.

Jdg 9:43 He took the people and divided them into three companies and laid wait in the field, and when he saw the people coming out of the city, he rose up against them and struck them-
This division of his men into three companies was exactly what his father Gideon had done, in his legendary victory against the Midianites. But as noted on :34,48, he was totally missing the point- he was trying to make a cardboard copy of another man's faith, following only the externalities, without Gideon's faith and humility.

Jdg 9:44 Abimelech and the companies that were with him rushed forward and stood in the entrance of the gate of the city, and the two companies rushed on all who were in the field and struck them-

LXX gives "the company that was with him", singular. This sandwiching of the enemy against their own city gate recalls the strategy used to take Ai. But Abimelech's spirituality and imitation of the righteous, as noted on :43, was apparently of a purely surface level nature.

Jdg 9:45 Abimelech fought against the city all that day, and he took the city and killed the people who were in it, and he beat down the city and sowed it with salt-

This was an attempt to claim that he had executed Divine judgment against an apostate city (Dt. 29:23), although Abimelech and Zebul were far from righteous themselves. We note how attractive it is to men to condemn others. The spreading of salt was likely another surface level spiritual allusion, claiming he had devoted the city to utter destruction to Yahweh. For strewing salt meant dedication to Yahweh, as in Ez. 43:24.

Jdg 9:46 When all the men of the tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the stronghold of the house of Elberith-

Elberith was presumably a form of their god Baal Berith (:4). Their trust in their false god was to be their destruction. Although Abimelech was hardly spiritual, and Zebul was apparently present in the idol temple (:27), he seems to have rejoiced in the idea of punishing them for idolatry. And we see the same personality types amongst God's people today.

Jdg 9:47 It was told Abimelech that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together-

These "men of the tower of Shechem" were perhaps the priests; it seems the tower was part of the pagan temple of Elberith (:46).

Jdg 9:48 Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who were with him, and Abimelech took an axe in his hand and cut down a branch from the trees, took it up and laid it on his shoulder, and he said to the people who were with him, What you have seen me do, hurry and do the same!-

Abimelech here quotes the words of his father Gideon in Jud. 7:17; and the carrying of tree branches and then rushing down from a height upon the enemy recalls Gideon with his three companies of men holding pitchers. See on :34. The way Abimelech made his men "cut down branches from the trees" alludes to Jotham's parable of the trees. The trees were cut down and burnt by Abimelech stirring up the people to do so. Zalmon means shadow, and according to the parable, Abimelech had bidden the men of Shechem come beneath his shadow. But the end result would be Shechem's destruction and also Abimelech's. "Shoulder" is the word for 'Shechem'. Literally, Abimelech laid the branch of the damaged tree on 'his Shechem'. He destroyed his own Shechem, his own people, just as Jotham had predicted.

Jdg 9:49 All the people likewise each cut down his branch and followed Abimelech, and they put them at the base of the stronghold and set the stronghold on fire on them, so that all the people of the tower of Shechem died, about one thousand men and women-

"The people of the tower", as suggested on :47, were apparently those committed to idolatry. "The stronghold" of idolatry is equated with the tower (:46). This was the house of Millo which was to be destroyed by Abimelech's fire (:20). Their destruction by fire would have been designed by Abimelech as some kind of destruction of the apostate as required by the law of Moses, as if he were Joshua conquering Canaan and burning the cities of the Canaanites. But Abimelech's spirituality comes over as so compromised that it was merely a surface level imitation of the true.

Jdg 9:50 Then Abimelech went to Thebez and encamped against Thebez and took it-

Abimelech had an apparent run of success, and it led him to think he was invincible. This is seen so often amongst men; from sports stars to evangelists to businessmen. The Biblical histories are all so absolutely psychologically credible, unlike the uninspired histories of the time. He presumably attacked Thebez to slightly increase his tiny empire of a few villages which he considered his 'reigning over Israel'.

Jdg 9:51 But there was a strong tower within the city, and all the men and women of the city fled to it and shut themselves in, and went up to the roof of the tower-

Abimelech assumed that as he had destroyed the tower in Shechem so he could that in Thebez. See on :50. Maybe Thebez had also been subject to Abimelech but had likewise rebelled against his authority.

Jdg 9:52 Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it and drew near to the door of the tower to burn it with fire-

I suggested on :49 that destruction by fire would have been designed by Abimelech as some kind of destruction of the apostate as required by the law of Moses, as if he were Joshua conquering Canaan and burning the cities of the Canaanites. But Abimelech's spirituality comes over as so compromised that it was merely a surface level imitation of the true. He felt that because he was punishing apostasy with fire, he was himself invincible; and therefore he was judged harshly. And we see such things amongst the children of God today.

Jdg 9:53 A woman cast an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and broke his skull-

This obviously was a fulfilment of the seed of the woman hitting the seed of the serpent upon the head (Gen. 3:15). And yet Abimelech had been about to burn her to death for supposed apostasy. We also note that a man who ended up judged like this was also used as a judge / saviour of Israel (Jud. 10:1). Milling was the work of women (Mt. 24:41), so like Jael, she grabbed whatever was handy and used it- although it's unclear whether she did this "for the Lord" as Thebez [possibly Tirzah 6 miles north of Shechem] may well have been in Gentile hands as was Shechem. Abimelech had broken down Shechem (:45), just as now his skull was 'broken'. Again, Jotham's words came true. What Abimelech did to Shechem was done to him.

Jdg 9:54 Then he called hastily to the young man who carried his armour and said to him, Draw your sword and kill me, so that men will not say of me, 'A woman killed him'. His young man thrust him through and he died-

Saul's armourbearer would not slay Saul because he was Yahweh's anointed king. Although Abimelech claimed to be king, and was accepted by some as king, he clearly was not recognized as king by God nor his own people. We note that the first, or possibly the next, king of Israel met his end likewise, asking his servant to kill him (2 Sam. 1:9). Saul is thus made to be a failed king of Israel just as Abimelech was. Abimelech is indeed remembered for having been slain by a woman, both in this record in Judges 9, and in 2 Sam. 11:18-21. What he greatly feared came upon him, as it will upon all whom God rejects. He who slew his brothers on a stone is killed by a stone.

Jdg 9:55 When the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead they departed each man to his place-

The tower was not burnt with fire, because it was God's intention that Abimelech should do this to Shechem- not Thebez (:20). And so Thebez was not burnt as Abimelech had intended.

Jdg 9:56 Thus God rewarded the wickedness of Abimelech which he did to his father, in killing his seventy brothers-

Sometimes the Biblical record is vague, other times exact. This reflects how God is not seeking to cover His back against critics. He is of an altogether higher nature than that. There are times when the Spirit uses very approximate numbers rather than exact ("about the space of four hundred and fifty years", Acts 13:20 cp. 1 Kings 6:1). The reference to "seventy" in Judges 9:56 also doesn't seem exact, for Jotham escaped out of the 70. Seven and a half years (2 Sam. 2:11) becomes "seven years" (1 Kings 2:11); three months and ten days (2 Chron. 36:9) becomes "three months" (2 Kings 24:8). And 1 Kings 7:23 gives the circumference of the laver as "thirty cubits", although it was ten cubits broad. Taking 'pi' to be 3.14, it is apparent that the circumference would have been 31.4 cubits; but the Spirit says, summing up, "thirty".

Jdg 9:57 and all the wickedness of the men of Shechem God repaid on their heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal-

As noted on :55, the tower of Thebez was therefore not burnt with fire, because it was God's intention that Abimelech should do this to Shechem- not Thebez (:20). And so Thebez was not burnt as Abimelech had intended.

JUDGES CHAPTER 10

Jdg 10:1 After Abimelech, Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar arose to save Israel, and he lived in Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim-
God Himself 'arose and saved' Israel from Egypt (Ps. 76:9, s.w. "raised up a saviour"), and the phrase is also used of Moses in Ex. 2:17. But the people didn't want this radical deliverance from their enemies, because like the generation saved from Egypt, they were with their enemies in their hearts, and worshipped their gods as Israel had taken the idols of their Egyptian enemies with them, through the Red Sea (Ez. 20:17). So the potential possible in these raised up saviours / judges was never totally realized.

This verse implies Abimelech was a saviour and defender of Israel. At some point he must have repented of all this and done work for God. His proclamation as king (Jud. 9:6) was however a rejection of Yahweh as king; the very thing his father Gideon had refused to do. Yet even such a spiritually weak man was used to save His people.

"Tola" means 'worm', continuing the theme that the judges all had something about them which made them despised of men. The left handed, the son of a whore or of a concubine, etc. And it is exactly this kind of person whom God uses.

Jdg 10:2 He judged Israel twenty-three years and died, and was buried in Shamir-
'Shamir' is the word for "brier" or "thorn", and is often used in Isaiah in a very negative place. This man called "worm", Tola, lived in a place of briars / thorns, wasteland, bearing God's curse. But from such a place arose a man used by God to save His people.

Jdg 10:3 After him arose Jair the Gileadite, and he judged Israel twenty-two years-
"Jair" means 'enlightener', or possibly 'light', which would fit with him being described as 'arising'. Like all the judges / saviours of Israel, he looked ahead to the rising of the light of Christ in Israel's darkness. There was another Jair who had liberated large tracts of land from the Canaanites during the conquest. Perhaps he was named after him. I have often noted the similarities between the lives of God's servants as recorded in the Bible; Jair judged for 22 years, and the previous judge for 23 years (:2), about the same period.

Jdg 10:4 He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkey colts,
To ride on a colt, an animal not yet broken in, was unusual. The idea surely is that they all rode on such colts at one time, perhaps the time when they received their thirty cities. It was as if they had to break in their city, as they were breaking in the colt, representing how they had to subdue the local inhabitants. And they look forward, as do all the judges, to the Lord Jesus; who also rode on a donkey colt as He entered the city of His inheritance, Jerusalem.

And they had thirty cities, which are called Havvoth Jair to this day, which are in the land of Gilead-

I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

Jdg 10:5 Jair died and was buried in Kamon-

Kamon can mean simply the rising, referring to elevated land. But given the belief in the resurrection of the body, we wonder if there was not also the idea of burying a man from where he would finally rise from the dead. In the same way as Joshua was buried in the border of his inheritance, to rise again and enter it.

Jdg 10:6 The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and served the Baals and Ashtaroath, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines; they forsook Yahweh and didn't serve Him-

"The children of Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh" is a refrain which occurs seven times in Judges (Jud. 2:11; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1), recalling how Israel both over history and in the last days were to be punished "seven times" for their sins (Lev. 26:23,24). Israel generally never totally rejected Yahweh whilst they served other gods. But at this point it seems they did. We note the large number of gods they worshipped. Typically a people only worshipped one god. But Israel worshipped many, never satisfied with one, but like Gomer in her sexual addiction, always seeking other gods. For the way of the flesh never satisfies.

Jdg 10:7 The anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel and He sold them into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the people of Ammon-

Yahweh sold them, but the record often says that they sold or prostituted themselves to the idols of the nations. He will confirm men in the path they wish to go.

Jdg 10:8 They troubled and oppressed the Israelites that year. For eighteen years they oppressed all the Israelites that were beyond the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead-

The first sentence of this verse is omitted by LXX and many versions, hence GNB "For eighteen years they oppressed and persecuted all the Israelites who lived in Amorite country east of the Jordan River in Gilead".

Jdg 10:9 The Ammonites passed over the Jordan to fight also against Judah and Benjamin and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was very distressed-

This "distress" is the word used of the distress of the historical Jacob / Israel in this same area (Gen. 32:7), when like Israel he was confronted with his sins and led to cast himself upon God's grace.

Jdg 10:10 The Israelites cried to Yahweh saying, We have sinned against You because we have forsaken our God and have served the Baals-

This was how Yahweh felt. They themselves didn't think they had forsaken Him. The Bible at times speaks from God's viewpoint, at others from the perspective of the people whose actions are being described. To forsake Yahweh was to break covenant with Him (Dt. 31:16,17). Israel did forsake Yahweh (Jud. 2:13), but still He remained faithful to them, as Hosea remained faithful to Gomer despite her infidelity to their marriage covenant. Instead of forsaking them as He threatened, He instead by grace sent them saviours, judges, looking forward to His grace in sending the Lord Jesus, Yah's salvation.

The punishment for forsaking Yahweh was that "Yahweh will send on you cursing, confusion and rebuke in all that you put your hand to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the evil of your doings by which you have forsaken Him. Yahweh will make the pestilence cleave to you until He has consumed you from off the land into which you now go in to possess it" (Dt. 28:20,21). We expect these things to therefore happen at this time; but we note God's amazing patience and gentleness in not bringing these things immediately, and instead raising up judges as saviours for this wayward people.

Jdg 10:11 Yahweh said to the Israelites, Didn't I save you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites, and from the Philistines?-

The salvation from the Egyptians was at the Red Sea, long ago (Ex. 14:30). The Israelites were repeatedly reminded of this (Jud. 2:1; 6:8; 10:11). But they failed to perceive that God's actions in history were in fact their personal salvation, an act of grace shown to them also. David grasped that point, and his Psalms often thank God for the exodus, as if it had happened to him personally. But the problem is that Israel like all people tended to only see what was before their face at that moment. They had no sense of God's historical salvation of them, and the guarantee that He would likewise come through for them, if they remained faithful to Him.

In the Hebrew there are seven salvations mentioned here (:11,12), in contrast to the seven gods they worshipped in :6. It was all God's grace.

Jdg 10:12 The Sidonians also and the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, and you cried to Me, and I saved you out of their hand-

"Maonites" is the word for the Midianites, alluding to the great deliverance from them worked by God through Gideon. "Oppress" is the word used of how Israel were oppressed in Egypt (Ex. 3:9). But the intention, as with Israel's latter day oppression, is that it would lead them to cry out for Yahweh's salvation, 'Jesus': "For they will cry to Yahweh because of oppressors, and He will send them a saviour and a defender, and He will deliver them" (Is. 19:20 s.w.). All the judges were therefore types of the ultimate deliverance of Israel by the Lord Jesus in the last days.

Jdg 10:13 Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods; therefore I will save you no more-

God told Israel straight "I will save you no more". But they begged Him, and He did. And likewise in Hosea, He said He would give them up completely, but just couldn't bring Himself to do it. God changing His mind is a theme that runs through Hosea. This is not caprice nor instability, but rather a window into the way that the pole of God's saving grace works out stronger than that of His necessary judgment of an awful, sinful people.

Jdg 10:14 Go and cry to the gods which you have chosen. Let them save you in the time of your distress!-

They had doubtless done this already, and were turning to Yahweh only as a last resort, rather than the first and only resort.

Jdg 10:15 The Israelites said to Yahweh, We have sinned; do to us whatever seems good to You, only deliver us, please, this day-

This confession of sin before asking for deliverance was apparently from the heart, for God responded to it (:16).

Jdg 10:16 They put away the foreign gods from among them and served Yahweh; and His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel-

God's soul, His very person, was grieved (Heb. cut down, reaped- as in harvest, s.w. "his soul was vexed unto death", Jud. 16:16) for the misery / grief of Israel (Jud. 10:15,16). The Hebrew word translated "misery" is also translated "grief". The soul of Almighty God so far away from us grieved for their grief. Their pain elicited in Him a response, no matter that their pain was totally their fault.

In the death of Jesus we see the rejection of the Son whom God had so dearly hoped His people would reverence- but they rejected Him. As something of each of us dies in the death of those we love, so "God was in Christ", sharing in His sufferings and death. It was not of course that God died. But He fully shared in the sufferings of His Son unto death. God was so hurt by Israel's sufferings that in sympathy with them, "His nephesh ["soul"] was shortened" or expended. The phrase is used in Num. 21:4 and Jud. 16:16 about death or the diminishment of life. God's pain was such that this was how He felt, because He so internalized the sufferings of His people. And how much more in the death of His Son? He even feels like that for the sufferings of Gentiles- in the same way as Moab would weep for their slain sons, so God says that His heart would cry out for Moab, "therefore I weep [along] with the weeping of Jazer... my soul moans like a lyre for Moab" (Is. 15:5; Is. 16:9,11). God "pitied" Nineveh- a Hebrew word meaning to pity with tears (Jonah 4:11). The mourning of the prophets over Tyre (Ez. 27:1) and Babylon (Is. 21:3,4) was an embodiment of God's grief even over those not in covenant with Him. And how much more does He weep and suffer with His people Israel in their sufferings (Jer. 12:12; 23:10; Hos. 4:2,3); "my heart yearns / moans for him" (Jer. 31:20).

God grieved over the carcasses of those wretched men whom He slew in the wilderness for their thankless rebellions against Him their saviour (Heb. 3:17). The apostle makes the point: "With *whom* was He grieved?". Answer: with the wicked whom He slew! A human God or a proud God would never grieve over His victory over His enemies. Even in the fickleness of Israel's repentance, knowing their future, knowing what they would subject His Son to, "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel". He delays the second coming because He waits and hopes for repentance and spiritual growth from us. But He praises the faithful for patiently waiting for Him (Is. 30:18; Ps. 37:7). Here we see the humility of God's grace, and His ability to have absolute humanity.

Jdg 10:17 Then the Ammonites were gathered together and encamped in Gilead. The Israelites assembled themselves and encamped in Mizpah-

Effectively this begins a new chapter or theme; this summarizes the situation which came about after the events of Jud. 11:1-4. Israel had repented: "The children of Israel said unto the Lord, We have sinned: do thou unto us whatsoever seems good unto You; deliver us only... and His (God's) soul was grieved for the misery of Israel" (Jud. 10:15,16). Straight after this, "the children of Ammon were gathered together" to attack. The people were "sore distressed" after an extended period of devastation at the hands of these people (Jud. 10:8,9), as they will be in the last days before they come to repent. It would appear from this type that after their repentance they will be faced with a final onslaught, and then tested as to whether they will really put their faith in Jephthah - Jesus.

This 'gathering together' is spoken of in latter-day passages - Zech. 14:2 and Rev. 16:14. The previous Arab invasions which typify those of the future, also mention this 'gathering together': Sisera's forces did this (Jud. 4:13), as did those of Ammon (Jud. 10:17; 1 Chron. 19:7), the Amorites (Jud. 11:20), the Arab powers with Assyria in Hezekiah's time (Mic. 4:11), Gog's forces (Ez. 38:7), the Arab-Canaanite tribes (Gen. 34:30) and especially the Philistines (Jud. 16:33; 1 Sam. 13:5,11; 17:1; 25:1; 28:1; 29:1; 2 Sam. 23:11). This is quite some emphasis. Thus while we can expect to see greater potential unity amongst Israel's enemies, developing around the Israel issue and perhaps a common allegiance to a charismatic 'Nebuchadnezzar' figure for a brief period, their complete meeting of minds will not be until the final push against Jerusalem.

Jdg 10:18 The people, the princes of Gilead, said one to another, Who will begin to fight

against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead-

The end result of Israel's suffering at the hand of Ammon was that they realized their desperate need for a firm leader. Both the ordinary people, and what remains of their leadership in the last days, will be unanimous in this same conclusion: "The people and princes of Gilead said one to another, What man is he that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? he shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead" (Jud. 10:18). The fact that they then asked Jephthah to be this "head" (Jud. 11:8) would suggest that secretly they knew all along who they should follow.

JUDGES CHAPTER 11

Jdg 11:1 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of a prostitute; and Gilead was the father of Jephthah-

He was a "man of valour" (Jud. 11:1), a word also translated "virtue", and coming from a root meaning 'to whirl around'. This may possibly suggest a connection with the cherubim, as if through their righteousness ("virtue"), Jephthah and Jesus were a manifestation of God. We see a purposeful juxtaposition between him being a man of valour / virtue, and being the son of a prostitute. Just as "Tola" means 'worm', we see continued the theme that the judges all had something about them which made them despised of men. The left handed, the son of a whore or of a concubine, etc. And it is exactly this kind of person whom God uses.

Jdg 11:2 Gilead's wife also bore him sons, and when his wife's sons grew up they drove out Jephthah, and said to him, You shall not inherit in our father's house because you are the son of another woman-

He was despised as "the son of a strange woman" (Jud. 11:2) as Jesus was accused of being born out of wedlock (Jn. 8:41). All the judges / saviours look forward to Him. Inheritance passed through the male line, regardless of the mother. Which is why Abraham's less favoured sons by Hagar and his concubines also received an inheritance from him (Gen. 25:6; Dt. 21:15-17). His disinheritance was therefore due to personal dislike. The brothers of Jephthah are apparently the same as the "elders of Gilead" to whom he says "Didn't you hate me and drive me out of my father's house?" (:7). Their argument would have been that since his mother was a prostitute, there was no guarantee that Gilead was in fact his father. Presumably Gilead had accepted Jephthah as his son, but [after his death?] the other sons overturned this. Psychologically, this set up Jephthah to want to prove himself as a man. And when offered the chance to become the senior son of his brothers through achieving a military victory, he jumped at it. And I suggest that was behind his desperate offering of his daughter to Yahweh if Yahweh gave him that much coveted victory. It wasn't simply about a desire to vindicate Yahweh and liberate His people; it was about Jephthah's pride and need to prove himself. Yet still he is counted amongst the faithful who will finally be saved (Heb. 11:32). Despite all his wrong motivations.

Jdg 11:3 Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob, and a group of adventurers gathered to Jephthah, and they went out with him-

Having been rejected by his brethren, Jephthah "dwelt in the land of Tob" (Jud. 11:3), a word which can mean 'heaven'. Our Lord's return from heaven in response to Israel's plea for help clearly echoes this.

Jdg 11:4 After a while the Ammonites made war against Israel-

The summary of the whole situation was given in Jud. 10:17, and Jud. 11:1-4 have explained

how this came about.

Jdg 11:5 When the Ammonites made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah out of the land of Tob-

Rejected by his brethren, he had been forced to live the life of a brigand and outlaw, and his military exploits and bravery were perhaps well known to all. Should he have resorted to robbery in order to stay alive? Perhaps not, but the experience was used by God in order to prepare him to deliver His people. The elders of Gilead likely included his brothers who had rejected him. The whole incident looks forward to Israel's desperation leading them to repent of their rejection of the Lord Jesus; see on :7.

Jdg 11:6 and they said to Jephthah, Come and be our chief, so that we can fight the Ammonites-

We see developed further the theme that Israel, and people generally, need a visible leader. It came to a head in their rejection of Yahweh as their invisible king in Samuel's time. And we likewise see the tendency of all religions to provide a visible 'king'; for personal faith in the invisible kingship of Yahweh, recognizing ourselves thereby as part of His Kingdom or Kingly dominion, demands real faith. Note how "so that *we* can fight..." becomes "that *you* may fight..." (:8). They were desperate for a human leader; they had offered leadership over them to anyone willing to even try: "Who will begin to fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead" (Jud. 10:18). Only when that didn't produce anyone do they think of Jephthah. They were more than scraping the barrel.

Jdg 11:7 Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, Didn't you hate me and drive me out of my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?-

This was effectively a 'no' from Jephthah. He is sceptical of their offer, and so he goes on to get them to swear before Yahweh that he will not only lead them in battle, but be restored to the "house" or family and be their permanent leader.

The Lord Jesus was 'thrust out' from His native town (Lk. 4:29) as Jephthah was driven out from Gilead. It was "the elders" who were also responsible for the Lord's rejection. Jephthah's questions were rhetorical. The answer was 'Because we failed to have your faith in Yahweh and are suffering for it, so we need you, as a believer in Yahweh whom we rejected, to lead us. You have what we don't have'.

Jdg 11:8 The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, Therefore we have turned again to you now- This really was what they had done to God. And they saw Jephthah as manifesting God to them; they responded to his rhetorical questions of :7, as discussed there.

So that you may go with us and fight the Ammonites, and you shall be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead-

The end result of Israel's suffering at the hand of Ammon was that they realized their desperate need for a firm leader. Both the ordinary people, and what remains of their leadership in the last days, will be unanimous in this same conclusion: "The people and princes of Gilead said one to another, What man is he that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? he shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead" (Jud. 10:18). The fact that they then asked Jephthah to be this "head" (Jud. 11:8) would suggest that secretly they knew all along who they should follow.

Hos. 1:10,11 alludes back to Israel's choosing of Jephthah as their head, implying that their choosing of Christ will be at the time of their national acceptance by God: "It shall be said unto them, You are the sons of the living God. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together (cp. "the children of Israel assembled themselves together" to choose a leader to fight Ammon, Jud. 10:17), and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land (Exodus language - as if their suffering in their own land will match what they experienced in Egypt): for great shall be the day of Jezreel" - where Gideon won his great victory over the Midianites, which prefigured that of the last days (Jud. 6:33). This confirms our view that the final Ammonite attack prefigures the very last threat to Israel, which will come immediately after their repentance.

Jdg 11:9 Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, If you bring me home again to fight the Ammonites and Yahweh delivers them to me, shall I be your head?-
Perhaps men like Jephthah (Jud. 11:9) and Samson (Jud. 14:4) were not wrong to seek to be the judges who delivered Israel from the Philistines. For we sense here that being the "head" was attractive to Jephthah. Paul seems to want to inculcate the spirit of ambition in preaching when he told Corinth that they should be ambitious to gain those Spirit gifts which would be most useful in public rather than private teaching of the word (1 Cor. 14:1,12). In similar vein Paul commends those who were ambitious (from the right motives) to be bishops (1 Tim. 3:1). Yahweh was acknowledged here by Jephthah as the source of victory. Yet we will see how he later offers his daughter to Yahweh if Yahweh will give him victory. It seems Jephthah is suspicious that they want him to be head over them during the war, but not afterwards. And so he clarifies the agreement- if he is given victory, then he will be permanently the head of Gilead and his family. And so passionately did he want this, to be brought home or back into the family again, that he bargains with God for the victory, so that he can become head of his family. Here we detect pride... and it was the same pride which meant he didn't redeem his daughter from death. We observe too how Jephthah things in terms of an exchange mechanism and reward for works. He sets up a deal with the elders, that if he defeats Ammon, he will be their head. And then he goes to God to broker a deal in the same spirit- if God gives him victory over Ammon, he will give God his daughter. This transactional mentality is far from the path of grace and faith. Faith and grace go together. He should have trusted in the power of God through His Spirit, and accepted that any victory would be by God's grace. But Jephthah's attitude fits the character picture we have of Jephthah- a rough, violent but intelligent man with a spiritual side. And he will ultimately be saved.

The son of a prostitute (:1) couldn't enter the assembly of Yahweh, and that is stated at the same as the statement that neither could a Moabite or Ammonite: "An illegitimate person must not enter into the assembly of Yahweh... An Ammonite or a Moabite must not enter into the assembly of Yahweh" (Dt. 23:2,3). Jephthah asks for victory against the Ammonites so that he might be restored to the house / family and become a leader in Israel: "If you bring me home again to fight the Ammonites and Yahweh delivers them to me, shall I be your head?" (Jud. 11:9). Many rejected people can identify strongly with Jephthah at this point, wishing intensely to be accepted in a family, to be respected, and not rejected for issues that were beyond their control [in this case, being the son of a prostitute]. He clearly resented his exclusion from God's people. And sought to negotiate and bargain a way around it. God makes no comment on his vow, but God does give him the desired victory and headship within Israel. Perhaps the "faith" which is noted in Heb. 11:32,33 was his trust that even a man in his impossible situation of rejection could in fact have a way made for him to be accepted. I prefer to see his motivations this way rather than him being ambitious for power.

Although surely there was an element of that in the way he reasons.

Jdg 11:10 The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, Yahweh shall be witness between us; certainly we will do as you say-

They swear by Yahweh, when previously they had been serving other gods; and also because they knew that Jephthah was devoted to Yahweh.

Jdg 11:11 Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and chief over them, and Jephthah spoke all his words before Yahweh in Mizpah-

We note that the word "king" is not used. Perhaps they had learned the lesson from Gideon's refusal of the offer to be king, and had learned too from the tragic demise of Abimelech, the man who wanted to be king.

Jdg 11:12 Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites saying, What have you against me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?-

The land was God's, and those who fight against God's people, fight against Him. Jephthah is very aware that as a leader of God's people, he is manifesting Yahweh. This rhetorical question, as his question to his own people in :7, was intended to elicit their repentance. And this fulfilled the Mosaic command to ask enemies to surrender before fighting them.

As Jephthah briefly appealed to the surrounding enemies to see Biblical sense before destroying them, will the Lord Jesus Christ do likewise? He will "plead with them" in the valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:2). A remnant of repentant Philistines will apparently repent (Zech. 9:5-7); other hints that some of the latter day enemies will repent are found in Is. 19:23-25 ("Assyria the work of My hands" implies they will be the subjects of a new spiritual creation); Is. 14:1,2 (those who took Israel captive will willingly be their slaves in the Kingdom age).

Jdg 11:13 The king of the Ammonites answered the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land when he came up out of Egypt, from the Arnon to the Jabbok and to the Jordan; now therefore restore that territory again peaceably- Ammon justified their invasion by a quasi-Biblical argument, based on their claim that "Israel took away my land, when they came up out of Egypt". Jephthah replied by saying that because God had dispossessed Ammon then, they should not keep raising this old land question (Jud. 11:23). Yet this issue of who really owns the land of Israel is as live now as it was then, and indicates once again how the final latter day invasion will use this sort of argument to justify it.

Jdg 11:14 Jephthah sent messengers back to the king of the Ammonites-

His answer is very Biblical and reflects a thorough acquaintance with the scriptures he had access to. This man who had to make a living as a highwayman and robber, the son of a whore who had been rejected by his father's sons, had turned to the scriptures because of his experiences. We cannot judge people. We simply don't know who deep down is searching for God, nor what thief or lowlife is secretly reading the Bible on their phone.

Jdg 11:15 and said to him, This is what Jephthah says: Israel didn't take away the land of Moab, nor the land of the Ammonites-

The lengthy argument which follows will come to its conclusion in :21- it was really Yahweh and not Israel who had taken the land. To cavil at this was to effectively fight against Yahweh, and Jephthah doesn't wish even his enemies to do this.

Jdg 11:16 but when they came up from Egypt Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh-

Jephthah's knowledge of the scriptural record seems very impressive, and he quotes verbatim fragments from passages like Num. 13:26; 14:25. Against him, the Ammonites stood no chance of twisting scripture and history to justify themselves.

Jdg 11:17 Then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom saying, 'Please let me pass through your land;' but the king of Edom didn't listen. In the same way he sent to the king of Moab, but he would not, and Israel stayed in Kadesh-

The lesson is that if we are unreasonable to God's people, there will be eternal consequences. The Ammonites considered that all this was mere history. And that is the trouble with human attitudes to God's word, much of which is history. We tend to focus on the immediate, the situation before us at this moment; and consider that the passage of time works a kind of pseudo atonement for our previous failings. It doesn't, and we need to therefore repent as soon as we perceive our sins. See on :28.

Jdg 11:18 Then they went through the wilderness and skirted around the land of Edom and the land of Moab and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and they encamped on the other side of the Arnon, but they didn't come within the border of Moab, for the Arnon was the border of Moab-

This is all careful quotation from Num. 21:4,11-20; Dt. 2:1. See on :16.

Jdg 11:19 Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon, and Israel said to him, 'Please let us pass through your land to our place'-

This is all careful quotation from Num. 21:21-24; Dt. 2:24,26. See on :16.

Jdg 11:20 But Sihon didn't trust Israel to pass through his border, but Sihon gathered all his people together and encamped in Jahaz and fought against Israel-

Jephthah is hereby appealing for the Ammonites to learn a lesson from history; for they too had 'gathered together against' Israel. The whole narrative of the book of Judges is that the lessons from history are simply not learnt. And so man stumbles on in darkness, ever seeking to be the empirical learner until it is too late, without the guidance of Divine principles and the precedents set in His word. See on :29.

Jdg 11:21 Yahweh the God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they struck them; so Israel took possession of all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country-

This was only true on one level. "Drive out" is s.w. "possess". We must note the difference between the Canaanite peoples and their kings being "struck" and their land "taken" by Joshua-Jesus; and the people of Israel permanently taking possession. This is the difference between the Lord's victory on the cross, and our taking possession of the Kingdom. Even though that possession has been "given" to us. The word used for "possession" is literally 'an inheritance'. The allusion is to the people, like us, being the seed of Abraham. The Kingdom was and is our possession, our inheritance- if we walk in the steps of Abraham. But it is one thing to be the seed of Abraham, another to take possession of the inheritance; and Israel generally did not take possession of all the land (Josh. 11:23 13:1; 16:10; 18:3; 23:4). The language of inheritance / possession is applied to us in the New Testament (Eph. 1:11,14; Col. 3:24; Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Pet. 1:4 etc.). Israel were promised: "You shall possess it" (Dt. 30:5; 33:23). This was more of a command than a prophecy, for sadly they were "given"

the land but did not "possess" it. They were constantly encouraged in the wilderness that they were on the path to possessing the land (Dt. 30:16,18; 31:3,13; 32:47), but when they got there they didn't possess it fully.

Jdg 11:22 They captured all the border of the Amorites from the Arnon to the Jabbok, and from the wilderness to the Jordan-

The territory is described from south to north, and then from east to west. The Ammonites claimed Israel had occupied their land and that of Moab (:15); Jephthah is aware of the history and corrects them, saying that in fact Israel captured the land of the Amorites, not the Ammonites. And that was only because Sihon of the Amorites refused to let Israel pass through his land and came out to attack them, resulting in Sihon's defeat. The Ammonites were to suffer the same fate- they picked a fight with Israel and then Israel not only defeated them but took twenty other towns (:33). And he stresses that Israel skirted around Moab rather than taking their land (:18). His awareness of God's word makes us ponder why he seemed unaware that he could redeem his daughter from having to undergo what he had vowed.

Jdg 11:23 So now Yahweh, the God of Israel has driven out the Amorites from before His people Israel, and should you take it over?-

By asking the Ammonites to accept Yahweh's legitimate claim upon this territory, Jephthah was effectively asking them to accept Yahweh as their God. In all God's judgments, there is the desire for human repentance.

Jdg 11:24 Won't you inherit that which Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So whatever Yahweh our God has given to us, that we will take-

The idea of a god giving his people territory to possess was not at all foreign to the peoples of the land. Chemosh was god of the Moabites (Num. 21:29; 1 Kings 11:7,33; Jer. 48:7,13,46). But Moab and Ammon were closely connected. And Chemosh had failed to protect 'his' land from the Amorites. Jephthah states the issue as being a conflict between Yahweh and Chemosh, both apparently laying claim to the same land. So the only way out of the conflict was for Ammon to accept Yahweh as their God, instead of accepting Chemosh, the god of another nation (Moab) as their god. But we wonder whether Jephthah is not still reasoning from the false assumption that Yahweh was only the God of the land of Israel, rather than going further as David did, and perceiving Him as in fact king of all the planet, with a claim therefore on every human heart. And later we will suggest that Jephthah's view of Yahweh was that He was a God open to negotiation and responding to bargaining chips like the offer of his one and only child.

Jdg 11:25 Now are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor king of Moab? Did he ever strive successfully against Israel, or did he ever fight against them?-

This is a somewhat more human argument. Balak king of Moab ought to have contested this land issue historically, but he never did.

Jdg 11:26 While Israel lived in Heshbon and its towns, in Aroer and its towns and in all the cities that are along by the side of the Arnon, for three hundred years, why didn't you recover them within that time?-

As noted on :25, this is now a more human argument, to the effect that if a territory had been taken in war and kept for 300 years by its conquerors, then it could not reasonably be demanded back. But this is a human argument, and Jephthah should have surely just kept with the spiritual argument- that the land was Yahweh's, and He had given it to His people.

We often see the same tendency; human, secular or logical arguments are deployed to uphold or support a position which is simply true because God's word has declared it to be so. This is where so much of 'apologetics' fails to be ultimately relevant. We think particularly of attempts to use science to bolster the Biblical accounts of God's miracles, or creation itself.

Jdg 11:27 I therefore have not sinned against you, but you do me wrong to fight against me. Let Yahweh the Judge be judge this day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon-

Jephthah speaks in the first person, as if this is a personal argument with him. But he does so because he realizes he is manifesting God. He also argues that Yahweh is the Judge between Yahweh and Chemosh in their conflicting claims to property. The argument means that it is foolish to enter into the judgment court, seeing this is the case. Paul uses the same kind of argument, in presenting the Lord Jesus as both our advocate for the defence as well as our judge. We cannot, therefore, be condemned; if we are truly "in" Him. Jephthah claims to trust that God will judge. But he then offers God a deal- he will sacrifice his daughter if God does indeed judge for Israel. Judges were not to be bribed (Dt. 16:19; 27:25) for Yahweh cannot be bribed (Dt. 10:17 "For Yahweh your God, He is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, the mighty and the awesome, who doesn't respect persons nor take reward"). That perhaps was a warning against the kind of attempt to bribe the gods made by the child sacrificing cults. And Jephthah knew his Bible, as it were, from how he reasons with the Ammonites about Israel's history. But Jephthah seeks to do just this with the ultimate judge. We too can give lip service to the idea of resigning all to God's judgment, and then press ahead in our own strength to bring about His judgment, as if it all depended upon us and our victories.

Jdg 11:28 However the king of the Ammonites didn't listen to the words of Jephthah which he sent him-

Just as the king of Edom refused to listen to God's words (s.w. :17). For Jephthah is clearly speaking God's words here.

Jdg 11:29 Then the Spirit of Yahweh came on Jephthah and he crossed over Gilead, Manasseh and Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he crossed over to the Ammonites-

As he went, he asked the Israelites there to support him, but they didn't (Jud. 12:2). This repeats the theme of what happened at the time of Deborah, and also Gideon. And again we see the inability of people to learn from history. For the Spirit was clearly upon Jephthah as it was upon Gideon and Deborah. See on :20. We enquire whether Jephthah was aware of this gift of the Spirit. Presumably he was, because gifts of the Spirit usually have some external manifestation and evidence. And yet he still makes the deal with Yahweh- that if Yahweh gives victory, he will sacrifice whatever first comes out of his house to greet him [and he surely knew that would be his daughter]. Had he fully trusted in the work of the Spirit, he need not have cut that 'deal' with God.

We too have received the Spirit, but are inclined to still lack faith that things will work out unless we act towards God as the world around us does. The gift of the Spirit for us is a constant internal presence of the Lord Jesus. When we pray, we may come to a time when we are lost for words, the clock ticks, the seconds slip by, but we still feel "in" God's presence although we aren't saying nor articulating anything at all... until we end the prayer with something like "In Jesus' Name, Amen". But the reality is that how we feel in those silent, wordless moments "in" prayer is how we can feel all the time. This is a huge challenge to us.

But that is what life in the Spirit looks and feels like. But like Jephthah, we fail to retain the intensity and still consider we need human strength.

Jdg 11:30 Jephthah made a vow to Yahweh and said, If You will indeed deliver the Ammonites into my hand-

This need not imply doubt, but rather faith (for which he was noted in Heb. 11). "If" in Hebrew doesn't have to imply that something is open to question, but can function as the word "when...". But if indeed the "if" here betrays a lack of full faith, then this was the basis for his foolish vow. Perhaps a man of full faith would not therefore have needed to make this vow. He would have taken victory as an absolute given. So in this case, we see how taking the lower level of faith so often leads us into further problems.

And yet it is hard to avoid the impression that Jephthah is trying to broker a deal with God. He had faith, which God saw and commended in Heb. 11:32. But that faith was incomplete and he wanted to try to encourage God to come through for him by offering God his daughter. As God saw that incomplete faith and commended it, as He did with Abraham, so we are encouraged that our incomplete faith is still acceptable to God. And are led to patience with those whose faith is clearly incomplete. There seems something wrong with this offer of something to God "If You will indeed deliver..." enemies. It's a kind of bribing God, and is not unknown today. If God does this, I shall do this or that. The usual pattern so far in Judges has been Israel's sin, Gentile oppression, Israel's repentance- and then God empowers a judge to deliver Israel through His Spirit. But Jephthah doesn't focus on the promises of the covenant- to give victory in response to loyalty to Yahweh. Instead he tries to bribe God. And I therefore do not consider that it was out of his mind to sacrifice one of his family to God. For offering your children to your god in gratitude wasn't unknown in the surrounding tribes. The Moabites especially were famed for their child sacrifices.

Jdg 11:31 then whatever comes forth from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites, it shall be Yahweh's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering- I will engage with the question as to whether or not Jephthah offered his daughter as a burnt offering; but I wish to preface the presentation of evidence by observing that this is one of the many times that the Bible intentionally presents us with a question which is ambiguous and cannot be conclusively decided. For God wishes us to engage with Him, to reflect upon His word, and consider it carefully. And in the process of that consideration and careful engagement with God's word, we are led closer to Him. It is the process and not the product, the road rather than the destination, which is important in these cases. Whether we come down on the right or wrong side in our conclusion as to whether Jephthah really sacrificed his daughter... is not the intention of the record. This of course is hard of acceptance by those literalists and legalists who insist that every Bible verse must have a clear, black and white interpretation, with no ambiguity.

That said, at this point I would note that animals don't live in houses where people live. Nor do they come forth from the doors of a house to meet the master of the house. And to sacrifice one animal in gratitude for a victory would be a very small sacrifice. If he had in view an animal, then he makes no stipulation that it must be a clean animal. For unclean animals couldn't be sacrificed. So it seems he does indeed have his daughter in view from the start. And we might wonder whether this isn't something similar to how Saul pronounced death on whoever had eaten in return for military victory, "even if it be Jonathan my son", knowing surely that Jonathan had eaten as he had not heard the command and curse upon those who ate. We note in the case of Saul's vow to slay Jonathan that he is not condemned

by Yahweh for breaking the vow. Rather does he just lose face before his people. And surely Yahweh would not have condemned Jephthah for not keeping the vow. Further, the phrase "offer it up for a burnt offering" is never used figuratively. Sacrifice as a concept is, but he doesn't use the word sacrifice. And yet *contra* this is the clear Divine disgust at human offerings, and Yahweh's condemnation of the other tribes for offering up their children to their gods. And as noted on :14, Jephthah had an excellent knowledge of the scriptures. So I conclude that the whole question is left intentionally ambiguous, with evidence both ways- in order to exercise our minds.

He offers "whatever comes forth", the phrase used of a child coming out from a woman at birth to become part of the "house" of the father, surely knowing that something was going to come forth. And typically it would be a woman coming to congratulate him. Jephthah knew full well that it was customary for women to go out to meet returning victors with songs and dances; in 1 Sam. 18:6 the women do so to meet David returning from his victory over Goliath. There is ample evidence from surrounding cultures that the victorious warrior's own daughters would come dancing to their father's success. Surely Jephthah knew his daughter would do this. It would have been most unusual if she had not. There is no Old Testament example of virgins devoting themselves to the Lord's service and remaining unmarried, let alone being forced to do so by a third party. The law of Moses and Biblical history is silent about this. So the vow to offer someone as a burnt offering must surely be taken as literal. It has been observed that "The burnt offering ('olah) involves death in all 286 O.T. occurrences". Even if we wish to go with this line of interpretation, there is still something ethically, morally and logically dodgy about a father telling his teenage daughter that she must remain a lifelong virgin serving Yahweh because her father has just won a victory. Even if we still accept that, then the essential lesson still remains: That for the sake of pride, a man destroyed his daughter's life. And he used his daughter as a kind of bargaining chip with Yahweh- even though Yahweh makes no recorded response to his offer. When he should have gone to war in faith, trusting in his empowerment by the Spirit. And only male animals could be sacrificed in this context, and at a designated altar with Levitical priests officiating. So Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter was still not according to God's will. If he did it, which I suspect he did, then this was still not true devotion to Yahweh according to His law.

We could however go with Adam Clarke's suggestion that we translate the Hebrew as meaning "'I will consecrate it to the Lord, or I will offer it for a burnt-offering"; that is, 'If it be a thing fit for a burnt-offering, it shall be made one; if fit for the service of God, it shall be consecrated to him'". However :34 clearly presents Jephthah as in a state of tragic shock when his daughter comes out of the house to greet him, and if Clarke's get out is valid, then this reads very strangely. See on Jud. 12:1,4. But we note that indeed it is legitimate to translate the "and" as "or", as in Ex. 25:15. In which case we can understand him to mean that he would dedicate it to Yahweh or offer it as a sacrifice. The Hebrew for "burnt offering" is always used just about a literal burnt offering; it's never used figuratively. Child sacrifice was so common in the surrounding world, and offered to the gods as a kind of deal in which the god would give a victory in return for it. Child sacrifice was of course abhorrent to Yahweh (Jer. 7:31; 19:5 ; Ez. 16:20; 23:39) and forbidden by the law (Dt. 12:31; 18:10, Lev.18:21; 20:2); but Jephthah may have been influenced by the surrounding conceptions of "God". His ultimate salvation (Heb. 11:32,33) surely involved some unrecorded repentance, as in the cases of Lot, Samson and so many whom the New Testament assures us will be saved. Our repeated surprise at who shall be saved is surely to teach us the lesson not to judge, and to accept that repentance may take place in a person without our being aware of it. This can be a helpful thought as we struggle with the apparent lack of repentance from those

who have hurt us. Historical records mention people offering their most noble children after offering purchased or slave children failed to lift a siege. Eusebius, citing Philo of Byblos, says that the Phoenicians "offered up their dearest children" in order to get victory against their enemies. And there are Biblical examples. Hiel rebuilt Jericho apparently using his oldest and youngest sons as foundation offerings (1 Kings 16:34). In 2 Kings 3:4-27 Mesha, the king of Moab, sacrificed his oldest son atop the walls of his fortress in full view of besieging troops to vainly try to break their siege. Ahaz sacrificed his son during a siege of Jerusalem, so perhaps he was doing the same thing (2 Kings 16:3,5). To sacrifice your most treasured possession to your god was seen as quite normal. And a son was a man's most treasured possession. It could be argued that a king or leader was expected [in the surrounding cultures] to make such a sacrifice. Jephthah's offer of his only beloved child can be readily understood within this context. Human sacrifices, especially of children, were required by the Moloch cult (2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 32:35). They were required in association with vows; Moloch would do good or not do evil to the offerer if they offered him their child. But Moloch was the god of the Ammonites whom Jephthah was fighting. Clearly he was influenced by the very religious system he was fighting- as often seen later in Israel's history.

This kind of negotiation with God was common- if You do this, then I'll do that. We think of Jacob offering to pay Yahweh a tithe if he is returned home safely (Gen. 28:20-22), Hannah offering Samuel to Yahweh if she gets pregnant (1 Sam. 1:11), Absalom claiming he made a vow to Yahweh if He returned Absalom from exile (2 Sam. 15:7-9). The law of Moses was aware of this culture. Vows to Yahweh are to be paid immediately (Dt. 23:21) at the place Yahweh chose (Dt. 12:11,17,18); but Lev. 27:1-8 allowed for payment to be made instead of the promised devotion of a person. Other legislation about vows is found in Lev. 22:17-25; Num. 30:2-17. And the practice of making vows and giving them is alluded to often- Job 22:27; Ps. 50:14; 56:13; 66:13; 76:12; Prov. 7:14; Ecc. 5:3. We note Saul promising God in 1 Sam. 14 that his men would eat nothing for a day, basically in return for military victory. When his son Jonathan unknowingly breaks the vow, Saul says he has to die [although we note that he didn't carry that out and is not condemned for it]. Jephthah's vow was made in this context. He could have got out of it. But it was perhaps his pride that stopped him. Human pride is more powerful even than faithfulness to your family.

Jdg 11:32 So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them and Yahweh delivered them into his hand-

Just as all the animals and everything in the *eretz* promised to Abraham was 'delivered into the hands' of Noah (s.w. Gen. 9:2), so the nations of that *eretz* were delivered into the hands of Israel (s.w. Ex. 6:8; 23:31; Dt. 2:24; 3:2,3; 7:24; 21:10; Josh. 2:24; Jud. 1:2). Tragically, like Adam in Eden [perhaps the same *eretz* promised to Abraham] and Noah in the new, cleansed *eretz*, Israel didn't realize this potential. What was delivered into the hand of Joshua (Josh. 2:24) actually wasn't delivered into their hand, because they disbelieved (Jud. 2:23); and this looks ahead to the disbelief of so many in the work of the Lord Jesus, who has indeed conquered the Kingdom for us. They considered the promise of the nations being delivered into their hand as somehow open to question, and only a possibility and not at all certain (Jud. 8:7; Num. 21:2 cp. Num. 21:34). Some like Jephthah (s.w. Jud. 11:32; 12:3), Ehud (Jud. 3:10,28), Deborah (Jud. 4:14), Gideon (Jud. 7:15) did, for a brief historical moment; but as individuals, and their victories were not followed up on. Instead they were dominated by the territory. And so instead, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies within the *eretz* (s.w. Lev. 26:25; Jud. 13:1). See on Jud. 12:2.

Jdg 11:33 He struck them from Aroer to Minnith, twenty cities, and to Abelcheramim, with a

very great slaughter. So the Ammonites were subdued before the children of Israel-
The nations in the land being "subdued" was the outcome of Israel being obedient to the covenant (s.w. Dt. 9:3). We read this word "subdued" used of how the land was at times subdued before Israel (Jud. 3:30; 4:23; 8:28; 11:33). But each time it is clear that the people generally were not obedient to the covenant. One faithful leader was, and the results of his faithfulness were counted to the people. This is what happened with the Lord's death leading to righteousness being imputed to us.

Jdg 11:34 Jephthah came to Mizpah to his house and behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances. She was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter-

I often say that the closer you look at anything Divine, the greater is the beauty. When you place human stuff under the microscope, the beauty breaks up. The fact Jephthah had only one child is stated twice over ["She was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter" Jud. 11:34], and this is also stressed when we perceive the order of the numbers in this part of Judges. They are in a pattern: 70 - 30/30/30 - 1 - 30/30/30 - 70. The first "70" is the number of children Gideon had; the first "30/30/30" refers to the sons/donkeys/cities of Jair's children ("He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkey colts, and they had thirty cities" Jud. 10:4), the central "1" is Jephthah's single daughter, the second "30/30/30" is the sons/daughters/daughters-in-law of Ibzan (Jud. 12:9 "He had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He sent his daughters away in marriage, and brought in thirty women for his sons"), and the final "70" refers to the sons, grandsons, and donkeys of Abdon (Jud. 12:14 "He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy donkey colts"). Don't tell me the Bible isn't Divinely inspired to have such detail in a chiasm like this.

Having no other children [and the text twice labours this] meant that his line would die out, and that was the greatest tragedy for Hebrew man, a fate worse than death. The judges that precede and follow the story (Jud. 10:1–5; 12:8–15) have many children, as if to highlight the tragedy and cost of his sacrifice. He made the vow in Mizpah and his house was in Mizpah—everyone knew the terms of the vow, and so we can conclude that his daughter came out of the house knowing what she was doing. This was unusual for a man of some distinction, and we wonder if Jephthah had become impotent. Or it could be that his wife had become barren, and he had refused to remarry or take other wives. He stands in stark contrast to other judges of Israel, who had 70 or 30 sons. We see this as a sign of his integrity. The whole narrative is set up for us to sense that the girl coming out of the house to meet Jephthah sent a chill of terror and tragedy down Jephthah's spine. The tragedy of the scene is emphasized by the record mentioning that she was his only child. I discussed on :31 the pros and cons for thinking that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter, and concluded that the evidence seems carefully stacked on both sides. Therefore I conclude that the incident is consciously crafted to help us engage carefully with the text, and there is no definite conclusion possible. His apparent integrity in only having one child is carefully balanced against his rashness of having made an oath which he now thinks he must carry out.

Jdg 11:35 When he saw her he tore his clothes and said, Alas my daughter! You have made me very sad and troubled, for I have made a vow to Yahweh and I can't go back on it-
"I can't go back" is literally "I am not able". He was able, but his pride was greater than his very genuine love of his family. And so it has so often been. We think of Darius and Herod making rash oaths and harming devout men of God—against their better desire, but because of their pride. His vow was unlawful, as it involved human sacrifice, so it was not binding

before Yahweh. Jephthah was not a priest and so could not have lawfully offered his daughter as a burnt sacrifice. So he was wrong to present his action as an unavoidable part of his Yahweh worship. The truth is that he was treating Yahweh as Moloch was treated, and was worshipping Yahweh in the way Moloch was worshipped. We note that his attitude to his own brethren the Ephraimites resulted in the death of 42,000 of them (Jud. 12:6). Surely he could have avoided that outcome, but he presents as having little conscience about blood shedding. He had after all led a band of robbers for many years, robbing his fellow Israelites, and was famed for being a warrior because of that. We could argue that he could have redeemed his daughter from the vow he involved her with (Lev. 27:4). But he decided in his mind: "I can't go back". Actually he could have done; but he so firmly chose the higher level that it was as if there was no way back. Ps. 15:4, in evident allusion to Jephthah, describes those who will attain the Kingdom as fearing Yahweh, and swearing to their own hurt and changing not. Some may swear and change and attain the Kingdom; but we are invited to follow Jephthah to the highest level. The principle of Jephthah's vow is seen in many other Bible characters.

Or it could be that for all his fluent knowledge of the history of God's people, he had not paid due attention to the details of the Mosaic law in Lev. 27:4, and so was unaware of this. I discussed on :31 whether like Saul wanting to kill his son Jonathan, Jephthah just possibly might have wished to kill his daughter. For he knew she would come out of the house to greet him with tambourine if he won. And this would make his grief here either theatrical, or because he now realized the reality of what he had vowed.

AV "thou art one of them that trouble me" correctly reflects the Hebrew. She had become an Achan to him, she was as one of his enemies. This seems a very harsh response; and it is certainly full of concern about his own feelings rather than his daughter's fate at his hands. But it may reflect the depth of his grief as he realized what his vow now required him to do. This extreme grief on his part would show the love he had for her, and we think of the mourning of Darius the night when Daniel was in the den of lions because of his refusal to change his decree. Through perceiving Jephthah's great grief, we are given an insight into his pride in still going ahead with her sacrifice. Be that sacrifice literal or figurative.

Jdg 11:36 She said to him, My father, you have made a vow to Yahweh; do to me what you have vowed, because Yahweh has taken vengeance for you on your enemies the people of Ammon-

Her attitude is indeed commendable on one hand, but she sees her father's victory as being his personal vengeance upon his personal enemies. The idea of fighting for Yahweh against His enemies, and His vengeance, seems far from her. I suggest she was fully aware of the vow, and went out of the house to greet her father knowing her fate. Jephthah doesn't tell her the content of the vow. The way he speaks and she responds ["you have made a vow..."] suggests they both knew what the vow meant and required. The content of the vow is not explained to her by Jephthah. Their conversation suggests they both knew the content of the vow and what it now entailed. The law allowed her to have disallowed the vow but she was of the same mindset. The house was in Mizpah and the vow was taken in Mizpah. Everyone knew the deal Jephthah had cut. There is a connection in the Hebrew which is easily missed in translation: "*Do* to me... because Yahweh has *done* vengeance for you". Because of what Yahweh did, so must be done to her. It's all the language of the deal. There is no cry of despair by her. She expresses no surprise nor attempt to get out of the vow. The fact she "returned to her father and he did to her his vow that he had vowed" (:39) shows her total acceptance. She could easily have run away and not returned to face the consequences of her

father's vow.

Jdg 11:37 She said to her father, Let this one thing be done for me: let me alone two months to go around on the mountains and bewail my virginity, I and my companions.

As discussed on :31, this could mean that she was resigned to death. Or the bewailing of her virginity could mean that she accepted that she was dedicated to Yahweh and therefore could never marry and have children. But there is no Mosaic concept of a woman being devoted to Yahweh by the oath of a third party, and therefore being unable to have children or marry. Even the oath of Naziriteship didn't preclude marriage. So again, as discussed on :31, we are left with evidence for and against the idea of her sacrifice. This, I suggest, is intentional.

For God wishes us to engage with Him, to reflect upon His word, and consider it carefully. And in the process of that consideration and careful engagement with God's word, we are led closer to Him. It is the process and not the product, the road rather than the destination, which is important in these cases. Whether we come down on the right or wrong side in our conclusion as to whether Jephthah really sacrificed his daughter... is not the intention of the record. This of course is hard of acceptance by those literalists and legalists who insist that every Bible verse must have a clear, black and white interpretation, with no ambiguity.

Whatever Jephthah's unwisdom, motives or murderous plans which may or may not have lurked in a very dark mind which wished to slay his daughter, this doesn't exclude him from being listed amongst the faithful in Hebrews 11. The lesson therefore is the same as that which we take from Samson. No matter how possibly tangled were a man's motives at some points in his life, no matter how strangely parts of a man's biography may read or appear when we meet them in live encounter, we are not to judge. For God at the end of all things may well accept him as faithful to Him. We are not to judge simply because we cannot judge.

Jdg 11:38 He said, Go. He sent her away for two months, and she and her companions went and mourned her virginity on the mountains-

The vow surely implied that Jephthah would immediately offer up whatever came out of his house (:31). So by allowing two months to perform the vow, he was stretching the interpretation. Why not, then, annul it altogether? We note it was her virginity which was to be lamented, which would suggest it was a devotion to a virginal life that was in view, rather than death. But then to die childless was also seen as a tragedy worthy of bewailing.

Jdg 11:39 At the end of two months she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed, and she was a virgin. It was a custom in Israel-

Jephthah "did" the vow after the two months. If she was only mourning her virginity in that period, there's a logical problem. For she was a virgin at the start of the period and at the end of it. She didn't sleep with a man during the two months. And so Jephthah "did" the vow to her at the start of the two months, if the vow was simply that she was to remain a virgin. Logically the requirement seems to be that he ended her life at the end of the two months. And her great sadness was that she died without having been a mother. The record stresses that the tragedy was her virginity. Whether or not Jephthah killed her, the idea is that he lost his lineage. God was silent about agreeing to Jephthah's vow, and there is no Divine comment on his carrying it out. Perhaps because the judgment was intrinsic to what he did- he was left with no seed.

"And she was a virgin" is intentionally vague; for tenses in Biblical Hebrew aren't at all precise. It could mean that she died, being a virgin. Or that she now lived the rest of her life as a virgin. But if the vow came into effect only after two months, then that could be read as implying she then died. Because she was a virgin at the start and the end of the two months. We note that the record doesn't state what Jephthah did to her; just that he did what he had vowed, and as discussed on :31,37, that vow is intentionally ambiguous. And the incident ends with this same open ended position, beckoning us to engage with the text and wonder what actually happened.

Jdg 11:40 that the daughters of Israel went each year to celebrate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year-

We wonder what there was to celebrate about this girl. For she could surely have run away, and would have found plenty to support her, just as Jonathan did when his father tried to murder him according to some unwise oath. Was the celebration of her obedience to her father's unwise oath? Or we could read "celebrate" as "lament" (AV). In which case this would be a lamentation of how a young woman had her life either ruined or ended because of the unwisdom of a male, and his pride in refusing to just take back his oath, in a mistakenly literalistic interpretation of Dt. 23:23. Again, as discussed on :31,37,39, the record is intentionally vague, in order to invite our thought and engagement with it. Whatever actually happened to Jephthah's daughter, Jephthah acted unwisely and wrongly. It was only his pride that stopped him using the Mosaic laws about changing a vow. The rest of the Jephthah record presents him as a sharp guy- an able negotiator, statesman, Biblically and spiritually articulate, and a saviour and true judge of God's people. And later Biblical comment upon Jephthah is likewise positive (1 Sam. 12:11; Heb. 11:32). Perhaps we are left with the stark contrast, to ponder- whatever happened to his daughter, we see how a man is accomplished as Jephthah can still fail when it comes to pride. No price is too high for some men to pay in order to preserve their pride- or try to. Even the destruction of the nearest and dearest to them. That would be one takeaway from the whole enigma. And yet he will still be saved; a prostitute's son who had led an armed gang of robbers, who was proud and influenced by pagan conceptions of God, who shed blood too freely... will still be saved.

JUDGES CHAPTER 12

Jdg 12:1 The men of Ephraim were gathered together and passed northward, and they said to Jephthah, Why did you go to fight against the Ammonites and didn't call us to go with you? We will burn your house around you with fire-

This continues a theme in Judges, of how God's people had no collective vision nor responsibility. The men of Ephraim were jealous and had a wounded sense of self-importance- rather than rejoicing that the Ammonite enemy of Israel had been destroyed. The Ephraimites came over as offended because they weren't invited to fight in a battle, even though they had shown no inclination; and they did this with both Gideon and Jephthah (Jud. 8:1; 12:1). We see how the Biblical record is consistent in its depiction of character and personality, over incidents which occurred far apart. This is yet another internal evidence for Divine inspiration.

The threat to burn his house with fire, from which his daughter had emerged, may be an allusion to what he had done to her; and they sought to punish him by burning him to death, the punishment for apostasy. I discussed on Jud. 11:31,37 how the whole question of 'Did Jephthah slay and offer his daughter?' is intentionally left ambiguous. And here again we have only a possible contribution towards the argument that he may have done this. But it is very tangential, purposefully so.

Jdg 12:2 Jephthah said to them, I and my people were at great strife with the Ammonites and when I called you, you didn't save me out of their hand-

We note the difference between this response to the Ephraimites, and that of Gideon in Jud. 8:1-3. Gideon was far humbler, and his softer answer turned away wrath. Whereas Jephthah is not so wise, and it results in bloodshed. We recall his unwisdom in his vow of Jud. 11. Surely Jephthah ought to have learned from the history of how Gideon correctly responded in an identical situation- when again, the Ephraimites had not come forward to help him in routing Yahweh's enemies. We also note Jephthah speaks of how the men of Ephraim could have helped save him from the hand of the Ammonites. But it was Yahweh who delivered him out of the hand of the Ammonites, and placed the Ammonites into his hand (Jud. 11:32). In the flush of victory, Jephthah seems to have lost the humility which Gideon displayed as noted on Jud. 8:2.

Jdg 12:3 When I saw that you didn't save me, I put my life in my hand and went against the Ammonites, and Yahweh delivered them into my hand-

Just as all the animals and everything in the *eretz* promised to Abraham was 'delivered into the hands' of Noah (s.w. Gen. 9:2), so the nations of that *eretz* were delivered into the hands of Israel (s.w. Ex. 6:8; 23:31; Dt. 2:24; 3:2,3; 7:24; 21:10; Josh. 2:24; Jud. 1:2). Tragically, like Adam in Eden [perhaps the same *eretz* promised to Abraham] and Noah in the new, cleansed *eretz*, Israel didn't realize this potential. What was delivered into the hand of Joshua (Josh. 2:24) actually wasn't delivered into their hand, because they disbelieved (Jud. 2:23); and this looks ahead to the disbelief of so many in the work of the Lord Jesus, who has indeed conquered the Kingdom for us. They considered the promise of the nations being delivered into their hand as somehow open to question, and only a possibility and not at all certain (Jud. 8:7; Num. 21:2 cp. Num. 21:34). Some like Jephthah (s.w. Jud. 11:32; 12:3), Ehud (Jud. 3:10,28), Deborah (Jud. 4:14), Gideon (Jud. 7:15) did, for a brief historical moment; but as individuals, and their victories were not followed up on. Instead they were dominated by the territory. And so instead, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies within the *eretz* (s.w. Lev. 26:25; Jud. 13:1).

Why then have you come up to me this day, to fight against me?-

Again we sense an arrogance, in the flush of victory. As if to say, 'I just beat the Ammonites, why then try to fight me?'

Jdg 12:4 Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead and fought with Ephraim, and the men of Gilead struck Ephraim because they said, You Gileadites are renegades of Ephraim from Ephraim and Manasseh-

The motivation for the conflict is here given as being merely racial and historical prejudice, rather than anything spiritual. And yet despite this yet further unwisdom and arrogance, Jephthah is listed as being amongst the faithful in Heb. 11, assured of resurrection to eternal life. We note that Jephthah took the initiative in attacking his brethren, and he did so because their words stuck in his mind, he kept repeating them, and therefore did what God was surely against- attacking and slaying his own brothers. This casual attitude to the death of others may, or may not, tie in to the discussion on Jud. 11:31 as to whether he also intended to slay his own daughter.

We see here the power of unkind words, although LXX offers "because they that were escaped of Ephraim said, Ye are of Galaad in the midst of Ephraim and in the midst of Manasseh". This would imply there had been a previous, unrecorded conflict between Gideon and the men of Ephraim. But 'You as Gileadites are really under our control' was the idea. GNB "The Ephraimites had said, "You Gileadites in Ephraim and Manasseh, you are

deserters from Ephraim!"". And reflection upon those words made Jephthah so angry that he went and slew his brethren.

We could understand that the men of Ephraim wanted to attack Gilead. Which is what the Ammonites had effectively tried to do in Jud. 11, and had been defeated again by Jephthah. The men of Ephraim were acting just like the Gentile world... and met the same fate. And this is what happens in all conflicts between God's people.

Or again we can see the attack on Gilead as being the result of pride. They boast, depending how we translate the Hebrew, that they will reduce the Gileadites to a mere remnant.

Jdg 12:5 The Gileadites took the fords of the Jordan before the Ephraimites. When the fugitives of Ephraim said, Let me cross over, the men of Gilead said to him, Are you an Ephraimite? If he said No-

The men of Gilead were related closely to the Ephraimites, hence the claim of :4. There was just a slight difference in accent between them. So this really was brother slaying brother, and shows Jephthah and his men in a very bad light. And yet, he is counted amongst the faithful in Heb. 11, and we assume he must have repented for what he did here.

Jdg 12:6 then they said to him, Now say 'Shibboleth;' and he said Sibboleth, for he couldn't manage to pronounce it right, then they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan- "Sibboleth" means both a stream- which is all the 'river' Jordan is at places in northern Israel- or a burden of abuse (Ex. 6:6); and 'shibboleth' is an ear of corn. There are many examples of this kind of thing in dialects today. Maybe the idea was that if they couldn't say "shibboleth" then they were asking to be placed under an abusive burden of death, 'sibboleth'. It has been observed: "The 'ear of wheat' was an ancient symbol of Ishtar, the goddess of heaven; and in later astronomy the Aramaic shebelta was the name of the Virgo Spicifera in the Zodiac: possibly, therefore, popular religious associations may have had something to do with the choice of the test word".

At that time, forty-two thousand of Ephraim fell-

This was nothing less than a bloodbath, a huge massacre. Although "thousand" when used of military conflict probably refers to a military division, rather than to a literal 1,000. Or we can read this as 'forty and two thousand', i.e. $40 + 2,000 = 2,040$. The whole tribe numbered only 32,500 at the previous census (Num. 26:37), which was less than the first numbering (Num. 1:33). Only 1,000 from each tribe formed the army (Num. 31:4,6). Whatever the figure, Jephthah presents surely as conscience less in arranging for the slaying of so many of his fellow Israelites. This would be in the context of his willingness to slay his own daughter, and his having led a band of violent robbers for many years prior to that.

Jdg 12:7 Jephthah judged Israel for six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in a city of Gilead-

Perhaps it was during these six years that he repented of his unspiritual behaviour and unwisdom, and had the faith which was the basis of his commendation in Heb. 11. We reflect that Jephthah was willing to sacrifice his only child for the sake of God giving him a victory which in turn would return him to his "house" or family, and make him their leader. But it probably didn't work out as family life happily for ever after. He would still have been spoken of as the son of a prostitute. And even if he did get the acceptance he so craved, it only lasted six years.

Jdg 12:8 After him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel-

All the judges / saviours look forward to the Lord Jesus, the ultimate judge / saviour of Israel. Ibzan, 'the splendid one' of Bethlehem, is a clear example.

Jdg 12:9 He had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He sent his daughters away in marriage, and brought in thirty women for his sons. He judged Israel for seven years-

He clearly wished to spread his influence far and wide. Perhaps "brought in" could imply from other tribes or even nations (AV "from abroad"), both of which were against the Mosaic intentions of keeping the inheritances within the tribes. We note the contrast with Jephthah, who had only one child, presumably because he refused to take other wives and retained his one barren wife as his only wife.

Jdg 12:10 Ibzan died and was buried at Bethlehem-

See on :8; he was a type of Christ. However, the book of Judges rarely mentions Judah, so this may be the Bethlehem in Zebulun (Josh. 19:15), from where the next judge also came (:11).

Jdg 12:11 After him Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel for ten years-

Elon's name means 'grove of oaks', clearly with reference to pagan practices. The fact he is not recorded as having renamed himself could suggest that he remained an idolater, although was used by God to deliver Israel. Being used by God doesn't mean we are therefore faithful to Him and assured of His acceptance.

Jdg 12:12 Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried in Aijalon in the land of Zebulun-

Elon and Aijalon have the same Hebrew consonants, and may be as in LXX the same basic word. Elon was a clan of Zebulun (Gen. 46:14; Num. 26:26), so this may refer to a man from that clan. The lack of a personal name would therefore indicate he was as it were an anonymous person used by God to deliver His people at a certain time.

Jdg 12:13 After him Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel-

"Abdon" means server, and "Hillel" means praise, usually of Yahweh. Although the Yahweh Name is absent from his name, we assume that he was a servant of Yahweh (s.w. Jud. 10:16). And yet as noted on :15, his personal commitment to Yahweh failed to ensure that the whole people were His servants.

Jdg 12:14 He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy donkey colts, and he judged Israel for eight years-

The very large numbers of children by several of the judges suggests they were polygamists, and we therefore get the impression of men who were not very spiritual but were used by God to deliver His people. They throw Jephthah into positive contrast, as he had only one child; presumably because he refused to take other wives and retained his one barren wife as his only wife. And he is one of the few judges listed in Heb. 11 as having had true faith. The stress on riding donkey colts may indicate prosperity; but it could equally suggest that they pretended to kingship. Because riding on a donkey's colt was connected with being proclaimed king.

Jdg 12:15 Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites-

The mention of the Amalekites is tacit admission that Abdon did not effect a major, lasting deliverance of Israel from their enemies. Or perhaps, as with Joshua, his victories were not followed up by the people. We see spiritual weakness at every turn in the Judges narrative.

JUDGES CHAPTER 13

Jdg 13:1 The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh and Yahweh delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years-

"The children of Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh" is a refrain which occurs seven times in Judges (Jud. 2:11; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1), recalling how Israel both over history and in the last days were to be punished "seven times" for their sins (Lev. 26:23,24).

Biblical history is unlike any other national history of a people in that it seems to emphasize the spiritual weakness of Israel. The heroes are nearly all flawed- and that, surely, is so as to give us realistic inspiration to rise up to their spirit, knowing how flawed we also are. And yet there's a tendency amongst some of us to idealize these men, in the same way as the Catholic and Orthodox churches portray them as white faced, haloed saints. Judaism has done the same. Despite the evident weaknesses of Samson (and other judges, e.g. Gideon) as revealed in the inspired record, later Jewish commentary sought to idealize them. Take Ecclesiasticus 46:11,12: "The judges too... all men whose hearts were never disloyal, who never turned their backs on the Lord...". Perhaps the psychological basis for this tendency is that we simply don't want to be personally challenged by the fact that heroes of faith were *so* much like us...

We know, or we ought to, how weak our moral judgment is, how prone we are to forget the degree to which God has justified us from our sins. This weakness is seen in the difficulty we have in analyzing the characters we read of in Scripture. For example, from reading the record of Lot in Genesis, it would seem that Lot was a materialistic, weak, faithless man who is shown to be the exact opposite to Abraham, who is held up as the example of real faith. Yet in the New Testament record, Peter points out that Lot was a righteous man. We are therefore left to conclude that the Genesis record is highlighting the weaker aspects of Lot's character, without commenting on the good points. We may have the same sort of surprise when we read in Hebrews 11 that Samson was a man of outstanding faith- yet the record we are reading at the moment in Judges seems framed to paint Samson as a womanizer, a man who lacked self-control and who only came to God in times of dire personal need.

But just imagine if only the negative incidents in our own lives, over a period of 20 (or 40?) years, were recorded. Anyone reading it would conclude that we were a complete hypocrite to claim to have any hope of salvation. In our self-examination, we sometimes see only this negative record; we fail to see that God has justified us, that in His record book, we are ranked among the faithful, as Samson was in Hebrews 11. Any character study of Samson needs to bear this in mind. Samson, over 40 years of service, courted a girl not in the faith and tried to marry her; once went to a prostitute in Gaza; and had an on-and-off relationship with a worthless woman in Sorek for a few months (?). And yet he seems to have lived the rest of his life full of faith and zeal- although I say this not in any way minimizing the mistakes he made. This is hardly evidence that Samson was the renegade sex-maniac that he is sometimes made out to be.

Jud. 17-21 contain various pictures of and insights into the apostacy of the tribe of Dan, providing the backdrop for a character study of Samson. These chapters seem chronologically out of place; they belong before the Samson story- perhaps. Although I have made a case on Jud. 17 that in fact some of the people of Dan from Samson's village home migrated north exactly because he had not delivered them from the Philistines. And the mother of the apostate Micah was likely Delilah, with her 1100 pieces of silver. Jud. 18:30 speaks of Jonathan the grandson of Moses, and 20:28 of Phinehas the grandson of Aaron (cp. Num.

25:11), which would place these events at the beginning of the period of the Judges, once Israel had first settled in the land. Dan's apostasy is suggested by the way in which he is omitted from the tribes of the new Israel in Rev. 7. Zorah, Samson's home town, was originally Judah's inheritance (Josh. 15:33-36), but they spurned it, and passed it to Dan (Josh. 19:41), who also weren't interested; for they migrated to the north and too over the land belonging to the less warlike Sidonians (Jud. 18:2,7-10). Their selfishness is reflected by the way they chide with him: "What is this that you have done *unto us*?" (15:11). "They had become reconciled to the dominion of sin since it did not appear to do much harm. They could still grow their crops etc.". It is even possible that his parents had elements of weakness in them; for his name doesn't include the 'Yah' prefix, and 'Samson' ('splendour of the sun') may be a reference to the nearby town of Beth Shemesh ('house of the sun-god'). It could be argued that because the father was responsible for his son's marriage partner (Jud. 12:9; 14:2; 15:2; Gen. 24:3-9; Neh. 10:30), therefore Samson's father was equally guilty for Samson's 'marriage out'. Many of the commands against intermarriage were directed to parents, commanding them not to give their children in intermarriage. All the Judges were preceded by a period of Israel prostituting themselves to the surrounding nations (Jud. 2:16-19); and this was evidently true of the period in which Samson grew up. From this apostate tribe and background came Samson. The way his own people angrily rebuked him that "Don't you know that the Philistines are lords over us?" (Jud. 15:11) was tacit recognition of the depth of their apostasy. They seemed to have no regret that they were fulfilling the many earlier prophecies that they would be dominated by their enemies if they were disobedient to Yahweh. The fact that Israel were dominated throughout Samson's life by the Philistines is proof enough that they were apostate at this time (Jud. 13:1; cp. Jud. 15:20; 16:31).

Jdg 13:2 There was a man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah, and his wife was barren and childless-

Judges typically gives a cycle of sin, suffering, repentance, prayer to God, judge sent to save, sin, suffering, repentance, prayer to God, judge etc. The case of Samson is different. Israel suffer for their sins but they do not repent nor pray to God, yet Samson is still sent. Likewise, the barren woman stories in the Bible usually have the woman desperately praying for pregnancy, and then getting a Divine intervention through an Angel, with a message about the child's future mission. This pattern is followed here apart from the fact Manoah's wife isn't recorded as praying. But she apparently experiences God's intervention by grace, on His intervention, without her [recorded] prayers. Grace is to be a dominant theme of the Samson story. Throughout the Samson story, there are anomalies, not least that a Nazirite continually broke the conditions of Naziriteship but was still a "Nazirite unto the Lord", in His sight. These are all summed up in the comment that his marriage to the Philistine was "of the Lord". The introduction to Samson's birth mirrors the introduction we have to Abraham. He is mentioned first, by name, and then his wife, with the comment she was barren. We are set up to expect a significant child from this barren woman. And that is typical of God's work with Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, Elisabeth... from the barren is brought forth something meaningful and salvific in God's purpose. And yet what we see in the child born is not at all a spiritual hero, but a very weak and confused man who was used by God. Samson is rather an anticlimax, intentionally so. And yet God still worked out His salvation through him. Manoah is named 15 times, his wife never; she is simply called "the woman", reflecting how she was perceived. As rather a childless nobody. God has a penchant for working through anonymous nobodies. And so the Angel was focused upon her rather than Manoah, even the second time appearing again to her alone, and she is presented as more perceptive than Manoah. It has been observed that "the large number of details about Manoah—he is given location, tribe, name and marital status—contrasts with the anonymity of his wife".

We note too the similarities with the account of the birth of Samuel. 'There was a certain man [Elkanah] of the family of... whose name was... whose wife was barren' (1 Sam. 1:1). Samson is to be a Nazirite to God from birth, and Hannah promised that Samuel was to be given up to Yahweh's service (1 Sam. 1:11-18); indeed it could be argued that Samuel was also a Nazirite. The Qumran text of 1 Sam. 1:13 has Hannah saying that "I will give him as a Nazir for ever" [MT "no razor shall come on his head"]. Both Elkanah and Manoah make offerings to God. Hannah assures Eli that "I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink" (1 Sam. 1:15), just as Manoah's wife is commanded not to [the phrase "wine nor strong drink" recurs], and just as the Nazirite was not to. We also note the repetition of phrase "If it had pleased God to kill us..." (by Manoah's wife, Jud. 13:23) and then in 1 Sam 2:25, talking of Eli's sins, who were slain "for it pleased God to kill them". The records are so similar that we wonder if what Samson failed to achieve, despite the potential given him, God set up Samuel to achieve. Although if Samuel were a Nazirite, he was defiled by touching a dead body (when he slew Agag, 1 Sam. 15:33). The parallels could mean that Samuel was intended to do the work Samson didn't. God raised up deliverance from another place, as Mordecai reasoned to Esther. And in seeking to understand our own lives and ministries, there must always be the consideration that perhaps we were raised up to do what others failed to do, perhaps even in previous generations. On Jud. 14:19 I note the parallels between Samson and Saul, and also David. God seems to work similarly today. One man [Samson] is raised up for a task, he fails or only partially does it; another [Samuel] is raised up and likewise doesn't complete it; and another likewise [Saul]. And then another [David] is raised up who does do it.

Samson lived at a time when Israel were hopelessly weak. His great desire was to do the work of the promised seed, who would save Israel from their enemies. He resented the Philistine domination and sought, single-handed, to overcome it in faith, not only for himself, but for his weaker brethren. As predestiny would have it, in recognition of his zeal for these things, he came from Zorah, 'the hornet'- a symbol of the Divine power that would drive the foreign tribes out of the land, as Samson dedicated himself to do (Dt. 7:20). And his father's name, Manoah, meant "rest", or inheritance (cp. Josh. 1:13,15). Samson-ben-Manoah was therefore Samson, the son of the promised inheritance.

Jdg 13:3 The angel of Yahweh appeared to the woman and said to her, Look now, you are barren and childless but you will conceive and bear a son-

"You are barren... but you will conceive" is typical of how God seeks to bring us to real acceptance of how we are, before offering deliverance. We think of the Lord asking the blind man what he wanted the Lord to do for Him. It was in one sense obvious, but the Lord wanted to convict him of what he really wanted. We too pass through that process of conviction before God delivers.

God's Angelic appearance to barren or childless women and promising them a very significant child is quite a theme. We think of Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 17:19; 18:10,14), Hannah (1 Sam. 1:17), Elizabeth (Lk. 1:13) and Mary (Lk. 1:31). These women were intended to have reflected upon the experience of those previous women, and to have taken strength and guidance from their response. This is the advantage of daily Bible reading and familiarity with the text and historical narrative of the scriptures. Even if we 'don't get anything out of it' at the point of reading, when events occur in our lives, we are able to see them in the context of Biblical history, and are comforted that we are not alone. Our experiences are not so totally unique. And it is the sense of walking alone in uncharted, unexperienced territory which is where much of our fear comes from. And yet because the hand of God works according to a historical pattern, we need not feel so alone; through

patience and comfort of the scriptures we have hope (Rom. 15:4), as if these historical records speak to us in a personified form and comfort us. See on :3,24.

"You will conceive" can be understood as 'You have conceived'. If so, we note how the Angel pointed out the obvious [that she was barren / infertile] and juxtaposed it with God's action: "You are pregnant". But the future tense would suggest that Manoah still had to do his part by sleeping with his wife.

Jdg 13:4 Now therefore you must be careful and drink no wine nor strong drink, and don't eat any unclean thing-

As discussed on :4, Manoah's wife was here promised that her son would be a Nazirite from birth; and she was to become the pattern for later women who were told likewise (1 Sam. 1:11; Lk. 1:15). It could be argued that she is being told that she too must be a Nazirite. At least until Samson is born. Menstruation meant touching the unclean (Lev. 15:19); so female vows of Naziriteship could not have been for longer than a month for pre menopausal women. But she would not have been menstruating whilst pregnant. If she was not asked to be a Nazirite, we would have an example of fences being placed around the law- Samson was to be a Nazirite, so his mother was not to drink wine whilst he was in her womb. The command to not eat anything unclean suggests she was likely or accustomed to eating unclean food.

Jdg 13:5 You shall conceive and bear a son, and no razor must come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he will begin to save Israel out of the hand of the Philistines-

It would be simplistic for a character study of Samson to see Samson as some kind of sex maniac or a believer. He was a man of faith who, amidst a weak and indifferent brotherhood, tried to rise up to the spirit of Messiah in delivering Israel from their spiritual enemies. In order to devote himself to this, it seems that he chose the single life. In common with others who trod that path of zeal (e.g. Timothy and possibly Hezekiah), he couldn't maintain it all the time. He stumbled, and his stumbling in this area resulted in him reasoning that the end (i.e. the work he was doing) justified the means, and that therefore he could do God's work in a way which in fact gratified his own flesh. He had to learn the spirit of the cross-carrying Christ; the lesson of the whole burnt offering: that the *whole* of a man's life must be affected by the cross- not just those parts which we are willing to surrender. We can't mix the service of God with the service of self. There is no third road. Because Samson failed to realize this (until the end), he was a man who in many ways never quite made it; he never quite lived up to the spiritual potential which he had.

Although he was to be the beginning of serious deliverance of Israel from the Philistines, the whole story of Samson is prefaced by the fact that during the 40 years of Samson's ministry (15:20 + 16:31), "the Lord delivered (Israel) into the hand of the Philistines" (13:1). It is emphasized in Jud. 14:4 that "at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel" ; and the men of Judah chode with him: "Don't you know that the Philistines are rulers over us?" (Jud. 15:11). The point is hammered home in Jud. 15:20: "He judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years". God's intention was that Samson was to deliver Israel from the Philistines; but somehow he never rose up to it, and only 'began' to do it (Jud. 13:5). They remained under the Philistines, even during his ministry. He made a few sporadic attempts in red hot personal zeal, confirmed by God, to deliver Israel. But he never rose up to the potential level that God had prepared for him in prospect. And yet for all this, he was accepted in the final analysis as a man of faith. It may be possible to understand that the breaking of his Naziriteship was yet another way in which he never lived up to his God-given potential. He was "a Nazirite unto God from the womb to the day of his death" (13:7). Yet he

broke the Nazirite vow by touching dead bodies and having his hair shaven (Num. 6:6); and probably drinking alcohol at the wedding feast and every time when Delilah betrayed him. This may mean that he chose to break God's ideal intention for him, to take a lower and lower level of service to God until actually he had slipped away altogether. However, it may be that God counted *his desire* for the high standard of Nazariteship to him. He saw him as if this never happened, in the same way as He saw Abraham as if he had offered up Isaac, even though ultimately he didn't (Heb. 11:17; James 2:21). Intention, not the human strength of will to do the act, seems to be what God earnestly looks for.

"A nazirite to God" could mean that this is how God would see him. Just as we are *unto God* the righteousness of the Lord Jesus. His view of us is all important. Bible readers are being set up for the NT concept of imputed righteousness. Because it could be argued that Samson broke every condition of the Nazirite vow. He drunk alcohol (Jud. 14:5, 10 cp. Num. 6:3, and surely he was drunk when tied up and then shaved when living with Delilah); touched the carcass of a dead animal (Jud. 14:8 and also the jawbone of the ass cp. Num. 6:6-8); and had his hair shaved (Jud. 16:15-22). But God saw him as a Nazirite. Although when his hair was shaved, it's as if God said 'enough'. Samson could not keep on his reductionism of God's principles, assuming all would be as before. Samson is purposefully enigmatic, and every man and his dog has a different interpretation of him- from "heroic fool, foolish hero, trickster, tragic wild man, comic bandit, tragicomic-trickster-terrorist, foolish-freedom-fighter-type-of-Israel, fool-for-love-Nazirite-judge, negative example and hero of the faith". And that, I would argue, is intentional. We don't know what to make of him. But God does, and Heb. 11 tells us that somewhere, somehow, he had faith, and will be saved eternally. Despite all those possible interpretations of Samson, I have to say that he strikes me as a narcissist who wasted his potentials, and all he ever does is more for himself than for God. And yet through all that... he will be saved by grace. Possibly in no other OT character do we see saving grace more clearly operative.

"He will begin to save..." could mean that he would begin the salvation- and David would finish it. But that would imply there had been no Divine attempt to save Israel from the Philistines before Samson. But Shamgar had already fought the Philistines in Jud. 3:31. Rather I suggest this is simply an overall statement of Samson's achievement. He would begin the deliverance from the Philistines... although potentially he could have delivered Israel completely. Or at least, his own tribe of Dan. See on :25. Samson potentially could have freed Israel from the Philistines. Instead we read of him doing a few heroic massacres clearly motivated by personal anger and revenge.

Jdg 13:6 Then the woman went and told her husband, A man of God came to me, and his face was like the face of the angel of God, very awesome. I didn't ask him where he was from, neither did he tell me his name-

LXX "I asked him whence he was, and his name, but he did not tell me". "I did not ask him His Name". Therefore the husband did ask His Name when He appeared again. She assumed this was a prophet, a "man of God", but she had the suspicion that it was in fact an Angel.

Jdg 13:7 but he said to me 'You will conceive and bear a son; drink no wine or strong drink, and eat no unclean thing, for the child shall be a Nazirite unto God from the womb to the day of his death'-

He was a Nazirite to God (i.e. in God's eyes?) all his life- although he broke his Nazariteship by contact with dead bodies (Jud. 14:19; 15:15 cp. Num. 6:6) and probably by drinking wine at his wedding (Jud. 14:10 "feast" = 'drinking', Heb.). This was not only imputed

righteousness, but God counting the essential intentions of a weak willed man to him as if he had actually achieved what he fain would do.

Or it could be that we are to read this as meaning that it was God's intention that Samson should be a Nazirite to the day of his death- but he failed to live up to that Divine intention and potential. Which is a sad theme of the Judges record. Jud. 13:7 cp. Jud. 16:17 implies that Samson himself felt he had broken his Naziriteship. Likewise Zacharias was "blameless" in God's sight, even though in this very period of his life he was in some ways lacking faith that his prayers would be answered (Lk. 1:6). It is our holding fast that is our acceptable service (Heb. 12:28 mg.); not the occasional heroics of outstanding acts of obedience.

We know that we sadly oscillate between the flesh and the spirit. And yet Scripture abounds with examples of where God sees us as in a permanent state of either sin or righteousness. We are fountains that bring forth good water, and therefore by that very definition cannot occasionally bring forth bitter water; we are good fruit trees or bad ones. We aren't a little of both, in God's sight. This is surely because He sees us on the basis of the fact that we are in Christ, clothed with His righteousness, rather than as individuals who sometimes act righteously and sometimes not during the course of a day. Thus God saw Samson as a lifelong Nazirite, although we know there were times when he broke the Nazirite vow by, e.g., touching dead bodies and having his hair cut. The challenging thing is to behold our brethren as having the "in Christ" status (for we can't impute anything else to them, lest we condemn them), and not to see them from the point of view of people who sometimes act righteously and sometimes don't.

Likewise the Angel declared that he would "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (Jud. 13:5). Yet he died with the Philistines firmly in control over himself and Israel. This was potentially possible in the Angelic plan; but he didn't live up to what had been made possible in prospect. Significantly, Samson's mother omitted to repeat this part of the Angel's conversation when she relayed the incident to her husband (Jud. 13:7)- perhaps because she didn't believe that her child would be capable of this. And perhaps this was a factor in his failure to achieve what God had intended for him.

The woman fails to repeat what was most important in the Divine plan- that "he will begin to save Israel out of the hand of the Philistines". And she doesn't repeat the requirement about not cutting his hair. Possibly we have here the theme that will be repeated in the Samson story- of partial spirituality. She is thrilled that she will have a child. But she doesn't see much further than that. And her lack of focus upon the hair issue may have come to full term when Samson effectively allows his hair to be cut.

She adds the detail "to the day of his death". The Angel didn't say that. And we are left to ponder the intentional ambiguity. Was this prophetic, that he would be seen by God as a Nazirite "to the day of his death"? Or is this the mother assuming he would not break his Naziriteship all his life? In which case her hopes for her son were to be majorly disappointed. Naziriteship was a voluntary vow, but here we see the higher hand of God, making Samson a lifelong Nazirite on the Divine initiative; and likewise making Manoah's wife a Nazirite at least until she gave birth to Samson. It's like his marriage being "of the Lord" (Jud. 14:5). That higher hand of God's working over against our freewill is the Old Testament version of the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

Jdg 13:8 Then Manoah entreated Yahweh and said, Oh Lord, please let the man of God whom you sent come again to us and teach us what we should do to the child who will be born-

The Angel had explained already; they were to raise him as a Nazirite. But as with Gideon, Manoah had a weak faith and wanted continual confirmation. And there was also the fact that he may well have doubted how a woman could speak to him God's words. He wanted to hear

them for himself. And God made a concession to that weakness, as He does to many cultural mores which are a denial of deeper spiritual principle.

Manoah's prayer was answered in that the Angel did come again- to his wife. He obviously wanted personal reassurance that his wife's pregnancy was from him, and that indeed she was telling the truth. The essence of the prayer was answered- the Angel came to his wife. And stayed long enough for her to dash to Manoah and get him to come and meet the Angel. We likewise often receive answers to prayer that are not to the letter of what we asked, but fulfil the spirit of it. But it is surely significant that the Angel appeared to his wife whilst she was alone. Clearly God was focused upon her as His channel, although she remains nameless as "the woman", and Manoah is mentioned by name 15 times. We note that in :11 Manoah refers to his wife as "the woman" rather than 'my wife'.

Jdg 13:9 God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman as she sat in the field, but Manoah her husband, wasn't with her-

I suggested on :8 that he may well have doubted how a woman could speak to him God's words. He wanted to hear them for himself. And God made a concession to that weakness. But He does so by all the same first appearing to the woman alone, and not directly to Manoah in the first instance.

Jdg 13:10 The woman quickly ran and told her husband, and said to him, The man has appeared to me, who came to me that day-

We note that the woman ran quickly, whereas Manoah arose and walked behind his wife (:11 Heb.). She consistently is presented as the more responsive and dynamic. Even though she is left anonymous. We note too that the Angel refuses Manoah's offer of hospitality and declines to give Manoah his name- actions which would have been seen as a slight to the hospitality culture. The focus is repeatedly upon the anonymous woman rather than Manoah. The record of Samson's birth frequently uses the phrases "the man" and "the woman" (:10,11), as if to send the mind back to Eden- with the implication that Samson was the seed of the woman, in type of Christ. "The woman" is a phrase nearly always associated in Scripture with the birth of someone who was to be a seed of the woman. "Of all that I said unto the woman, let her beware", coming from the mouth of an Angel (:13), surely confirms the Eden allusions.

Jdg 13:11 Manoah arose and went after his wife and came to the man and said to him, Are you the man who spoke to the woman? He said, I am-

To hear the words of God directly, Manoah has to follow after his wife. I suggested on :8,9 that he may well have doubted how a woman could speak to him God's words. He wanted to hear them for himself. And God made a concession to that weakness. But He does so in such a way that still requires him to follow behind his more spiritual wife (see on :23), in order to hear those words.

Jdg 13:12 Manoah said, Now may your words come true. What should the child's way of life and mission be?-

There may be here the slight hint that he did not have total faith in the words of promise. For we could understand him as meaning 'Well I hope what you say is true. Should it be true, then how should we, in that case, raise the child; what is his mission going to be, so that we might raise him towards it?'. I note on :23 that his wife has more faith and perception than he does. And it is highly significant that the description of the "mission", to deliver Israel from the Philistines, is told only to the woman and not to Manoah.

Jdg 13:13 The angel of Yahweh said to Manoah, All that I said to the woman she must do-
Although God is making a concession to Manoah's weakness in appearing to him, He emphasizes that His primary word had been to the woman, not to Manoah. The concession to his chauvinistic weakness was therefore not total, but done in such a way that he was reminded that God had chosen his wife before him in revealing His word. See on :14.

Jdg 13:14 She may not eat anything that comes from the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing; all that I commanded her let her observe-
"Let her observe" may have been the command to Manoah, to not stand in the way of her obeying the call to also be a Nazirite. See on :13.

Jdg 13:15 Manoah said to the angel of Yahweh, Please, let us detain you so that we may make a young goat ready for you-
The record of Samson has a large number of examples of the repetitions in Biblical narrative. They are situations where he was connected into the experience of those who had gone before- e.g. Manoah's desire to detain the Angel recalls Jud. 6:18; Gen. 18:5. His desire to detain the Angel and offer sacrifice was exactly that of Gideon (6:18). His belief after he had seen the Angel ascend (Jud. 13:20 = Jud. 6:21), and his subsequent fear, were again expressed in the words of Gideon (Jud. 13:21,22 cp. Jud. 6:22). As Gideon was, perhaps subconsciously, the hero of Manoah, so Samson followed his father's spirituality in this, wanting likewise to copy Gideon. It seems he lived out parental expectation, and imbibed the spirituality of his father without making it his own. Born and raised believers, beware.

The whole scene is very similar to that of Gen. 18:7,8. Manoah responded as Abraham did, and later he would have perceived the similarities, and therefore grasped that this "man" was indeed an Angel.

Jdg 13:16 The angel of Yahweh said to Manoah, Though you detain me, I won't eat your food, and if you prepare a burnt offering, you must offer it to Yahweh. Manoah didn't know that he was the angel of Yahweh-

And yet as noted on :15, the whole scene was so very similar to that of Gen. 18:7,8 that we conclude that Manoah ought to have perceived ["know"] that this was an Angel. The fact he didn't is therefore an indication of lack of spiritual perception on his part. See on :23. The fact the Angel didn't eat of his food and meat, whereas the Angels who visited Abraham did so, could be read as a possible rebuke of Manoah for not perceiving this was an Angel. It could also be argued that in a similar scene, the visiting Angel accepted Gideon's food (Jud. 6:18). See on :17.

"Detain" is the word used for the Angelic restraining of the womb from bearing children (Gen. 20:18), and had been used specifically about Sarah (Gen. 16:2). And this whole incident was intended to help them see the similarities with Abraham and Sarah's Angelic visitation. The Angel may intend them to grasp the point- that they thought they were detaining / restraining Him, when He had been restraining them from having children until this point. Perhaps only later did they perceive this, if at all. There are many such Biblical allusions built in by God to our life experiences; and we may or may not ever perceive them in the course of our lives. Self examination of the path and details of our lives is clearly intended by God.

Jdg 13:17 Manoah said to the angel of Yahweh, What is your name, that when your words come true, we may honour you?-

The record says that Manoah said this "to the Angel", whilst clearly thinking this was a mere

man. He acts and reasons as if this is a man, and he needs to know his name so that he can give him honour. When surely his mind should have been upon honouring God. "When" may also bear the implication of "if", as if he still didn't completely believe these words (see on :12). As noted on :16, his lack of perception that this was an Angel is criticized implicitly.

Jdg 13:18 The angel of Yahweh said to him, Why do you ask about my name, since it is beyond understanding-

Or, "wonderful", implying 'miraculous'. This again was urging Manoah to understand that this was not a human prophet, but an Angel with the power to do miracles. I have noted on :16,17 that Manoah is being implicitly criticized for not perceiving this was an Angel. And so the Angel replies with exactly the Angelic words to Jacob (Gen. 32:29). Their subsequent fear (Jud. 13:22) is that of Gen. 32:20. See on Jud. 14:12. Yet despite this, Manoah fails to make the connection, for only at the point :21 does he realize this was an Angel. The Angel's name was "wonderful" [NEV "beyond understanding"]. The Angel doesn't give any one word answer, but instead "*did* a wonderful thing" (:19). For all time we see that the Name of God is not a lexical item, but rather manifest in what He *does*.

Jdg 13:19 So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering and offered it on the rock to Yahweh. Then the angel did a wonderful thing as Manoah and his wife looked on-
Manoah had initially wanted to prepare food for the visitor, but He had declined it, and told him instead to offer it to Yahweh. And Manoah does so.

Jdg 13:20 When the flame went up toward the sky from the altar, the angel of Yahweh ascended in the flame of the altar, and Manoah and his wife looked on-

The fact they had an altar on their property indicates that they did serve Yahweh, although not in the ideal sense of offering at His sanctuary. But still God worked through that. "Ascended" is the word usually translated "offering". The idea is that the Angel was identified with the sacrifice, meaning that it had been accepted. Despite all Manoah's lack of spiritual perception throughout the encounter, as lamented on :16-18.

And they fell on their faces to the ground-

The phrase used of men doing this with a sense of unworthiness and conviction of sin (Gen. 44:14; Josh. 7:6; Ruth 2:10). Now that they had been humbled, God could work further with them. And that is an abiding principle.

Jdg 13:21 But the angel of Yahweh didn't appear to Manoah or to his wife any more. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of Yahweh-

See on :16,17,18. It was the very absence of God's direct appearance in his life that in the end persuaded Manoah that truly, he did have a fully valid relationship with Him. And the apparent silence of God is intended to teach us likewise.

Jdg 13:22 Manoah said to his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God-

He failed to learn the lesson from Gideon, who had likewise wrongly panicked (Jud. 6:22,28); and likewise of Jacob and others who saw the face of an Angel and lived (Gen. 16:14; 32:30). Isaiah too failed to learn this lesson from history (Is. 6:5). This is typical of man's tendency to think that God is "a hard man", indifferent to us as persons, distant, judgmental. Again Manoah is presented as far less spiritually perceptive than his anonymous nobody of a wife, who [as many such are today] was far more perceptive in spiritual things.

Jdg 13:23 But his wife said to him, If Yahweh wanted to kill us He wouldn't have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from us, neither would He have shown us all these things,

nor would He have told us such things as these-

She reasoned that if God had accepted the sacrifice, and told them they would have a child, they would therefore not be slain at least before she gave birth. She presents as far more perceptive than Manoah, even though she remains unnamed. Here we have a repeat of the essence of the situation between Deborah and Barak, where again a woman's faith was greater than a man's fear; see on :12. Such interconnections within the Biblical record reveal an overall Divine mind behind the entire volume. And we see too how Biblical history is intended to serve as a precedent for us, teaching us that we are not alone, not on unmapped territory never passed before. But all is working out as God has worked previously.

Jdg 13:24 The woman bore a son, and named him Samson, and the child grew and Yahweh blessed him-

"The child grew, and Yahweh blessed him" is the language used of Samuel, John and the Lord Jesus- all likewise chosen from the womb, with births announced by Angels to childless women. See on :2,3. It is possible that his parents still had elements of weakness in them; for his name doesn't include the 'Yah' prefix, and 'Samson' ('splendour of the sun') may be a reference to the nearby town of Beth Shemesh ('house of the sun-god'). We note that it was the wife who named him Samson, and it was unusual for a woman to name the child. Zorah was only 3 km. from Beth Shemesh. Long hair was associated with the sun gods- the long hairs representing the rays of the sun. The sun gods are depicted as having long hair- Ra-Horakhtz, Attis, Surya and Lugh. Samson chose to wear his long hair as seven locks (Jud. 16:13), and this is exactly the kind of radiant crown seen on the sun gods. The crown of the Greek sun-god Helios was often depicted with seven spikes. This continues the theme- that Samson mixed Yahweh worship with paganism; and his hatred of the Philistines was not therefore purely a result of his love for Yahweh. He died with the request "that I may avenge myself the revenge of one of my two eyes" (Jud. 16:28). The sun was thought to be the 'eye' of Heaven. Samson's dying request that he be avenged for the loss of his eyes suggests he died still with a strong sense of association with the sun god.

It could be argued that because the father was responsible for his son's marriage partner (Jud. 12:9; 14:2; 15:2; Gen. 24:3-9; Neh. 10:30), therefore Samson's father was equally guilty for Samson's 'marriage out of the faith'. Many of the commands against intermarriage were directed to parents, commanding them not to give their children in intermarriage.

Jdg 13:25 The Spirit of Yahweh began to trouble him in the camp of Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol-

Samson was intended to "begin" delivering Israel from the Philistines (Jud. 13:5), and so the Spirit of God "Began" [s.w.] to move him to do so (Jud. 13:25). But he didn't let that process progress as intended, becoming caught up on anger and sexual lust issues. We have the sense that God began a work in and through Samson that wasn't completed as potentially possible- perhaps with the implication, that it should have been but wasn't. Not until David's time would Israel be free from the Philistines (2 Sam. 8:1). Yet despite only partially fulfilling his potential, Samson did make a beginning. And he will be saved, despite all that was unfinished and all the unrealized potential. On one hand, the fool begins and doesn't finish (Lk. 14:30 "This man began to build, and was not able to finish"). On the other hand, we are saved by grace even when we don't finish. Likewise the Lord has "begun a good work in us" and will complete it- if we let Him, for He will keep on trying to finish it ("Being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will keep working at perfecting it, until the day of Jesus Christ" Phil. 1:6). The Galatians 'began in the Spirit' but left that path and tried to complete the work without the Spirit, "by the flesh", and failed (Gal. 3:3). The Lord 'began' doing and teaching in His ministry (Acts 1:1; 10:37 "that word began

from Galilee") and continues. So many times the Lord's words are prefaced with the statement that He "began to say..." (Mt. 4:17; 11:7,20; Mk. 4:1; 6:2,34; 8:31; 10:32; 12:1; 13:5; Lk. 4:21; 7:24; 11:29; 12:1; 20:9; 24:27). This is all quite some theme. His words were intended to commence something in the hearers, although usually that intended process wasn't and isn't allowed to go forward to its intended end. When a man today hears the Lord's words, that process likewise begins; but men truncate it.

I suggested on Jud. 17:1 that the story line continues directly from the death of Samson to Delilah and her son making an idol. We note that the camp of Dan, Zorah and Eshtaol are mentioned in Jud. 18:2,8,11,12, just as they are in Jud. 13. The Spirit of God had moved Samson to deliver his tribe Dan from the Philistines in that very area (Jud. 13:25 and see on Jud. 14:19), but he hadn't lived up to that potential. In Samson's time, the tribe of Dan had not possessed the land given to them (Josh. 19:47,48). In Jud. 18 we read of how they gave up, and went up north to drive the people of Laish out of their territory, rather than dealing with the Philistines and having their intended tribal allotment. Samson was their potential means for inheriting the land they were supposed to. The Spirit moved him to be sensitive to this. Yet as we see in Jud. 15, they were prepared to live with the Philistines reigning over them. Samson perceived the potential and wanted to realize it; but his people didn't. And he himself failed to realize his own personal potential. Had he liberated Dan from the Philistines as God potentially enabled, the whole miserable story of Jud. 17-21 need never have happened. But instead Samson was caught up with personal skirmishes arising from his own anger issues and refusal to get over the anger and sense of revenge arising from his failed marriage. Yet he still will be saved, according to Hebrews 11.

Zorah was where Samson was born and he was buried in just the same location between Zorah and Eshtaol (Jud. 16:31). In his youth, the Spirit moved him in between those places, setting him up for his life's work, or at least for the potential of it. The implication of being buried in the exact same place may mean that he didn't actually progress very far, in fact nowhere. Yet still he will be saved. The presence of the Philistines there, and perhaps their abuse of the Danites, provoked his spirit... and the Holy Spirit confirmed him in that. We know from his walk alone in the vineyards in Jud. 14 that Samson was not unknown to go walking alone. And so the LXX here in Jud. 13:25 is significant: "The Spirit of the Lord began to go out / walk with him". As he walked around the local area alone, angry at the evidence of Philistine domination, the Spirit went with him and confirmed him in his desire to break the bondage. Or we can interpret "the camp of Dan" as a military term for the soldiers of Dan in Zorah-Eshtaol, of whom there were 600 at the time of Jud. 18 in just that place; and he was one of them. The difference was that God's Spirit began to impel him personally. We see how the movement of the Spirit is partly a result of Divine sovereign choice, similar to making a man a Nazirite when Nazirite vows were to be taken as freewill decisions. Am. 2:11 speaks of God raising up Nazirites. On the other hand, God's Spirit confirms the human spirit. And yet the various translations all give the range of God's initiative with Samson here: "to stir" (NIV, NRSV), "to move [him] at times" (KJV), "to drive [him] hard", "to arouse", "to direct". Only LXX gives "to accompany / walk with". These translations all help us see how the Spirit works internally on a man's heart, and with us too today.

As we will note elsewhere, he failed to realize the potential- of giving his tribe Dan their inheritance free from the Philistines. He got caught up in anger issues over the failure of his first marriage. He turned to prostitutes, and was endlessly set on revenge for it. So that what he achieved was minimal compared to the potential enabled by the Spirit. Yet still he will be finally saved.

Samson was possessed of a finely tuned conscience. The first instance of this is when we read how the Spirit of Yahweh troubled him (Heb.) from time to time in the camp of Dan, in

the very places where his people had earlier failed to follow up the victories of Joshua-Jesus by their spiritual laziness. He was troubled, deeply, by the Philistine dominance and Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh (s.w. Gen. 41:8). God works directly on the human spirit by His Spirit. And so He provoked Samson to have these concerns in his spirit, and God's Spirit confirmed Samson's positive response to these proddings, which were initially of God's working directly on his heart. This is how the Holy Spirit likewise works today.

The context of Samson's marriage does seem to suggest that Samson himself sought occasion against the Philistines; for the Spirit of the Lord had been troubling his conscience as to why the people of Dan had not followed up Joshua's victories, and had allowed themselves to be overrun by the uncircumcised (13:25 Heb.). The only other references to "troubled" are in Gen. 41:8; Ps. 77:4; Dan. 2:1,3. The Spirit of God worked with Samson's spirit, so that it was troubled as he went for his solitary walks of meditation. It was no accident that he was buried in the very place where his conscience was first awakened (Jud. 16:31); he maybe asked for this burial place, to show he had at last returned to his innocent spiritual beginnings.

JUDGES CHAPTER 14

Jdg 14:1 Samson went down to Timnah and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines-

"Went down" reflects his spiritual fall; the theme is stressed in :1,5,7,10. This is a great anticlimax to all we have been set up to expect and hope for in Samson from the previous chapter. Born by Divine intervention, a Nazirite who has been Divinely stirred and set up to deliver Israel from the Philistines. And he now goes down and falls in love with one of their women, and intends to break the covenant by marrying her. And his weak father reluctantly goes along with it. It's all an intentional anticlimax to what we were set up to hope for. It reflects how God must so often feel- that potentials are wasted or at best only lived up to in a very partial way. Like Samson, God's potential heroes get caught up on their anger issues, personal revenge, sex and other dramas.

Samson's 'seeing' was wrong. The Hebrew is literally 'A woman he saw', and his first words are 'A woman I saw... get her for me'. This introduces us to his narcissism. He saw this woman, and then dismisses his father's objection that the woman is a Philistine by saying that she is 'right in his eyes', in his sight. His loss of eyes at the end is obviously an appropriate judgment upon a man who sinned with his eyes. But Samson is all Israel; for at this time, when there was no king, Israel like Samson did what was 'right in their eyes' (Jud. 21:25).

"Timnah" means 'a portion assigned', alluding to how this small area had been assigned to God's people- not the Philistines. Samson's potential mission was to dispossess the Philistines from there, and the entire small region between Zorah and Eshtaol. He failed in this, although he will be saved finally, according to Hebrews 11.

Judah also did wrong in Timnath with a woman, and was deceived and shamed by her (Jud. 15:1 = Gen. 38:17). Earlier Scripture, which it seems Samson well knew and appreciated, was crying out to Samson to take heed. But he was blind to the real import of it all. It is emphasized that Samson "went *down*" to her (Jud. 14:1,5,7,10), as if his literal descent to her in the valley was also a retrograde step spiritually. Samson's marriage was wrong. And so it was. And yet his hero Gideon (see on Jud. 13:15) had likewise 'gone down', the record emphasizes, to liberate Israel from their enemies (Jud. 7:9,10,11,24). In view of the other examples of Samson consciously imitating Gideon, it is likely that he was seeking an opportunity to deliver Israel from the Philistines. And yet he mixed his motivations. He loved the girl, he wanted to gratify his flesh with the forbidden fruit. He loved the world, and

thereby became in some sense an enemy of God (James 4:4). But then he loved Gideon, he loved the holiness of Yahweh, he hated the world and the Philistines, he loved Israel, weak as they were, and wanted to deliver them from their spiritual bondage. And instead of casting him off as a man of such divided heart that he was not worthy of God's covenant love, God worked with him. And by using a purposeful ambiguity, He has recorded this for us in such a way as unites God's desire for Israel's deliverance with that of Samson.

It may be that as Gideon "went down" to destroy God's enemies (Jud. 7:9), so Samson justified his 'going down' to the Philistines to take their women, as well as to destroy their warriors (Jud. 14:1,5,7,10). As Gideon was somehow 'separate from his brethren' in his zeal, so was Samson. And yet Samson seems to have copied just the externalities of Gideon; not the real spirit. And therefore as Gideon foolishly multiplied women to himself in the spiritual weakness of his middle age, so perhaps Samson saw justification for his attitude. 'If heroic Gideon could indulge the flesh in this area, I surely can'. He fell into our common trap: to compare ourselves amongst ourselves, to measure ourselves against human standards as we find them among the contemporary brotherhood (2 Cor. 10:12). Saul should have realized that Samson, like him, idolized Gideon, but only on a surface level- and should have taken the lesson. But he didn't see the points we've made in this paragraph. He could have done, but he didn't bother. And so with us. The word supplies us the potential power to overcome. It can often happen that the daily readings are almost purpose-designed for our present situation. Yet if we neglect to read them- that help lies untapped.

Samson fell for the 'little of both' syndrome, justifying it under the guise of Scriptural examples. He had done this in his youth; he "went *down*" to take a Philistine girl for wife (Jud. 14:1,5,7,10); and yet by doing so he was seeking an opportunity to slay Philistines. He may well have had in mind the sustained emphasis on the fact that Gideon went *down* to destroy the Midianites (Jud. 7:9,10,11,24). He went down morally and physically, and yet he justified this by thinking that as Gideon went down physically, so would he. Such is the complexity of the process of temptation. And all this is written for our learning. Significantly, the major temptations within the Lord's mind- as far as we can tell from the record of the wilderness temptations- was to misinterpret Scripture to His own ends; to soften the cross.

Jdg 14:2 He came up and told his father and mother, I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore get her for me as my wife-

This marriage with an unbeliever was clearly wrong. It could be argued that because the father was responsible for his son's marriage partner (Jud. 12:9; 14:2; 15:2; Gen. 24:3-9; Neh. 10:30), therefore Samson's father was equally guilty for Samson's 'marriage out of the faith'. Many of the commands against intermarriage were directed to parents, commanding them not to give their children in intermarriage. And Manoah is presented in Jud. 13 as consistently lacking in spiritual perception.

Jdg 14:3 Then his father and mother said to him, Is there never a woman among the daughters of your brothers, or among all our people, that you go to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? Samson said to his father, Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes-

The disappointment of Samson's parents is that of Esau's (Gen. 26:35; 27:46; 28:1). For all Manoah's slowness to respond and perceive in Jud. 13, he clearly was amongst the faithful minority. Samson's action was quite contrary to the spirit of the Law: marriage with the local tribes was categorically prohibited (Ex. 34:16; Dt. 7:3,4; 1 Kings 11:2). Joshua's warning that those who married the surrounding tribes would find them "a snare and a trap for you..."

thorns in your eyes" (Josh. 23:12,13 RSV) was fulfilled in Samson being tied up and blinded by Delilah; and yet it also had an element of fulfillment with his wife. The similarity is such as to suggest that Samson's marriage out of the Truth was definitely wrong because it was a fulfillment of the words of Josh. 23. "Is there *never* a woman among the daughters of your brothers... that you go to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?" implies that she wasn't the first one; he had often got involved with Philistine girls down in the valley, despite his conscience for Yahweh troubling him as he walked alone on the heights (Jud. 13:25 Heb.). Samson gave no good answer to his parents: simply "Get her for me; for she is right in my eyes" (14:3, repeated in 14:7 for emphasis- he really did fall for the lust of the eyes). This insistence rather than explanation would suggest a bad conscience in Samson. Likewise the crowd only shouted out the more when asked why and for what crime they wished to crucify Jesus (Mt. 27:23). The Biblical record is consistently psychologically credible, and true to observed human experience in this area. Unlike the contemporary, uninspired histories and legends of the other nations around Israel. See on :10,11.

She was 'right in his eyes' (14:3 AVmg.) not for beauty but in the sense that 'she suits my purpose' (Heb.). The same Hebrew is used not concerning beauty but rather utility in 1 Sam. 18:20; 2 Sam. 17:4; 1 Kings 9:12. The way in which Samson set up the riddle, almost expecting that they might tease it out of him through his wife, the way in which he agreed that if they did this, he would give them the clothes of 30 Philistines... it all suggests that Samson set the whole thing up to seek an opportunity against the Philistines. On the other hand, there seems a connection with how Israel at this time did what was 'right in their own eyes'. Samson becomes representative of them all.

In their culture, it was unheard of for a man to disobey his father when it came to marriage. If the father said no, that was it. Samson presents as domineering and obsessive, possibly autistic. "Get her for me" is literally "This one, get her for me". That one, that Philistine... Manoah presents as weak in going along with his son's wrong request. For the command against intermarriage specifically stated that a man should not give his children in marriage to the surrounding tribes (Dt. 7:3,4). "Get her for me" specifically refers to paying the dowry and gifts to her family members. We perceive here the 'spoilt kid' in Samson, and the weakness of his parents.

Jdg 14:4 But his father and mother didn't know that it was from Yahweh, for He sought an occasion against the Philistines, for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel- The "He" can be read as both God and Samson; they both had the same desire, and God worked with mixed up Samson to this end. LXX "it was of the Lord, that he sought to be revenged on the Philistines". Samson's obsession with revenge was wrong on many counts. For he should never have so loved the Philistine woman that he wanted revenge when the marriage didn't work out. But God worked through that, for He also sought revenge on the Philistines for what they had done to His weak people. But strictly, "from the Philistines", a provocation originating on their side. Again we wonder whether this was God seeking to provoke the Philistines to provoke Samson so that he attacked them; or whether this is Samson consciously working out a way to make the Philistines provoke him so he has an excuse to attack them in a kind of revenge killing that would be more acceptable than an outright attack on them. And the ambiguity as to whether Samson or God are referred to is intentional; because it reflects how God works through human weakness, failure and anger. Working all this out from the evidence presented in the record is hard work. The fact a man does something "of the Lord" doesn't mean that he is guiltless. In the same context of God's deliverance of Israel from the Philistines, men who did things "of the Lord" were punished for what they did (Dt. 2:30; 1 Sam. 2:25; 2 Chron. 22:7; 25:20). But the whole question of Samson's marriage is overshadowed by this fact that "It was of the Lord, that he sought an

occasion against the Philistines". He used this incident to begin to raise up Samson as a Judge of Israel (Jud. 2:16,18; 1 Chron. 17:10). This is surely one of Scripture's purposeful ambiguities, designed to provoke us to meditation: it is unclear whether "he" refers to Samson or Yahweh. There are a number of other passages which mention how "it was of the Lord" that certain attitudes were adopted by men, resulting in the sequence of events which He desired (Dt. 2:39; Josh. 11:20; 1 Sam. 2:25; 1 Kings 12:15; 2 Chron. 10:15; 22:7; 25:20). It is tempting to read Jud. 14:4 in this context, meaning that God somehow made Samson desire that woman in order to bring about His purpose of freeing Israel from Philistine domination. And yet this would require that God almost made Samson have a desire for that woman. For God's Spirit works directly upon the human spirit, and yet confirms our spirit in where we really want to go. This may not be impossible- it may be that Paul's God-given "thorn in the flesh" was a similar forbidden passion. It would be an example of God leading into temptation (Mt. 6:13). However, it is more likely that God worked through Samson's wrong desires, through his human weakness, to bring about God's purpose and glory.

It is often maintained that "judge not" refers to not judging motives. If we are not to judge motives, but we are to 'judge' in some sense, this would mean that we must judge the outward works of men. And yet Biblical and human analysis reveals that outward behaviour is often not a reflection of inner motive (e.g. Samson's marriage). To judge outward behaviour without considering motives is almost pointless. There are countless cases of where the same action may be right or wrong depending on motive. Thus both David and Uzziah acted as the High Priest, but only Uzziah was condemned for it; David refused to choose his punishment as God asked him, preferring to leave it to God, whereas when Ahaz did something similar, he was condemned for it; Rahab's lie is commended as an act of faith, whilst other lies are sins; Samuel and Eli both had the same experience of their children being apostate and them being criticized for it, but only Eli is condemned for this.

God's intention was that Samson was to deliver Israel from the Philistines; but somehow he never rose up to it, and only 'began' to do it (Jud. 13:5). They remained under the Philistines, even during his ministry. He made a few sporadic attempts in red hot personal zeal, confirmed by God, to deliver Israel. But he never rose up to the potential level that God had prepared for him in prospect. And yet for all this, he was accepted in the final analysis as a man of faith.

Jdg 14:5 Then Samson went down with his father and mother, to Timnah and came to the vineyards of Timnah, and suddenly a young lion roared against him-

"Came to..." strictly translates as 'before coming to...'. These vineyards, I suggest, were in the valley of Sorek where Delilah was. For sorek is the Hebrew word translated "vine" in Is. 5:2; Jer. 2:21. Again the idea is that the events in Samson's life were all in a very small area of not many square miles. His mission was to dispossess the Philistines from it; but he failed in that. For the people of that area in Jud. 18 emigrated to the far north of Israel because of the Philistines.

Lions roar when they are hungry, when they go onto the attack or begin to eat their prey (Ps. 104:21; Am. 3:4,8). Samson had provoked the lion by going into the vineyards, and yet the lion provoked Samson to kill it. This is related to how he sought to provoke a provocation "from the Philistines" through his marriage plan. It has also been suggested that "a young lion" would unlikely be alone in a vineyard- unless it were a nomadic lion attempting to claim a territory. This is yet another element of unreality, or anomaly, in the Samson story, reflecting how such things [like his marriage to the Philistine] were "of the Lord". Just as he was a Nazirite but flouted the vow, and as bees nesting in a lion cadaver is unusual, so is a singular young lion going on the attack in a vineyard, apparently separate from the pride of lions. Attempting to claim a territory is another reason why lions roar and tend to be more

aggressive [This matter is firmly established in Brent A. Strawn, "*kepir arayot* in Judges 14:5", *Vetus Testamentum* 59 (2009) pp. 150-158]. In this case, we see the lion representing the Philistines. And again, the issue is related to Samson's call to stop the territorial expansion of the Philistines into his area.

We get the picture of Samson and his parents walking the four miles down into the valley, and Samson goes off for a wander in the vineyards. The vineyard was a symbol of Israel (Ps. 80:15; Is. 1:8; 5:7; 27:2; Jer. 12:10; Mt. 21:41). This may have been already evident to Samson from Gen. 49:11; although most likely the symbol of Israel as God's vineyard was already established by his time. Conscious that Timnath was the 'portion assigned' to Dan and yet they had failed to take it, Samson meditates there in the vineyards, a symbol of Israel, the people who should have been there. Inheriting Philistine vineyards was one of the blessings promised (Dt. 6:11) and initially obtained by Joshua-Jesus (Josh. 24:13). And yet those vineyards were now back in Philistine control. A lion suddenly appeared and roared against him, just as the Philistines later would (Jud. 15:14). The lion was a common symbol of Israel's enemies. The Spirit came upon Samson and he overcame it, in evident symbol to him that he really could deliver Israel from the Philistines. There is every reason to think that Samson appreciated all this symbology.

And yet did Samson ultimately slay the lion of the Philistines and bring the promised blessings of honey to Israel (cp. Ex. 3:8; Dt. 8:8 etc.)? No, not really. He achieved some tokenistic success against their warriors; but Israel remained enslaved (Jud. 15:20). He didn't live up to that potential which God had enabled him to achieve. And yet although it may seem that his life was wasted, in that he didn't really bring much deliverance for anyone- the whole process of it saved him personally. Those whose families and converts have turned away from the Faith will identify with this comfort. But whilst the above case for Samson's spiritual commitment can be made, there is evidence galore that his motives were mixed in this matter of Samson's marriage. Consider: why did he as a Nazirite go for a walk in vineyards, among the forbidden fruit (cp. Christians putting themselves into compromising situations)? This was typical of him: a great zeal and understanding, mixed with a desire to walk as close to the edge as possible, and to ultimately have a little of both. He had a fascination with vineyards, which the record brings out. Like an ex-alcoholic staring at the bottles in the shop 'just out of interest', so Samson fooled about with what was forbidden- just as we all tend to.

Not only do circumstances repeat between the lives of God's children, but also within our lives. We may pass through a very similar experience more than once. The human chances of this ever happening again were remote. But the similarity and repetition may be so that we learn the lesson we failed to learn; or it could even be a punishment for not learning the lessons we should have learned. Again, Samson's life demonstrates this. The lion roared against him as the Philistines did (Jud. 14:5 s.w. Jud. 15:14); and not least in the uncanny similarities between the way his first wife enticed him and wrung his secrets from him, and the way 40 years later another worthless woman did the same to him (Jud. 14:15-17 = Jud. 16:5,15,16). He just didn't see the similarities, or if he did, he didn't learn any lessons. Admittedly, it's far easier for us, presented with the records as they are, spanning 40 years within a few pages. And yet without doubt the lion's attack on Samson was a warning to him- not to sail as close to the edge as he could, wandering in vineyards as a Nazirite.

Jdg 14:6 The Spirit of Yahweh came mightily on him and he tore it as he would have torn a young goat, having nothing in his hand, but he didn't tell his father or his mother what he had done-

It was only after it roared against him that the Spirit came upon him and enabled him to kill

it. He had to take the first nervous steps towards that lion in faith, and then the Spirit came upon him and confirmed his actions. The fact he didn't tell his parents what he had done may not only indicate his humility, but also suggests he was not naturally a strong man. To say he had just killed a lion would seem ridiculous.

The stress is on the way in which the Spirit came upon Samson (Jud. 14:6,19; 15:14), as it did on other judges (Jud. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29). "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit" (Zech. 4:6) may be referring to these incidents; demonstrating that when God's spirit acts on a man, it is not human muscle at all that operates. He is even listed amongst those who out of weakness were made strong (Heb. 11:34). The three references to the Spirit coming upon Samson all use the same Hebrew word; it is usually translated 'to prosper'. And the point is clearly made that Yahweh will not prosper / come mightily upon the wicked, but He will prosper the righteous and obedient. Yahweh prospered Samson despite his disobedience, anger issues and unspirituality. Here we have another Old Testament example of imputed righteousness. Samson broke the Nazirite conditions, but was still counted as a "Nazirite to God", in God's eyes. This isn't the same as God turning a blind eye to His favourites. He counts us as righteous, especially now "in Christ".

Samson killed a lion, escaped fire and killed many Philistines by his faith (Heb. 11:32-34)- so the Spirit tells us. Yet these things were all done by him at times when he had at best a partial faith. He had a worldly Philistine girlfriend, a sure grief of mind to his Godly parents, and on his way to the wedding he met and killed a lion- through faith, Heb. 11 tells us (Jud. 14:1-7). The Philistines threatened to burn him with fire, unless his capricious paramour of a wife extracted from him the meaning of his riddle. He told her, due, it seems, to his hopeless sexual weakness. He then killed 30 Philistines to provide the clothes he owed the Philistines on account of them answering the riddle (Jud. 14:15-19). It is evident that Samson was weak in many ways at this time; the Proverbs make many allusions to him, the strong man ruined by the evil Gentile woman, the one who could take a city but not rule his spirit etc. And yet underneath all these weaknesses, serious as they were, there was a deep faith within Samson which Heb. 11 highlights.

The latter day invader is likened to a beast devouring Israel (Joel 1:6), having the Assyrian invader as its prototype. But the Philistines are here likened to a lion ravaging God's people, the vineyard of God. Thus the period of invasions by Israel's smaller neighbours is a prelude to the final invasion by Assyria/Babylon. These larger powers are also symbolized by the lion (Jer. 50:17).

If the prohibition against Nazirites touching a carcass applied to animals, then this would've ended his Naziriteship. We get the impression God overlooked this. Probably this was why he didn't tell his parents how he got the honey. He scooped the honey with his hands and ate it from his hands, we are told. The same hands had just recently been empowered by the Spirit to slay the lion. His hands were again used to slay the Philistines with a bone, to tie the tails of foxes, to remove the gates of a town and then to push over the pillars of the temple. His unclean hands were still used by God.

We enquire why he didn't tell his parents; nor did he tell them where he got the honey from (:9.16). Likewise he tells his wife that he hadn't told his parents the answer to his riddle. On one level we deduce his loneliness, possibly arising from being an only child. On another, we get the impression that he realized that God was somehow in his life, and he was being called as an individual to deliver Israel from the Philistines. But this strand in his thinking was too heavily involved with his narcissism to be ultimately fruitful. For he failed to deliver his tribe from the Philistines, and his 'ministry' was merely personal skirmishes and vendettas against the Philistines. "She's the right one for me" (Jud. 14:3) can be read as a reflection of his sense that through this woman he could achieve his agenda- of attacking the Philistines.

But the failure of that marriage led him to personal bitterness and anger, rather than perceiving that although life hadn't gone the way he expected it to, God was still in it.

Jdg 14:7 He went down and talked with the woman, and she pleased Samson well-

This again indicates that he didn't simply and totally use her as a tool towards his purpose of killing Philistines. He did really love her, and was wrong in this. But it was extremely unusual for a man to talk with a woman directly. There were usually intermediaries. The idea is that he specifically wanted her and saw the possibilities of using her in his carefully planned plot, to provoke the Philistines to provoke him so he could slay some of them in apparently legitimate revenge. We might note that so far he has only 'seen' her and decided to marry her; only now does he talk with her personally. On one hand, this was just a classic case of lust of the eyes. But it may be she looked somewhat 'loose' and he imagined her being unfaithful during the drinking party, which would then provide the provocation "from the Philistines" (:4) that he was trying to create.

Jdg 14:8 After a while he returned to take her-

Samson is described as wanting to "take" a wife; this Hebrew word is 51 times translated 'take away', 31 times 'fetch'. He evidently didn't intend to live there with her; he wanted her to come and live with him in the Israelite encampment, four miles up in the hills from the valley where she lived. There was usually a significant period, up to a year, between engagement and marriage. Ample time for the bees to make honey in the carcass.

And he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion. In it there was a swarm of bees, in the body of the lion, and honey-

God sent the lion against Samson. He did this in order to go along with Samson's symbolic thoughts, and this may afford some justification for Samson's marriage. He was there, wandering in those vineyards, meditating how they were representative of the blessings which belonged to Israel, and yet they were now in the hands of God's enemies. And then, God furthers the parable: He sends a lion, symbolic of the Philistines, and Samson is given power to overcome him. And further, when Samson returned to the carcass to meditate deeper on 'the fallen one' (14:8 doesn't use the usual word for 'carcass'- s.w. "fall" Prov. 29:16; Ez. 26:15; 27:27; 31:13), "behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcass of the lion" (14:8). The Hebrew for "swarm" is normally used (124 times) about a congregation of people, often God's people Israel. And the Hebrew for 'Bee' is 'Deborah', a celebrated earlier judge. God was surely teaching him that through his victory over the Philistine lion, God's people could be inspired to be faithful, and would therefore be able to enjoy the promised blessing of honey, taken out of the Philistines. Samson saw all this; for he "took" (Heb. is usually used in the sense of 'to take dominion over') the honey, partook himself, and shared it with others. In all this there is a detailed type of the Lord's representative sacrifice on the cross. On the cross, He won the victory over the lion of the devil (1 Pet. 5:8 cp. Heb. 2:14; 1 Jn. 3:8 may allude to Samson's victory). This enabled us to be empowered to partake the Kingdom blessings. As Samson walked away from the carcass some days after killing it (14:8 Heb. "a time" = 'days'- three days?), with the honey in his hands, eating it and offering it to others, so the Lord left the empty tomb. See on :9.

Samson discovered a congregation (Heb. '*edat*') of bees- *deborim* , in Hebrew. The judge Deborah would've been fairly recent history for Samson; she would have been the heroine of anyone like Samson, who also arose to save Israel from their enemies at that time. Surely he was being gently led to reflect that there were a whole congregation of Deborahs ['bees'] around, and he should eat of them. And yet Samson went his loner road, and suffered the

consequences of it- rather like Elijah, who was in denial of the fact there were actually at least another 7000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Or perhaps Samson was simply being asked to execute his deliverance of Israel after the pattern of Deborah, to 'eat' of her, to fellowship her example and spirit. But he chose not to 'get it'; as we so often do in the countless nudges and prods which God gives us in daily life. We note the use of 'edat, meaning "community", rather than the Hebrew 'seres', the common word for "swarm". The idea is that a new, liberated community of people would arise over the dead carcass of the lion, representing the Philistines whom Samson would slay. But this potential never happened. For by the end of Samson's days, the Philistines were still in control of that small Danite community, between Zorah and Eshtaol, whom Samson had been intended to deliver. The presence of the honey in a lion carcass was miraculous, just as Samson's creation of a new community would have been. Some claim that the intense heat would have meant that the body of the lion decomposed dry, but that makes little sense. It has been observed: "The carcass would have to have dehydrated in an inconceivably short time, since bees do not live in such moist places as cadavers undergoing decomposition. Even if wind and heat in a Palestinian summer are judged sufficient to prevent decomposition, it is clear that the story does not represent Samson's discovery as an every-day occurrence".

Jdg 14:9 which he took it into his hands and went on, eating as he went. He came to his father and mother and gave some to them and they ate, but he didn't tell them that he had taken the honey out of the body of the lion-

See on :8. The way he ate and gave to his parents and *they also ate* without him telling them where he got it from is a clear reversal of what happened in Eden (Gen. 3:6; doubtless Eve didn't tell Adam either where the fruit came from): but here the fruits of spiritual victory rather than failure were enjoyed and shared. The promised blessings of honey were conditional upon Israel's obedience (Dt. 32:13 cp. Ps. 81:16), although granted in prospect (Dt. 32:13). Israel at Samson's time were disobedient and therefore didn't have the Kingdom blessings. And yet the whole acted parable taught that through the supreme zeal of one lonely man, into whose struggle not even his parents could enter (14:6,16), the blessings of obedience could be brought to the disobedient multitude of God's people. And here we have the essence of the Gospel.

"The body of the lion" in :8,9 is LXX "the mouth of the lion". The idea is that he was empowered to take something out of the mouth of a lion, as David would. And as with David, the message was that he could save Israel from the mouth of the Philistines.

Jdg 14:10 His father went down to the woman, and Samson made a drinking feast as was the custom for the young men-

The process of marriage involved Samson in participating in the traditions of the surrounding tribes (this is emphasized: Jud. 14:10,11; 15:20). The "feasting" was strictly 'drinking' (Heb.)- and Samson the Nazirite attended this. Even if he didn't partake, he was placing himself directly in temptations' way to break his Naziriteship. Just like walking alone in the vineyards.

Jdg 14:11 When they saw him they brought thirty companions to be with him-

The problem with marriage out of the faith is that you don't marry just a person, but a family. And so he now has 30 "friends", all of them unbelievers. But we suspect Samson had evil intent in all this, for his marriage was because he sought opportunity against the Philistines. The groom ought to have brought 30 friends with him, but he didn't. And so the bride's family provided them. LXX says they did this "because they feared him". They sensed he had evil

intent toward them. This confirms the impression we have that his whole marriage plan was because that woman was "right in his eyes" for some plan he had to kill Philistines. In the same way as his marriage out of the Faith was "of the Lord". The Philistines were suspicious that something was going on like this.

Jdg 14:12 Samson said to them, Let me tell you a riddle now. If you can give me the answer within the seven days of the feast, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing-

Thirty changes of clothing was a huge amount of wealth. We ponder why both sides were willing to gamble for such very high stakes. I suggest the men who agreed the bet with Samson were drunk at the time. It was not a rational, normal thing to do. We wonder whether somehow, Samson knew he was going to tell his wife and she would tell the others, thereby creating the need for 30 garments, which he would obtain by murder. Perhaps he knew this only on a deeply subconscious level. But clearly he was using their deceit in suddenly expecting him to come up with 30 changes of clothes for his "friends" as an excuse to murder 30 Philistines. For the entire marriage was because he sought an opportunity to fight the Philistines. We are left wondering to what degree Samson was overtaken by circumstances [his wife revealing his secret], and to what degree he planned all that happened. If it was all so carefully premeditated, we ponder why he returned to his parents' home so angry, rather than with joy that his mission against the Philistines had started to be fulfilled. The 'unclear' element which the narrative presents is in fact a way of giving us insight into the working of the Spirit. There are elements of both Divine and human volition.

They had to declare the riddle "and find it out" (14:12 AV). This would indicate that they had to actually find the carcass of a lion with honey in it. They plowed behind his wife as a heifer, and so were led by her to Samson's secret place of meditation where the dead lion was (Jud. 14:18).

Jdg 14:13 But if you can't give me the answer, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing. They said to him, Tell us your riddle, that we may hear it- It was Samson's duty as the groom to provide 30 changes of clothing (a huge expense), or at least, this was what they perhaps unexpectedly told him at the wedding. But perhaps he knew this full well ahead of time, and was using it as an excuse to kill 30 Philistines. How that exactly would work out, he perhaps didn't know. He clearly did love his bride, and she did indeed betray his love and trust. It is impossible to totally decode where he really stood in all this in psychological terms- for his motives were mixed and his plans and intentions were therefore perhaps not clearly defined in his own mind. I suggest that he knew full well that he had the obligation to provide 30 changes of clothing; this was part of the bride price. But he intentionally doesn't bring them, and says he will only give them if the Philistines guess his riddle.

Jdg 14:14 He said to them, Out of the eater came forth food. Out of the strong came forth sweetness. They couldn't give the answer in three days-

"The eater" (Heb. 'the devourer') and "the strong" not only referred to the lion, but more essentially to Samson himself. The same basic word for 'eater' is used as a verb to describe how Samson 'ate' / 'devoured' the honey from the lion (Jud. 14:9). And years later the Philistines realized how Samson's riddle described himself: for they rejoiced that "the destroyer (devourer) of our country" was now overcome (Jud. 16:24). Samson saw that through his God-given strength he could bring forth the honey of blessing to Israel. They had to declare the riddle "and find it out" (14:12 AV). This would indicate that they had to actually find the carcass of a lion with honey in it. They plowed behind his wife as a heifer,

and so were led by her to Samson's secret place of meditation where the dead lion was (Jud. 14:18). A riddle was supposed to have a reasonable answer. But the answer to Samson's riddle was "Bees hived in a lion's carcass and produce honey", but bees do not make hives in carcasses. The Philistines were being asked to accept something miraculous had happened, the hand of God, and that was beyond their conception. But that was the point that Samson wanted to make. Without accepting that point, the riddle was insoluble.

Jdg 14:15 On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, Entice your husband to tell us the riddle, or we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you called us here to mock us?-

Thirty changes of clothes was a major expense. "To mock us" can be rendered "to make us poor". Or the idea may be that they would have to strip themselves naked and give their clothes to Samson. LXX "did you invite us to do us violence?" could suggest that Samson had implied that he would obtain the 30 changes of clothes by murdering the wedding guests, the 30 companions of :11. Indeed the Hebrew for "mock us" can mean 'to dispossess'. That was indeed his intention and calling- to dispossess the Philistines from the small area between Eshtaol and Zorah. In this case, the wedding to the girl had been planned by Samson as a means through which to inflict damage upon the Philistines. The girl in question was "right in his eyes" for his plan. And yet his motives were mixed with his own carnal lust. For if he was merely using the wedding as a cover for an attack upon the Philistines, he wouldn't have afterwards been so furiously angry and jealous at the marriage not working out.

Jdg 14:16 Samson's wife wept before him and said, You must hate me, and don't love me. You have given a riddle to my people but you haven't told it me. He said to her, I haven't even told it to my father or my mother; why should I tell you-

He speaks to his wife as if she should expect that he was closer to his Hebrew parents than to her: "'I haven't even explained it (the riddle) to my father or mother', he replied, 'So why should I explain it to you?'" (14:16 NIV). Gen. 2:24 taught that a man must leave his parents and cleave to his wife in marriage; she must be closer to him than them. It could be that by saying this, Samson was reminding her that he didn't see their relationship as full marriage; he was only using her (cp. how he 'used' a Philistine as his best man, 14:20). Yet he did what only days before had been unthinkable: he told her his finest and most personal secret, which he wouldn't even tell his dear parents. Such is the fickleness of our nature. And yet there seems reason to think that somehow Samson foresaw his possible failure, and arranged to use the situation to forward God's work. It could even be that the girl was party to Samson's plan; she may have appeared to have a genuine interest in Samson's spiritual aims. The Philistines themselves realized this when they chode with Samson's wife that they had been called to the wedding 'to have our possession taken away' (14:15 Heb.). They saw the aim of Samson's marriage: to dispossess them and take their possession for Israel. It seems no accident that he chose Timnath, 'a portion assigned'- to Israel. This was part of the land promised to Dan, but which they had allowed the Philistines to overrun (Josh. 19:43,47). And Samson would have seen himself as 'Samson-of-Zorah', the hornet- symbol of the Egyptian tribes which drove out the Canaanites in preparation for Israel's later victories (Dt. 7:20; Josh. 24:12).

The parallels between the woman of Timnah and Delilah are clear. The words of the Philistines to the woman are identical: 'Coax your husband' (Jud. 14:15); 'Coax him' (Jud. 16:5). Both women use the same language to persuade Samson to reveal his secret: 'You really hate me, you don't love me' (Jud. 14:16); 'How can you say you love me' (Jud. 16:15). Both women are described as nagging him and wearing him down (Jud. 14:17; 16:16). The point is that Samson didn't learn from his mistakes, refusing to perceive how circumstance was repeating in his life.

Jdg 14:17 She wept before him for seven days, while their feast lasted, and on the seventh day he told her, because she pressed him severely. Then she told the riddle to her people. On the seventh day before the sun went down-

As "she cried the whole seven days of the feast" (14:17 NIV), she daily "pressed him". This is the very same Hebrew word used in many passages to describe how an apostate, Gentile-loving Israel would be pressed / oppressed by their enemies (Dt. 28:53,57; Jer. 19:9; Is. 51:13). Samson was in some sense apostate at this time, yet he had faith and was strongly motivated; and for this he was blessed by God with strength to defeat the Philistines. The daughters of the Philistines *hate* God's people (2 Sam. 1:20; Ez. 16:27,57). The Ezekiel passages stress the paradox: that Israel (whom Samson represented) loved the women who hated them.

Samson really loved that girl (Jud. 14:3,17; 15:1,7,11), even though he also hated her (Jud. 15:2; he must have gone through this process again with Delilah in the time that led up to her final betrayal). This true love for her makes Samson's marriage look more questionable.

Jdg 14:18 the men of the city said to him, What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion? He said to them, If you hadn't ploughed with my heifer you wouldn't have found out my riddle-

LXX "before he went into the chamber", the same word as in Jud. 15:1.

They had to declare the riddle "and find it out" (14:12 AV). This would indicate that they had to actually find the carcass of a lion with honey in it. They plowed behind his wife as a heifer, and so were led by her to Samson's secret place of meditation where the dead lion was (Jud. 14:18).

There is reason to think that to some degree, Samson may have realized that his life was pointing ahead to the great Messianic deliverer yet to come, the Lord Jesus Christ. Samson may have recognized the strength of the future Saviour when he gave his riddle to the Philistines. He meditated upon that dead lion with the sweet honey in it, and formulated his comment: "What is sweeter than honey? What (or, Who?) is stronger than a lion (Heb. 'the strong one'- this is one of Samson's many word plays)?" 'Who is stronger than the strong one?' was an idea picked up by the Lord Jesus in, I suggest, conscious allusion (Mt. 12:29); although it is masked in the English text. He was the strong one who was stronger than the strong man of sin. Through His victory, the roaring lion of the devil lays dead. And in his skull is sweet honey; did Samson see in this the same meaning as David did in Ps. 119:103? Did he so understand the nature and method of the Lord's work that he appreciated that the Lord's victory over all His people's enemies would be through the power of God's word, lying there in the place of the mind of the beast He overcame? Yet Samson killed the lion himself; surely he felt that to some degree *he* was the strong man who had overcome the beast, through his application to God's word. His frequent references and allusions to God's past revelation, both in his words and actions, would indicate that he was a man of the word.

Samson's reference to his wife as his "heifer" could be seen as disparaging, just as his father Manoah had referred to his wife as "the woman" rather than "my wife". 'You ploughed with / behind my cow' would be a fair enough rendering. But to plough with another man's heifer, implying to plough in another man's ground, is an expression used in Greek and Latin, as well as extra-Biblical Hebrew, for committing adultery with another man's wife. It was a drinking party with young men known to the bride. It's quite likely Samson is accusing them of having slept with her; and indeed she ends up marrying one of them. They ploughed behind her would suggest anal sex whereby she technically remained a virgin. Such practices

are known in parts of Africa. In this case, we have here something that Samson couldn't have planned ahead of time; although on the other hand she may have been 'right in his eyes' in that he saw her as a loose woman who would likely fall for his plan, and justify his anger and desire to create a provocation from the Philistines. In this case we see his penchant for sleeping with loose women; we think of the prostitute in Gaza and Delilah who also did things for money. His anger served as motivator for his continued anger with the Philistines in the area. And this was used by God; even though "What should Samson have done?" would surely have been to count himself blessed God had saved him from a marriage to an unbeliever. And humbly sought to think differently.

We are maybe too quick to assume that "the eater... the strong" meant simply the lion. It was Samson who was without doubt "the strong", and had demonstrated himself stronger than a lion by killing one; and it was he who ate the honey- he was "the eater". "Samson's vomit" could have been the answer to Samson's riddle: Food came from the eater [you vomit if you eat too much honey]; sweet things came out from the strong person.

But we could argue that their answer to the riddle, or the answer he gave his wife, knowing she would share it, was not really complete. The answer was not just 'Honey out of a lion'. Their answer was "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?". But this only answers the second part of the riddle: "Out of the strong came forth sweetness". They correctly define "the strong" and "sweetness". But they make no comment on the first part of the riddle: "Out of the eater came forth food". How exactly did honey come "out of" the lion? The answer was: "Because bees miraculously hived in its carcass after it had been killed". They don't explain that bit. Samson could have argued that they had not in fact fully explained the riddle. They were warm, but not right there. Again we wonder whether the entire thing was a set up by him. He asked them to agree the wager when they were drunk, guessing that his wife would be pressured by them because the wager was so large, guessing she would give in- and planning this as an excuse to legitimately get angry with them and kill them. For his marriage was because he sought a provocation "from the Philistines". But he was playing with fire, and the fact he returns to sleep with his wife and is angry she has married another man rather suggests that he let that fire burn him. Likewise he later sleeps with a prostitute as a pretext for carrying off the gates of the city. He clearly thinks he can have a little of both. They had to declare the riddle "and find it out" (Jud. 14:12 AV). This would indicate that they had to actually find the carcass of a lion with honey in it. They apparently didn't fulfil this condition. Likewise on :14 I suggested that they were to perceive that the answer was also "Samson"- the strong who would bring the blessings of honey to Israel. But Samson thought their answer good enough to go and kill 30 men to provide the garments.

Jdg 14:19 The Spirit of Yahweh came mightily on him, and he went down to Ashkelon and struck thirty men of them and took their belongings and gave their clothes to those who had explained the riddle-

"Came mightily upon" has the idea of God penetrating / thrusting Himself upon Samson. And yet He was working through Samson's own spirit and desire to slay Philistines. We see how the movement of the Spirit is partly a result of Divine sovereign choice, similar to making a man a Nazirite when Nazirite vows were to be taken as freewill decisions. On the other hand, God's Spirit confirms the human spirit. And yet the impression is surely given that the Divine sovereignty side of the equation is stronger. We see the same happening when the Spirit came upon Saul (1 Sam. 10:6,10; 11:6). I discussed on Jud. 13:2 how Samson only 'began' to deliver Israel from the Philistines; but his birth has many similarities with that of Samson. As if God raised up Samuel to do the work Samson began but didn't finish. But even Samuel didn't do it; and so we can also note the many similarities between Samson and Saul, who

was also raised up to deliver Israel from the Philistines. Like Samson, Saul also failed, and so David was raised up to do it (2 Sam. 8:1). The very same Hebrew phrase for the Spirit coming upon them is used of both men (Jud. 14:6,19; 15:14; 1 Sam 10:6,10; 11:6). Both committed suicide, and were mocked by the Philistines in the house of their idols (Jud. 16:25; 1 Sam. 31:4,9,10). David likewise has some similarities with Samson in that he too killed a lion with his hands, as a sign he could defeat the Philistine. He killed the Philistine "without a sword in his hand" (1 Sam. 17:50) just as Samson killed the lion with his bare hands (:5). And the Spirit given to Saul passed to him (1 Sam. 16:13). God seems to work similarly today. One man [Samson] is raised up for a task, he fails or only partially does it; another [Samuel] is raised up and likewise doesn't complete it; and another likewise [Saul]. And then another [David] is raised up who does do it.

Lev. 26:3-8 had promised dramatic success against their enemies *on the basis of* obedience to the Law. The fact Samson had this power was therefore proof that he really was reckoned by God as zealously obedient to the Law; and yet he was like this in the midst of a sadly apostate Israel. I take this view of his strength. This is in itself no mean achievement: to rise to a level of spirituality much higher than that achieved by the surrounding brotherhood.

Significantly, he went down to the valley of Ashkelon, the very place that Joshua had conquered but Judah had been unable to drive out the Philistines from (1:18,19), and slew 30 warriors. But I would prefer to go with a different identification of "Ashkelon" as Khirbet Askalun, about four miles South of modern Tibneh (Timnah), rather than the well-known Ashkelon. Because it seems to me that Samson's mission was to free the area between Zorah and Eshtaol from the Philistines- see on Jud. 13:25. This was where he was first moved by the Spirit to deliver from the Philistines, and it was where he was buried. It was from exactly this relatively small location that the people of Dan emigrated northwards after Samson's death, unable to endure the Philistine domination.

To kill the men and then strip their clothes from their dead, bloodied bodies would have infringed Samson's Nazirite vow; as did touching the carcass of the lion. And probably he participated at the drinking feast, which would have done the same. Yet he reminded a Nazirite to God. But he kept assuming that Divine law and principle didn't apply to him personally, that God somehow understood... and this led to him finally letting his hair be cut [for surely he knew Delilah would betray his secret], and that was reductionism to a point that God would not accept it. A powerful lesson to us, that the fact God may let man 'get away with it' doesn't mean there are no moral boundaries.

His anger was burning, and he went up to his father's house-He seems angry that he had let himself fall too deeply for that Philistine girl (14:19), and "utterly hated her" (15:2). And yet this human anger may also have been mixed with a more righteous anger, in that to give his wife to another was adultery, and it happened that they carried out (perhaps unconsciously?) the punishment for adultery which the law required (Lev 20:14; 21:9). He realized that the Philistines had led him into sin, and he just wanted to destroy the source of his temptation. When he slew the thirty men at Ashkelon, as he seemed to have planned right at the start in his seeking occasion against the Philistines, he was "burning with anger". His motive was partly bitterness and the revenge of a man humiliated and deceived by a woman; but his slaughter of the Philistines was also done in faith (Heb. 11:32-34), with God given strength to confirm his faith.

Jdg 14:20 But Samson's wife was given to his companion, whom he had considered a friend-

AV "used". We get the impression that he 'used' his wife as he 'used' this best man, because his motive was to use the situation in order to dispossess and murder Philistines. But he also genuinely loved the girl. His motives were terribly mixed. Here we have some more evidence on the side of 'the hand / Spirit of God' leading Samson rather than purely his own plans. The

fact his bride was cruelly married off to his best man so quickly [despite his parents having paid the bride price for her] would have provoked his anger and been seen by everyone as unacceptable; and wrong as this anger may have been, in the sense that the planned marriage was disobedience, God worked through this. His failed marriage and the betrayal led him to hate the Philistines yet more. It stimulated deep anger issues within him that lasted the rest of his life. The subsequent events all relate to his anger with the Philistines and his desire for revenge, indeed it was all more of a personal vendetta than seeking to deliver Israel from the Philistines. It was his failed marriage that led him to use a prostitute and consort with Delilah who was likely not much less than a prostitute, willing to do anything for money. And yet through these failures God's purpose was worked out- of 'beginning' to deliver Israel from the Philistines.

JUDGES CHAPTER 15

Jdg 15:1 But after a while, in the time of wheat harvest, Samson visited his wife with a young goat. He said, I will go in to my wife into the room. But her father wouldn't allow him to go in-

This is another anticlimax, as in Jud. 14:1. We expect and hope that Samson has learnt his lesson and will keep well away from Philistine women. But we are disappointed; he returns to have sex with her and finds she is perhaps literally in the bedroom with her new husband, the best man at his wedding to her. His father had offered a young goat to Yahweh (Jud. 13:18), but Samson brings one as a gift to his Philistine father in law. But again, his failure is used to enable him to fight the Philistines with some kind of excuse. He speaks of being "blameless" by taking revenge, perhaps because this element to his behaviour would shield his people from being attacked by the Philistines. Because what he did would have been seen as vaguely legitimate within the revenge culture of the times.

Here we have another anomaly in the Samson story. His wife betrayed him and married his best man. But despite his anger, still he loves her and comes back to her, for sex. He will do the same with Delilah despite all her betrayals. He never learns his lessons from his failures. But the anomaly is in that he wants to return to her for sex, rather than keeping an angry distance from her. He had slain 30 Philistine men to provide the 30 garments. Those men were from Askelun, a local village. Again we see the "of the Lord" element in all this. His sexual passions are clear, as is his naivety, born of allowing his passions to be overriding. But God works through this- in order to bring about further judgment upon the Philistines, and to coax Samson towards his intended potential of delivering that area from the Philistines.

We get the impression that the woman's father blocked the door of the bedroom where the woman was. She was newly married- although marriages usually took time to arrange. We get the impression she was within the bedroom having sex with Samson's one time best man. The whole situation, caused by Samson arriving at the very worst moment, was of God. Because it fuelled Samson's anger. Even though that anger was in many ways wrong. And yet God worked through that anger, empowering Samson to catch 300 foxes and tie their tails together.

As the Spirit came upon Gideon (Jud. 6:34), so it is described as coming upon Samson (Jud. 14:6). It seems that the incident in chapter 15, where Samson visits his wife with a kid and uses this as an excuse to kill many Philistines, was planned by him to reflect Gideon's zeal. The way Gideon brought a kid to Yahweh (Jud. 6:19) may reflect how Samson came with a kid (Jud. 15:1). See on :4.

Jdg 15:2 Her father said, I was certain that you utterly hated her, therefore I gave her to your companion. Isn't her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please take her instead-

Samson really loved that girl (Jud. 14:3,17; 15:1,7,11), even though he also utterly hated her (he must have gone through this process again with Delilah in the time that led up to her final betrayal). This true love for her makes Samson's marriages look more questionable. The turning of love to hatred is what happened when Amnon raped Tamar. The Biblical record is consistently psychologically credible, and true to observed human experience in this area. Unlike the contemporary, uninspired histories and legends of the other nations around Israel.

He seems angry that he had let himself fall too deeply for that Philistine girl (Jud. 14:19), and "utterly hated her". And yet this human anger may also have been mixed with a more righteous anger, in that to give his wife to another was adultery, and it happened that they carried out (perhaps unconsciously?) the punishment for adultery which the law required (Lev 20:14; 21:9). He realized that the Philistines had led him into sin, and he just wanted to destroy the source of his temptation.

Jdg 15:3 Samson said to them, This time I will be blameless of harm to the Philistines-

He burnt those vineyards in a desire to be "blameless from the Philistines" (15:3 AVmg.). The same word is translated unpunished, guiltless, innocent, clean, acquitted; as if he knew he had sinned, but believed that by further fighting of Philistines he could gain his forgiveness. He had to be brought to the shame of Gaza Prison to learn that forgiveness was by absolute faith, not works and hatred of this present world.

Samson insisted that he would be "blameless" if he now destroyed the Philistines' economy by arson (3). But on a secular level, his causing of famine and pain to so many was not an appropriate response to his betrayal by his bride's family. This is all similar to Samson claiming that the Philistine girl was "right in my eyes", using the word for just or righteous. He felt his using her to provoke a fight with the Philistines was somehow 'right' and righteous. But he now wants sex with her... his ethics are definitely mixed. Yet God worked through it, even though Samson was on one level unethical and wrong to reason like this. Just as God worked through his anger problem.

Jdg 15:4 Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took torches, tied them tail to tail in pairs and put a firebrand between each pair of tails-

I noted on :1 how Samson was seeking to imitate Gideon, who apparently was his hero. He takes 300 foxes and puts firebrands in their tails. Why 300? Surely this was in conscious imitation of how Gideon took 300 men and put firebrands in their hands, and with them destroyed God's enemies (Jud. 7:16). The connection between the faithful 300 and the foxes could suggest that in Samson's eyes, he didn't even have one faithful Israelite to support him; he had to use animals instead. He is consistently portrayed as a man acting alone, not leading Israel, which was perhaps the Divine intention for him as a judge. Throughout the Samson account, there are things which show God's power overriding nature. Bees hiving in a carcass is an obvious one. Another example is how foxes, who are solitary creatures, are put into pairs and take fire in a specific direction. Some have argued that jackals must be in view, because they are pack animals. The lesson of the foxes cooperating was perhaps to show Samson that his solitary personal war against the Philistines was not God's way. We recall how he didn't share his secrets with neither his wife nor his parents; how he twice went for a wander in the vineyards alone; and never told his parents about slaying the lion nor the source of the honey he later found in it. Solitary endeavour was not God's intention for Samson. Had he engaged with this weakness of his, he might indeed have fulfilled his mission potential of liberating at least the Zorah-Eshtaol area from the Philistines. To confirm Samson in learning

this lesson, the incident with the foxes now takes his conflict with the Philistines away from a personal argument with his wife's family and neighbours, and towards a total engagement with the Philistines. He slew 1000 of them, so we can imagine they mobilized a few thousand warrior against him. His slaying of the 30 men after his betrayal at the wedding apparently went without reprisal from the Philistines. It was perhaps seen as within the limits of an eye for an eye in their *lex talonis* culture, seeing that Samson had been so badly treated and shamed at the wedding. But his action with the foxes would have brought hunger and economic ruin to the Philistines, and elevated their conflict with Samson to an altogether different level.

Jdg 15:5 When he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing grain of the Philistines and burnt up both the shocks and the standing grain, and also the olive groves- Samson used the whole situation as an opportunity to burn up the corn and vineyards of the Philistines, in conscious allusion to how the law stipulated that a man who did this to his Israelite neighbour must make retribution (Ex. 22:5). He was emphasizing that these people were *not* his neighbours, they were not in covenant relationship, and he openly showed that he treated them accordingly. Likewise he took vengeance on the Philistines (Jud. 15:5; 16:28), when the Law taught that Israel were not to take vengeance (same word) *on each other* (Lev. 19:18), but could do so on their enemies (Num. 31:2; Dt. 32:43 cp. Josh. 10:13). Note, in passing, how he set those foxes up as cherubim, again imitating Gideon's flaming torches- a ball of whirling fire coming in judgment upon the Philistines. The fox was a symbol of apostate Israel in later Scripture (Ez. 13:4); perhaps Samson made the same connection, and wanted to symbolize how through his faith and insight, weak Israel could be turned into the cherubim of God in bringing judgment on the Philistines and deliverance for themselves. The way he used their tails to bring such destruction may have been a reference to Dt. 28:13,44, where apostate Israel, suffering for their sins as they were in Samson's time, are described with the same word: they would be the tail of the nations. He saw that he was the one who could bring salvation and blessing to Israel.

He later teased Delilah to tie him with seven “withs”, the Hebrew word implying made from a vine. He just would mess with the forbidden. The way he burnt up those vineyards in 15:5 may have been as a result of realizing that the answer lay in total devotion and rooting out of temptation, rather than wandering around in them as he did in Jud. 14; cutting out the eye that offends. See on :3. His hatred of the vineyards was perhaps a reflection of his alcoholism. Surely he only slept and let Delilah's men cut his hair or bind him because he was drunk.

Destruction of fruit trees in war was forbidden (Dt. 20:19) and the contemporary culture considered that whilst theft of your enemy's harvest was acceptable, destroying their fruit trees was excessively cruel. But Samson does this, intentionally.

Jdg 15:6 Then the Philistines said, Who has done this? They said, Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because his wife was given to his companion. The Philistines came up and burnt her and her father with fire-

The seven day marriage feast, associated with a deceitful father in law offering the sister of the desired bride in marriage- this is all the same as Jacob experienced (Gen. 29:27), right down to the fact that the younger sister was fairer (Jud. 15:2 cp. Gen. 29:16,17). Samson should have learnt from the evident similarities with Jacob; but like Jacob, he still trusted his own strength. See on Jud. 13:18.

Jdg 15:7 Samson said to them, If you behave like this, surely I will be avenged on you- Saul followed Samson's weak side when at this same time he demanded to be avenged of his

enemies (1 Sam. 14:24); yet this wasn't Samson at his best (Jud. 15:7; 16:28). On one hand, Samson uses this murder of his wife and father in law as a pretext for killing more Philistines. But yet we also sense that he had loved the girl, and wanted vengeance as any Hebrew man would have wanted for the murder of his wife. It was all about him, "I will be avenged", and he fails to learn the lesson even in his last words, demanding vengeance for his eyes. Likewise he boasts that "I" have slain a thousand men just with a jawbone. Yet still he will be saved. His motives were hopelessly mixed, flesh and spirit confused together. Whereas the life of simple, total devotion to the Spirit is the only way to peace and real spiritual achievement.

He felt he had done to the Philistines as they had done to him, and he felt his behaviour to them was somehow in terms of an eye for an eye, the *lex talionis*: "If you do this will I not be revenged against you, and after that I will cease?" (Jud. 15:7). "As they have done to me, so I have done to them" (Jud. 15:11). He kills 30 men because his wife betrayed him. He burnt up the corn harvest because the wife he had abandoned had remarried. His expectation that he has the right to sex with her after her remarriage is unreasonable and betrays a sense of over entitlement. He kills many people because his ex-wife had been executed by the Philistines. He kills a thousand men with a jawbone because the Philistine authorities tried to arrest him. He wrecks a city gate because he was angry with himself for sleeping with a whore. Then at the end he wants to kill 3000 people because he has lost his sight. Again, his revenge is disproportionate. The revenge he took was always far more than an eye for an eye, even though he sees it all as justified, legitimate revenge within the terms of *lex talionis* ["If you do this will I not be revenged against you, and after that I will cease?" (Jud. 15:7)]. The Mosaic examples of an eye for an eye are always careful to insist that any such punishment must never exceed the harm initially done. Samson seems to have had a sense of over entitlement and a genuinely warped sense of equality / measure for measure. Possibly an overbearing mother and distant, weak and ineffective father contributed to this narcissism. We note of course that the Lord's teaching was that "an eye for an eye" was not anyway the ideal standard of spirituality. And yet God worked through this, to begin the deliverance of Israel from the Philistines.

Jdg 15:8 He attacked them viciously and slaughtered many of them, then he went and lived in the cave in the rock of Etam-

He smote the Philistines "hip and thigh" (AV) with a great slaughter, alluding to the sacrifices (s.w. "shoulder" Ex. 29:22; Lev. 9:21; 1 Sam. 9:24; Ez. 24:4- nearly all usages of this word in Samson's Bible referred to the "shoulder" of the sacrifices), as if he was offering them as a sacrifice to Yahweh. "Hip on thigh" is apparently a better rendering, implying hand to hand combat. This would serve to emphasize his contact with the dead bodies, as he hurled them to the ground one by one. And yet the Spirit of Yahweh came upon him to enable this- a breach of the letter of the Nazarite law.

But then he "went down (again- see on Jud. 14:1) and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam. You don't go down if you are going up to the top of a rock. But perhaps spiritually he 'went down', to dwell in isolation from the people he was supposed to be judging / leading, in the rocks. Dwelling in the rocks is associated with a bad conscience in Is. 2:21 and 57:5. Yet for all this, God counted him as having judged Israel 20 years at this stage (15:20); even though there was this evident break when he simply ran away from his people.

We enquire why Samson took refuge in Judah. I suggest he wanted to protect his own people of Dan, or at least the small area he was called upon to liberate, between Eshtaol and Zorah.

Jdg 15:9 Then the Philistines went up, and encamped in Judah, and spread themselves in

Lehi-

Samson's victory at Lehi may have inspired Shammah to slay the Philistines at the same place, years later (2 Sam. 23:11; AV "into a troop" is Heb. "Lehi"). And yet Samson's victory with a donkey jawbone would have been inspired by Shamgar's victory with an ox goad (Jud. 3:31). This is how the body of Christ should function; one spiritual victory inspiring another.

Jdg 15:10 The men of Judah said, Why have you come up against us? They said, We have come up to take Samson prisoner, to do to him as he has done to us-

He says that he had killed Philistines because "I merely did to them what they did to me" (Jud. 15:11 NIV). There was no mention of the fact that he was seeking occasion against God's enemies (even though he was speaking to Hebrews). He passed off his actions as pure revenge- which on one level, was all they were. The Philistines had earlier said that they wanted to take Samson "to do to him as he did to us" (Jud. 15:10). And Samson replies in the same primitive way: that he only did to them what they did to him. It seems that Samson spoke to them on their level. And yet when the Philistines came upon Samson, roaring against him like the lion in Jud. 14:5, God's Spirit once again came upon him in confirmation of his faith. And yet his motives were hopelessly mixed. He was partly the angry young man, the jilted lover, wishing to express his native anger- and yet doing so by claiming that he was serving God. And indeed he was- but with mixed motives. We see this kind of thing in ourselves, and in many who claim to serve God.

Jdg 15:11 Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cave in the rock of Etam and said to Samson, Don't you know that the Philistines are rulers over us?-

This was tacit recognition of the depth of their apostacy. They seemed to have no regret that they were fulfilling the many earlier prophecies that they would be dominated by their enemies if they were disobedient to Yahweh. The fact that Israel were dominated throughout Samson's life by the Philistines is proof enough that they were apostate at this time (Jud. 13:1 cp. Jud. 15:20; 16:31). Israel, as so often, refused the saviour / deliverer raised up for them, and preferred to remain in bondage. Just as so many today. We note that the men of Judah numbered three thousand warriors. Potentially, this was a force large enough to fight the Philistines. But this continues the theme of men not living up to their potential. The ideas are juxtaposed- they had 3000 warriors, but accepted the Philistines ruled over them. They had the potential to break free, but accepted their servitude. And are only recorded as using their potential strength to fight against their own deliverer.

What is this that you have done to us?-

Zorah, Samson's home town, was originally Judah's inheritance (Josh. 15:33-36), but they spurned it, and passed it to Dan (Josh. 19:41), who also weren't interested; for they migrated to the north and too over the land belonging to the less warlike Sidonians (Jud. 18:2,7-10). Their selfishness is reflected by the way they chide with him: "What is this that you have done unto us?".

He said to them, As they did to me, so have I done to them-

See on Jud. 13:5. If we ask 'What exactly did they do to him? What did they kill and burn of his?', the answer must be 'His wife'. He perhaps felt that she was worth hundreds of them, and the burning of their livelihood, leaving famine in its wake, was what they had done to him emotionally. Yet it is curious how he loved the Philistines and yet hated them. Samson's answer however reveals that his main motive was personal revenge. He gives no hint that he sees his actions as part of a Divine deliverance of His people from the Philistines. Yet that was his potential and His intended purpose, as the Angel explained to his mother. The Philistines have just used the same phrase- they want to do to Samson as he did to them (:10), and now he says he wants to do the same to them, as they did to him. This is a classic case of

"an eye for an eye", with each stage of the 'hitting back' being of greater magnitude than what was done. It is clearly out of step with the spirit of the Lord Jesus, who taught specifically not to think and act like this. We are again left with the impression that Samson was all about personal vengeance, shame, pride and anger issues rather than wanting to deliver Israel from the Philistines to Yahweh's glory.

Jdg 15:12 They said to him, We have come down to tie you up so that we can deliver you into the hand of the Philistines. Samson said to them, Swear to me that you will not kill me yourselves-

He had to beg his own people not to try to kill him themselves (even whilst he had long hair), because he knew that the strength he had was only for certain specific purposes- i.e., to deliver God's people from the Philistines (15:12). The way they came to bind Samson has suggestions of Legion (Lk. 8:29); perhaps they considered him to be mentally ill, and attributed his strength to fits? Or worse, did they consider the work of the Spirit of God to deliver them to be that of demons? If so, Samson was typifying the Lord's later experience (Mt. 12:24-27). The way Jesus spoke of himself in this context as the stronger than the strong man (cp. Samson) encourages this view. And yet the strong man who was bound, i.e. the devil, can also be seen as a reference to Samson. Again, we are left with a difficult question: Was Samson telling them the truth when he said that his motive at Lehi was purely personal revenge? Or were they so unspiritual that he spoke to them on their level, even though at other times he pleaded with them to quit their idolatry (Jud. 2:16-19)? Or were his motives simply hopelessly mixed? Within him was a burning desire to do God's work; he was the one faithful Israelite who could chase 1,000; and yet in the company of his unspiritual brethren, he let his human side come out, and wrapped up his zeal for the Lord in human terms- even though there was some truth in how he expressed it. This kind of thing can so easily happen in our Christian experience; we bring out the worst in each other.

Jdg 15:13 They said, No, we will tie you up and deliver you into their hand, but we will not kill you. They bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock-

The way they tie him up and he begs them not to kill him (15:12,13) hardly sounds like Samson judging Israel (:20). And yet this was his desire, and this is what God imputed to him, in the same way as he was a Nazarite to God (i.e. in God's eyes?) all his life (Jud. 13:7)- although he broke his Nazariteship by contact with dead bodies (Jud. 14:19; 15:15 cp. Num. 6:6) and probably by drinking wine at his wedding (Jud. 14:10 "feast" = 'drinking', Heb.). This was not only imputed righteousness, but God counting the essential intentions of a weak willed man to him as if he had actually achieved what he fain would do.

Jdg 15:14 When he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him, and the Spirit of Yahweh came mightily on him. The ropes that were on his arms became as charred flax, and his ropes dropped off his hands-

The Spirit likewise came upon him to kill the Philistines in Lehi (15:14). It wasn't a permanent strength. This is in harmony with the way in which the Spirit was used in the New Testament. The Spirit came upon the apostles and they were filled up with it, as it were, and then drained of it once the work was done; and had to be filled with it again when the next eventuality arose. The shouting of the Philistines recalled the roaring of the lion against Samson (Jud. 14:5). As in our lives, one experience prepares us for the next one, which occurs on a far greater scale than the first one.

Jdg 15:15 He found a fresh jawbone of an ass and struck down a thousand men with it-
The record emphasizes it was a "fresh" jawbone. This meant Samson would be touching something unclean, and thus ending his Naziriteship. Yet still God empowered him to slay

the Philistines in his unclean state. And we have to ask whether it was not, surely, of God that this fresh jawbone was there. God could have arranged an iron weapon to have come into his hand, or a jagged millstone or sharp flintstone. But the providential arrangement was for something unclean. This, then, is something slightly more than God tolerating Samson's breaking the letter of the Nazirite vow. This is God, having set Samson up as a Nazirite from birth, actually putting something unclean in his hand. And He then makes water flow for Samson to drink from the unclean carcass (see on :19). The message was that God accepted Samson was not very pure... but didn't want Samson to think that He wouldn't work through him because of that. Tragically Samson ended up sinning that grace may abound in that he came to assume that even his hair could be shaved, and still he would receive the Spirit.

Samson slaying Philistines with a jawbone suggests Shamgar slaying Philistines with an ox goad (15:15 cp. 3:31).

15:15 Samson grabbed a jaw-bone and exalted that with *that* he had slain a thousand men at Lehi. The word for "jawbone", Lehi, means literally 'that which is soft'. God was teaching him that His strength was only perfected in weakness. His words are a conscious allusion to Josh. 23:10 (and Lev. 26:8): "One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the Lord your God, He it is that fights for you". It could be that he counted the bodies, or counted each man he slew, consciously trying to get up to 1,000 in order to fulfill the prophecy. Although "a thousand" may refer to a military unit rather than a literal number. Samson doesn't say that he alone killed the thousand men; he did it with the jaw-bone (coming from a Hebrew root meaning 'soft', 'weak'). This jaw bone is one of the seven weak things which are mentioned in Judges as being the tools of God's salvation: left handed man (Jud. 3:21); an ox goad (Jud. 3:31); a woman (Jud. 4:4); a nail (Jud. 4:21); a piece of a millstone (Jud. 9:53); a pitcher and trumpet (Jud. 7:20). God's people are likened to an ass frequently (Gen. 49:11,14; Is. 1:3; Jer. 2:24; Hos. 8:9; Lk. 13:15; 14:5). The first two references would have been known to Samson at Lehi; and he may have reflected that the fact the firstborn of an ass must be redeemed by a lamb was prophetic of how Messiah would save all His otherwise condemned people (Ex. 13:13; 34:20). Could it not be that despite their cruel betrayal of him and utter faithlessness, dear Samson felt he was living out a kind of acted parable of what was possible for Israel: that through his zeal, and in his hands, the weak people of God could achieve the great victory over thousands which Moses and Joshua had earlier foretold? In this he was a superb type of the Lord.

Jdg 15:16 Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps on heaps; with the jawbone of a donkey I have slain a thousand men-

Samson sees all this as a personal triumph rather than seeing it in the context of God's plan to liberate Dan from the Philistines. Samson's victory song at Lehi smacks of personal vengeance, showing how mixed were his motives. There is little suggestion of the humble servant merely doing God's will:

"With a donkey's jaw-bone
I have made donkeys of them.
With a donkey's jaw-bone
I have killed a thousand men"
(15:16 NIV).

Lev. 26:3-8 had promised dramatic success against their enemies *on the basis of* obedience to the Law. The fact Samson had this power was therefore proof that he really was reckoned by God as zealously obedient to the Law; and yet he was like this in the midst of a sadly apostate Israel. This character study of Samson takes this view of his strength. This is in itself no mean achievement: to rise to a level of spirituality much higher than that achieved by the surrounding brotherhood.

Joshua's final exhortation to Israel contains a passage which reads as some kind of prophecy of Samson. It is proof enough that Samson is to be read as a symbol of Israel: "Be therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses... that you come not among these nations, these that remain among you (true in Samson's time)... but cleave unto the Lord your God...no man has been able to stand before you (this was Samson)... one man of you shall chase a thousand (cp. Jud. 15:16): for the Lord your God, He it is that fights for you (this was exactly true of Samson in Jud. 15:18)... take good heed unto yourselves... else if you go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and make marriages with them (as Samson did), and go in unto them, and they to you (cp. Jud. 15:1; 16:1, where Samson went in to the Philistine women): know for a certainty that the Lord your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you (cp. Jud. 16:20); but they shall be snares and traps unto you (Delilah!)... and thorns in your eyes, until you perish" (Josh. 23:6-13). This passage would associate Samson's God-given strength and victory over the Philistines with his obedience to God's word. It was not that Samson was just an arbitrary tool in God's hand. Frequently the things Samson says and does are full of allusion to various passages in the Law, and also earlier incidents recorded in Judges which would have been known to him probably as the oral word of God. The point is that God counted Samson's heart and partial obedience as enough obedience to work through him, and treat him as if he were obedient. Just as he was a "Nazirite to God".

Jdg 15:17 When he had finished speaking he threw away the jawbone, and that place was called Ramath Lehi-

And yet it was out of that jawbone which he discarded that water came to save his life (:19). He had used and then as it were cast away his first wife and best man, considering that the end [defeating the Philistines] justified the means. He is perhaps being shown that his attitude was wrong. The value and meaning of the human person, even if they are Philistines, is such that nobody should ever just be used and discarded.

Jdg 15:18 He was very thirsty and called on Yahweh and said, You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant; now shall I die for thirst and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised-

Samson had broken the Nazirite vow by touching the lion's carcass and eating the unclean honey from it. He had apparently drunk alcohol at the drinking party. He had touched the wet, fresh jawbone of a dead animal. He had touched dead bodies. Right after that, he faces death from thirst. He only survives by praying to Yahweh and then receiving miraculous water. God was teaching him that all his breaking of the Nazirite conditions was not unnoticed by Him, nor was Samson granted some kind of automatic exemption from God's law. He realizes this, and prays strongly to God for salvation. God was putting the brake on him. Or trying to. Because in the final incident with Delilah and his hair, he is brought up to reality with a harsh jolt. He effectively allowed Delilah to have his hair shorn [for surely he knew she would do this], and thus ended his Naziritiship. He on some level assumed this infringement of God's requirements would also be acceptable with God, and "as at other times" he could shake himself, receive power and murder the Philistines. But we cannot practice reductionism until there is no moral basis left in our relationship with God. See on Jud. 16:20.

His request for water in that dry place was abundantly answered- in the same way as Yahweh had responded to exactly the same request from a faithless Israel in the desert (Ex. 17:1-7; Num. 20:2-13). And the way he names the well after the miraculous provision of water, and the way presumably the opened well remained (15:19), has links with pseudo-

Israelite Hagar (Gen. 16:19 21:19). And yet even in these similarities, it must be noted that there was a certain spiritual culture in Samson's prayer. He didn't make a direct, crude demand for water. He placed his situation before God, and left it to Him to respond as He knew best. This is a feature of many spiritual prayers: not to crudely, directly ask for the obvious; but to simply inform the Almighty of the situation, in faith.

Samson at Lehi saw them as unclean asses; and yet he loved their women. And yet in the midst of this almost arrogance, he cries: "I thirst", and so exhibits something of the spirit of Christ in His final hour of agony and ultimate conquest on the cross (Jn. 19:28).

Samson despised the uncircumcised Philistines, as he had been brought up to (Jud. 14:3). He knew they hated him and yet he loved them and yet he hated them- all this shows the complexity of human nature, and describes our attitude to the world and the things of the flesh. And yet the only real answer is to *cut off* the flesh; to gouge out the eye that offends; not to comfortably go along with the fact that we have such a love: hate relationship with the flesh. For we cannot serve two masters; we can only ultimately love one. The Lord we serve is in many ways a demanding Lord.

Samson dying of thirst crying desperately for water recalls Hagar's experience (15:19 cp. Gen. 21:19).

Jdg 15:19 But God split the hollow place that is in Lehi and water came out of it-

This is the language of God's provision for Israel in the wilderness. The word translated "Lehi" is that for jaw bone (AV "God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout"), as if the water came out of the discarded jaw bone. "God split open the hollow place which was near [or "in"] the jawbone". As discussed on :15, here we have an example of God yet again taking the initiative in showing that He would work through the unclean. For He could have made the water appear from some other source. Likewise He worked through the bees and honey miraculously appearing in the cadaver of the lion.

When he had drunk, his spirit came again and he revived, therefore its name was called En Hakkore-

We note how place names were altered or given to commemorate what had happened. The way that so many pagan place names survived in ancient Israel is a reflection therefore of how little effort they made to eradicate pagan influence- for they were mostly idolaters themselves. We have here another miraculous anomaly in the story- a spring remained on the top of a hill, Ramath Lehi (:15), 'jawbone hill'. Springs are generally in valleys, not on the top of hills; and so this one was called the fountain of the one who called [on God].

Which is in Lehi to this day-

I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

Jdg 15:20 He judged Israel in the days of the Philistines for twenty years-

God's intention was that Samson was to deliver Israel from the Philistines; but somehow he never rose up to it, and only 'began' to do it (Jud. 13:5). They remained under the Philistines, even during his ministry. And he was hardly accepted as Israel's judge / saviour, for they tied

him up and handed him over to the Philistines. He made a few sporadic attempts in red hot personal zeal, confirmed by God, to deliver Israel. But he never rose up to the potential level that God had prepared for him in prospect. And yet for all this, he was accepted in the final analysis as a man of faith. On the other hand, we must factor in 1 Sam. 12:11, a comment about Samson that commentators have generally not given due weight to: "Yahweh sent Jerubbaal, Bedan, Jephthah and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and you lived in safety". The context is Samuel arguing that Israel didn't need a king to deliver them from their enemies, because they had had judges like Samson who delivered them. This certainly suggests that Samson did achieve something more than a few personal scraps with the Philistines, motivated by his personal anger issues. But it's not recorded. The Philistines themselves described him as "our enemy, the destroyer of our country who has slain many of us" (Jud. 16:24). Which encourages us to think that in God's wisdom, He has intentionally chosen to just record Samson at his worst, the low points of his life. To demonstrate that a believer [as Hebrews 11 treats Samson] may have very low moments, poor motivations etc. and yet still be a believer. It's no bad exercise to mentally write a spiritual autobiography of yourself, recording only you at your lowest moments. And yet by grace through faith, you too will be saved eternally.

JUDGES CHAPTER 16

Jdg 16:1 Samson went to Gaza and saw there a prostitute, and went in to her-

We noted earlier on Jud. 14:1 and 15:1 that the record presents us with strong anticlimaxes. We expect Samson to be spiritually strong, but he collapses in both 14:1 and 15:1. But by the end of Jud. 15 we are left with Samson strong in faith and humility, and having judged Israel 20 years. We are left hopeful that he is on the way up, spiritually. And now we read he goes to a Philistine city and sleeps with a prostitute. Again, our spiritual expectations are dashed. Yet despite all these failures to live up to potential, he will still be saved because of his faith.

This incident repeats how he went somewhere and saw a woman in Jud. 14. He presents as absolutely failing to examine himself, totally not self critical, blind to the consequences of his sins and therefore never learning from his mistakes. We think likewise of how a femme fatale teased his secret from him in Jud. 14 and then again in Jud. 16.

The way this passage starts with "Then" (see Heb., AV) is one of several classic conjunctions which occur in the Biblical record. The "But" of Acts 5:1 is another. After the spiritual and personal glory of the fight at Lehi, "Then..." Samson goes to Gaza and sees a whore. It may not have happened immediately afterwards (Jud. 15:20), but it seems purposefully placed where it is in the record. A similar example occurs in Jud. 14:19,20 cp. Jud. 15:1: after repenting of his marriage with the Philistine girl and using his failure as an opportunity to seek occasion against God's enemies, Samson then relents and lets his human love for the girl take him over, and he goes to visit and sleep with her. And again in Jud. 16:3, we see Samson repentant as he lies there at midnight, and he rises up and in the spirit of the Lord's cross, carries away the gate of his enemies. And then, "it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman..." (Jud. 16:4). He simply couldn't keep up the level of spiritual intensity which he fain would have. And again, we know much about this problem.

And yet Samson went to Gaza conscious that his people had failed to drive out the tribes there (Josh. 11:22). Judah had captured it in Joshua's strength (Jud. 1:18), but had let the Philistines return. So Samson chose Gaza from spiritual motives; and yet he schemed out his plan to enable him to gratify his flesh. But Samson lay there only until the middle of the night. Then he "got up and took hold of the doors..." (Jud. 16:1,3 NIV). If he went in to spend the night there, he presumably entered the house at around 7 or 8. He had what he

wanted, and then lay there thinking, the record seems to suggest, and decided to not lay there all night as he planned, but get up and do God's work. Whilst it is unrecorded, surely there were prayers of deep and fervent repentance as he lay there? His conscience likewise seems to have struck him after he attempted to marry the Philistine girl, and also when he burnt up the vineyards. And so again here. He may have justified his behaviour by reference back (in his deep subconscious, maybe) to how the spies sought to destroy Jericho by entering the city and lodging with a whore- who also lived near the city gate.

When Samson decided to attack Gaza by going into a harlot's house, he may have been consciously imitating the way the spies played their part in Jericho's destruction (16:1). And yet it was once again only a surface imitation. He fell for the 'little of both' syndrome, justifying it under the guise of Scriptural examples.

Jdg 16:2 The Gazites were told, Samson is here! They surrounded him and laid wait for him all night in the gate of the city, staying quiet all night and saying, Wait until dawn, then we will kill him-

"They laid wait for him all night" is describing what they intended to do; for he arose at midnight. They were apparently "in the gate of the city", where the whorehouse was just as Rahab's was. They waited outside her house, in the gate of the city, probably in the many guard chambers there were around the gate complex of a city. Yet they "surrounded him"; so he was in a room within the gate complex, used as a brothel, just as Rahab's brothel was on the city gate. Just as the Philistines would do later around Delilah's house [because he failed to see the similarities]. But Samson picks up the gate of the city- presumably killing the Philistines or making them flee. For the city gate complex was always heavily guarded in any city. Taking the gate of the city with its bar would likely have wrecked the whorehouse. The bar was a horizontal rod at the backs of the two leaves of the gate.

See on Ps. 118:10-12. The purpose of this final tragic chapter in Samson's life was to bring Samson to a final realization that there was no third way in the service of Yahweh: it's all or nothing. The Lord worked through Samson's 'little of both' syndrome. The Lord Jesus read the Samson record this way: He recommended that we too tear our eyes out to stop us stumbling from the path of total devotion (Mk. 9:47). We all know how the story turns out. And it's one of those parts of Scripture which I for one don't reading. I don't want to go on from chapter 15 to chapter 16. I know what's coming, and I'd rather not be reminded of the whole tragic sequence. And yet it's there, absolutely for our learning. And *Samson should have already learnt*. As his first wife had vexed her with her words to tease his secret from him, so Delilah did. As the Philistines laid wait for Samson as he lay with the whore in Gaza (16:2), so they laid wait in Delilah's bedroom (16:9). He had already repented of using God's service as an excuse for satisfying his own flesh in the incident with the Gaza prostitute. He had bitterly walked away from his first Philistine wife. He burnt down the vineyards, recalling how he had foolishly strolled in them as a Nazarite. He must have looked back and seen how he had played with fire. And now, he goes and does it all again. He goes to the valley of Sorek, 'choice vines', and Samson falls for Delilah, 'the vine'. He went down to the vineyards again; the Nazarite tried to take fire into his bosom again.

Jdg 16:3 Samson lay until midnight, then arose and took hold of the doors of the city gate and the two posts, picked them up, along with the bar, put them on his shoulders and carried them up to the top of the mountain that faces Hebron-

"Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight" (16:3 AV) gives a different picture: of Samson 'laying' with her as a man lays with a woman, and then getting up and going out to do God's work. The interplay between sexuality and spirituality was never stronger.

The incident in Gaza is evidently typical of the Lord's work. There was Samson, "the splendour of the sun", 'compassed in' by his enemies (as Christ on the cross, Ps. 118:5,10-12) in Gaza ('fortified stronghold', cp. death). Then he arose in the darkness, rendered powerless the gates of death and carried them up 30 miles to a high altitude (cp. Heaven), to Hebron, 'the city of fellowship', where the tomb of Abraham was (Gen. 23:19), and where Gentile giants had once lived (Num. 13:22), conquered by faithful Israelites. Joshua had taken Hebron (Josh. 10:36) but Israel had not followed up his victory, and the Philistines had returned; Caleb then took it (Josh. 15:13), but again, by Samson's time, the Philistines were back. And Samson, although a type of Christ, was intensely aware of all this failure (cp. how he chose Gaza and Timnath, areas with a similar history, for his other exploits). It would seem that Samson killed the men at the gates, the leaders of the city, and then took the gates with him (16:3 cp. 2). The Hebrew used for Samson 'taking away' the gates is that translated 'possess' in the Genesis promises. Thus he possessed the gates of his enemies and slew their figureheads, as the Lord did through the cross. Samson obviously saw some specific meaning in taking the gates to Hebron and the tomb of Abraham. He surely saw that he was prefiguring Messiah's work of taking the gate of his enemies, as promised to Abraham. Or perhaps he saw himself as 'in' the Messiah, and sharing in what He would do in the future. Archaeologists have found tablets that refer to the power of Baal to possess the gates of all who oppose him; and Samson evidently wanted to show the superiority of Yahweh over Baal. The fellowship ('Hebron') which was enabled by the Lord's victory should never be undone by us; He died that He might gather together in one all God's people, to reconcile us all in one body both to each other and to God. To break apart the body is therefore to deny the essential intention of the cross. There are other points of contact with the Lord's passion. The men of Gaza laid wait in the gates of the city; they were therefore the rulers? But they decided to only kill him in the morning. The rulers of the Jews decided likewise.

It is hard to decide whether Samson was an ordinary man "out of weakness made strong" by the Spirit; or whether he was a giant, extra empowered at times by the Spirit. To carry the gates and the bar that ran across them would require not only strength, but a very large person. The bar was a horizontal rod at the backs of the two leaves of the gate. Likewise his ability to touch both the pillars on which Dagon's temple rested would have required very long arms. A person's arm span is related to their height, and various Dagon temples have been uncovered. For his hands to be on each pillar, he would have been abnormally tall. This consideration could support the idea that he was a giant, and that in turn would perhaps explain his apparent lack of intelligence, his mother's previous barrenness due to genetic issues, inability to settle down with a woman, hot blooded compulsive behaviour, inability to charismatically lead Israel in battle and the fear the Philistines had of him when he first appeared on the scene at his wedding party [in the LXX]. In this case, he was the Israelite version of Goliath the Philistine giant.

Samson's strength isn't taken away despite his sin. He assumes that he can touch the unclean and morally do as he wishes, and God will remain with him. The fact God by grace appears to let man 'get away with it' leads men to the same tragic decline as we will now read of. It is a powerful warning. We note Hebron was 30 miles away and at an elevation of 3300 feet. It was on the frontier of Israelite and Philistine territory, and the gates placed there on a mountain there would have been visible to the entire Shephelah. If this mountain is the modern El Montar, it towered as a landmark familiar to all travellers along the caravan route from Syria to Egypt. Samson was seeking to make a point and to inspire Israel that they too could possess the gates of their enemies. Yet he does this right after spending an evening with a whore in Gaza. How do men feel after visiting a whore? Angry with themselves and wanting to prove themselves in some other way, since they have failed to find or keep a wife as the love of their life. Samson's physical feat right afterwards was surely motivated by

anger, with himself and with the Philistines and their whore. But God empowered that anger with a gift of His Spirit, and worked through Samson. And finally will save Samson eternally. We gasp at His grace.

Jdg 16:4 Afterward, he fell in love with a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah-

Samson had a mixed conscience when he slew the lion. He was in the vineyards, the very place where he shouldn't have been as a Nazarite, although he justified it by spiritual and even Biblical reasoning. He then burns up those vineyards in order to have a blameless conscience. He then loses that good conscience and cowers in the rocks. And then later he goes to the valley of Sorek (Heb. 'the vine') and forges a relationship with another worthless woman. Samson's marriage looks less acceptable in this context. So he returned to his old desire to walk near the forbidden fruit of the vine. His purges of conscience were temporary, and he returned to the old haunts and ways.

Jdg 16:5 The lords of the Philistines came to her and said, Entice him, and find out where his great strength lies, and how we might prevail against him to tie him up and subdue him. Then we will each one of us give you eleven hundred pieces of silver-

"Delilah" is a distinctly Hebrew name, and Sorek was on the border of Hebrew and Philistine territory. I will suggest on Jud. 17:1 that she is in fact the Hebrew woman who uses her wealth to sponsor her son to make an idol.

Prov. 6:26,27; 7:1 make clear allusion to Samson and Delilah, and they suggest that Delilah was a "whorish woman". In this case, her motivation for betraying Samson was fundamentally financial, apart from other lesser factors which there probably were. The bribe she was offered has been estimated in modern terms as around US\$ 2 million (2025). And Judas likewise went to the chief priests and asked how much they would give him for betraying the Lord. Again, Samson was a type of Christ. This all indicates the unbelievable materialism which is in our natures: to betray a good man, even the Son of God, ultimately for pieces of metal. We must have all asked: 'Why, oh why, did Samson go on trusting her, when it was so obvious she was going to betray him?'. It may have been because she was an Israelitess (even if a renegade). The way she says "The Philistines are upon you!" (16:20) and the way the lords of the Philistines came up to her (16:5) may suggest this. Their offer of money to her was exactly after the pattern of the Jews' approach to Judas. The way "pieces of silver" feature in both records leads us to wonder whether the correspondence was so exact that she also betrayed the helpless Samson with a kiss, as Judas did. See on Jud. 14:5.

We note that the same sum of 1100 pieces of silver will occur in the next chapter; see on Jud. 17:2.

The parallels between the woman of Timnah and Delilah are clear. The words of the Philistines to the woman are identical: 'Coax your husband' (Jud. 14:15); 'Coax him' (Jud. 16:5). Both women use the same language to persuade Samson to reveal his secret: 'You really hate me, you don't love me' (Jud. 14:16); 'How can you say you love me' (Jud. 16:15). Both women are described as nagging him and wearing him down (Jud. 14:17; 16:16). The point is that Samson didn't learn from his mistakes, refusing to perceive how circumstance was repeating in his life.

Jdg 16:6 Delilah said to Samson, Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be tied up and subdued-

As his first wife had vexed him with her words to tease his secret from him, so Delilah did. But Samson didn't learn from his life, and this is the tragedy of so much spiritual failure-

people don't learn from history, both their own and others. LXX "and humbled". It was crystal clear what Delilah intended to do with the information.

Jdg 16:7 Samson said to her, If I am tied with seven fresh cords that were never dried, then shall I become weak like other men-

"If I am tied..." is literally "If they tie me". Samson knew, on one hand, that Delilah was going to betray him and get the Philistines to tie him. But the way he continues in the relationship is psychologically credible. His hair was braided in seven locks (:19), and so his reference to seven cords was in fact reflective of how he had his hair in mind. If Delilah were a better psychologist, and a more educated guesser, she might have figured the answer even at this point.

He teased Delilah to tie him with seven "cords" or AV "withs", the Hebrew word implying made from a vine. He just would mess with the forbidden. Samson tells Delilah that if he is bound, he will be weak "like one man" (16:7 AVmg.). This is surely an allusion to passages like Lev. 26:8 and Josh. 23:10- that one man would chase many. Samson implies that he fights like he is many men; he appropriated those blessings to himself. He came to assume he had faith. Lifetime Christians have the same tendency, with the joy and vigour of first faith now far back in time. Samson had been bound before and had burst those bonds (Jud. 15:13); he seems to have assumed that one past deliverance was an automatic guarantee of future ones. His great zeal for the Lord's work seems to have lead him to chose the single life; and yet he evidently was in the habit of occasional affairs (Jud. 14:3 "is there never..."), using prostitutes and having on and off relationships with women like Delilah. Samson thought his devotion and the appalling apostacy of his brethren somehow justified it. Note how Timothy and Hezekiah seem to likewise have stumbled in their commitment to the single life.

Jdg 16:8 Then the lords of the Philistines brought to her seven fresh cords which had not been dried, and she tied him with them-

As this all happened in the bedroom (:9 NEV "inner room"), it seems to me that she used them in some kind of sexual bondage game. "Delilah" means 'weak', and Samson was the archetypical strong man. The mind will follow... as to how this played out in their sex life. And yet the strong was dominated by the weak, and eyeless in Gaza he was made to do women's work. Yet as noted on :9, even at such a low spiritual point in his life, God's Spirit remained with him.

Jdg 16:9 Now she had an ambush waiting in the inner room-

The idea is, "the bedroom". See on :8. The Philistines are described as "abiding" in Delilah's house (16:9 AV)- a word normally used in the sense of 'permanently living'. It would seem that Samson didn't permanently live with her, but occasionally visited her, until at the end he was happy to live with her (she pressed him "daily"), co-habiting with her other Philistine lovers. With his hair shaven, he 'went out, as at other times'- deciding bitterly that he had really had enough, and once again he would walk out on her, this time for good, and would 'shake himself' and take a hold on himself. But this time it was too late.

She said to him, The Philistines are upon you, Samson! He broke the cords, as a string of tow is broken when it touches the fire. So his strength was not known-

The thongs burst from him as when string comes close to a flame. This is similar to the scene in Jud. 15:14, where because the Spirit was upon him, Samson became like a burning fire which snapped his bonds. See on :12.

Jdg 16:10 Delilah said to Samson, You have made a fool of me and told me lies! Now please

tell me how you can be tied-

We are left to imagine all the crocodile tears and lies told by Delilah regarding how she set him up to be ambushed and slain by Philistines, whilst claiming she loved him.

Jdg 16:11 He said to her, If I am tied with new ropes with which no work has been done, then I shall become weak like other men-

Samson ends up bound (s.w. "tied") in fetters of brass. He was truly an Israelite in bondage to the Philistines, the very thing he had so despised and given his life to fighting against. But in these bondage games with Delilah, he liked being tied up in bondage to a Philistine [or quite possibly, a Hebrew woman involved with the Philistines]. We have a deep insight here into how he actually both loved and hated Philistine bondage. Just as he loved vineyards and yet burnt them up. This inability to wholly dedicate himself to Yahweh's ways and people was to be his undoing.

Samson was reasoning that as the ropes of Jud. 15:11 had been overcome by the Spirit, so any attempt to tie him up would trigger the same outpouring of Spirit power.

Jdg 16:12 So Delilah took new ropes and tied him with them and said to him, The Philistines are upon you, Samson! The ambush was waiting in the inner room. He broke them off his arms like a thread-

In the next two occasions when Samson broke his bands (Jud. 16:12,14), the language of breaking them as if there was fire within him (as in :9, see note there) doesn't occur. It may be that although the fire of the Spirit was within him, Samson came to feel that he, of his *own* ability, was doing the miracles: "*he snapped the ropes off his arms...*". There is even a sense of unjustified, egoistic sarcasm in the way he gets the Philistines to tie him with flimsy pieces of grass and then breaks them off and kills them. Samson had broken the ropes which the men of Judah had bound him with; he was living in the assumption that God would act as He had done before, empowering him to get out of his problems by grace. He was slipping into continuing in sin that grace might abound, presuming upon grace, seeing grace as a right and entitlement. And yet as with the power of the Spirit right after sleeping with a prostitute in :2,3, so again despite such weakness, God's Spirit power still came upon him. But there had to be a limit to his reductionism.

Jdg 16:13 Delilah said to Samson, Until now you have fooled me and told me lies. Tell me how you can be tied. He said to her, If you weave the seven braids of my hair into the fabric on the loom, I will become as weak as other men-

Samson had been named after the sun god, and was raised near the sun god shrine at Beth Shemesh. Long hair was associated with the sun gods- the long hairs representing the rays of the sun. The sun gods are depicted as having long hair- Ra-Horakhtz, Attis, Surya, and Lugh. Samson chose to wear his long hair as seven locks (Jud. 16:13), and this is exactly the kind of radiant crown seen on the sun gods. The crown of the Greek sun-god Helios was often depicted with seven spikes. This continues the theme- that Samson mixed Yahweh worship with paganism; and his hatred of the Philistines was not therefore purely a result of his love for Yahweh.

See on Ps. 118:10-12. He initially says: "If *they* bind me..." (16:7), but changes this to "If *you*..."; he knew beforehand that she would betray him, although couldn't admit it to himself. And so we see the complexity of Samson's situation. It was not that his telling of the secret to Delilah was necessarily a sin in itself. He trusted her and yet knew on another level she would betray him. This is just a part of human nature. It helps explain why the Lord Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas would betray him (Jn. 6:64), and yet how He could really trust in Judas as his own familiar friend, confide in him (Ps. 41:9), tell him that he would sit with

the other eleven on thrones in the Kingdom (Mt. 19:28). This was ever a serious contradiction for me, until considering the Samson : Delilah relationship in depth. A man can know something about someone on one level, but act and feel towards them in a quite different way than this knowledge requires. David likewise must have known Absalom's deceit; but he chose not to see it, for love's sake. "They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things [just as Absalom did in the gate]... but I, as a deaf man, heard not" (Ps. 38:12,13). Paul surely knew how Corinth despised him, how little they knew and believed, and as he himself said, the more he loved them, the less they loved him. And yet in all honesty he could say: "As you abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence *and in your love to us*" (2 Cor. 8:7). Yet the more abundantly he loved them, the less they loved him- not the more abundantly. Yet he saw them as loving him abundantly. One also gets the sense that the Gibeonites' deception was somehow guessed by the elders of Israel, but against their better judgment they disregarded the telltale signs (Josh. 9:7). Or Amasa, taking no heed to the sword in Joab's hand... against his better judgment, surely (2 Sam. 20:10). This is a feature of human nature; the contradictions evident in the Jesus : Judas relationship and the Samson : Delilah relationship are only explicable for me by realizing this. The whole thing is an eloquent essay in the Lord's humanity and the depth of His 'in-loveness' with Judas the traitor. If you love someone, you like them and see them as different and better to how they are. You see them as more than they are, as more than they can be. And so it is with God's love, resulting in what Paul would call Him imputing righteousness to us, justifying us, counting us right.

And this Lord is our Lord, the same yesterday and today. Our self-knowledge will be deepened by realizing that we too have this spiritual schizophrenia: it's not that we are spiritual one day and unspiritual the next. We are both flesh and spirit at the very same moment. Appreciation of this will help us cope with the more evident failures of our brethren. It doesn't necessarily mean that they must be written off as totally unspiritual and insincere because of acts and attitudes of evident unspirituality. The Spirit is still there, at the very same moment. Think of how Samson slept with a whore until midnight, and then in faith rose up and was granted the Spirit to perform a great act of Christ-like, cross-like victory over the enemies of God's people.

Jdg 16:14 She wove his hair into the fabric and fastened it with the pin, and said to him, The Philistines are upon you, Samson! He awoke and pulled away the pin from the loom and the fabric-

The way Samson asked Delilah to fasten the hair of his head with a nail and then try to have mastery over him is a parody of what would have been a well known incident: Deborah's mastery over Barak (Jud. 4:21). This would indicate that Scripture was never far from his mind. In Samson's relationship with Delilah, he got closer and closer to the edge. Samson tells Delilah to bind him, then he gets closer to showing his hand: he asks her to do something to his hair. And then, he falls to the final folly. It could even be that after the previous teasings he left her completely (16:14 AV "he went away")- after the pattern of his previous twinges of conscience concerning his first wife, his love of vineyards, his lying with the whore in Gaza... But he evidently returned to her.

Jdg 16:15 She said to him, How can you say, 'I love you', when your heart is not with me? You have fooled me three times and have not told me where your great strength lies-

Even at his weakest, Delilah had observed that his heart wasn't with her: it was somewhere else, i.e. with the God of Israel. She repeats the very words of Samson's first wife. And he failed to discern the patterns in life, to learn from his mistakes. Because he wasn't deeply impressed by his sin, because his anger and pride were so dominant in his personality.

Jdg 16:16 When she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, he became tired to death-

Samson's marriage reflects a spiritual brinkmanship which was his spiritual undoing, however. For the same word is used concerning how Delilah later vexed him unto death with her words, and then Samson rose up and slew the Philistines with God's help. The same word is used concerning how the Gentile enemies of an apostate Israel would afflict them (Dt. 28:53,55,57). Yet at this very same time, Samson had faith. But there came a time- there had to come a time, for the sake of Samson's eternal salvation- when this having a little of both had to be ended.

His becoming tired to death could mean that he now decides upon a path to death. His later suicide was just the outworking of his decision to die at this point; see on :28.

Jdg 16:17 So he told her everything, and said to her, No razor has ever come on my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will go from me and I will become weak like any other man-

Samson's zeal to deliver Israel was confirmed by God, in that he was given gifts of Holy Spirit in order to enable him to deliver Israel. However, this doesn't mean that he himself was a man rippling with muscle. The Philistines wanted to find out the *secret* of his strength; it wasn't that he had such evidently bulging muscles that the answer was self-evident. He told Delilah that if his head were shaved, he would be like any other man. He was therefore just an ordinary man, made strong by the Father after the pattern of the Saviour he typified. It wasn't a permanent strength. This is in harmony with the way in which the Spirit was used in the New Testament. The Spirit came upon the apostles and they were filled up with it, as it were, and then drained of it once the work was done; and had to be filled with it again when the next eventuality arose. Indeed, the word *baptizo* strictly means 'to fill and thereby submerge'; hence the use of the term in classical Greek concerning the sinking of ships or the filling of a bottle. Therefore the idea of baptism with Holy Spirit could simply be describing a temporary filling of the Apostles with power in order to achieve certain specific aims.

If this is indeed how Samson experienced his fillings with the Spirit, it throws new light on the way he allowed Delilah to apparently suck information out of him. She asked for the secret of his strength; he knew she would betray him; he told her; she betrayed him, which meant a group of Philistine warriors came and hid themselves in the house (full known to Samson); and he then rose up and killed them, using the gift of God's Spirit. He was so sure that God would use him in this way, that he thought he could do anything in order to entice Philistine warriors into his presence- even if it involved gratifying his own flesh. The way he threw away the jawbone after killing 1000 Philistines at Lehi may suggest that he felt that now he had done the job, the instrument was useless; and he begged the Lord to give him drink. He knew that now he was an ordinary man again.

Jdg 16:18 When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent for the lords of the Philistines saying, Come up once more, for he has told me everything. Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her, and brought the money with them-

It has been suggested from the way the Philistine lords are described as coming up to her, and the way in which she speaks of "the Philistines" (16:18-20), that she was in fact an apostate Israelitess. And thus he justified himself. We are left to ponder how Delilah lived after she had received all the money she clearly coveted. Was she happy? Did what she did buy her happiness? Clearly not.

Jdg 16:19 She made him sleep on her knees, and then she called for a man who shaved off the seven braids of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him-

See on 2 Chron. 33:12,13; Neh. 13:22. It should be noted that his strength was not somehow magically associated with his hair; his strength went from him because Yahweh departed from him (16:19,20). We have seen earlier that Samson was well into spiritual brinkmanship. It had characterized his life, according to the selection of incidents the record presents us with. The sequence of events is worth listing:

Delilah asked Samson to tell her his closest secret,

then Delilah bound Samson as he asked;

Samson awakes from a deep sleep with Delilah;

Delilah playfully afflicts Samson while he is bound and Samson overcomes Delilah (16:19 implies this happened each time);

Then Samson realizes Delilah has betrayed him;

and the Philistine warriors were there waiting in the bedroom.

Then Samson goes out of the bedroom, shakes himself and kills them.

Then Delilah says Samson doesn't really love her

- and they repeat the experience.

This is the classic material for love : hate relationships. At first sight, Samson appears an incomprehensible fool. But more extended meditation reveals the human likelihood of it all. She would've convincingly repented and asked for one last chance- time and again. It is hard not to interpret his sleeping exhausted with her and then the bondage session as some kind of sex game, followed by drinking alcohol so that he fell fast asleep [thus mocking his Nazirite vow]. And yet Samson thought he was strong enough to cope with it, as did Solomon years later. He may even have had some kind of desire to simply mock the Philistines when he suggested they should tie him up with seven pieces of grass. He seems to somehow have known that his first wife would wangle his secret from him and betray him, and thus he would have the opportunity to kill Philistines- even though he didn't intend to open his heart to her (Jud. 14:16). And now the same happened. He seems to have known that she would betray him, although he evidently thought better of her; for he was deeply in love with her.

The shame of the final fight is graciously unrecorded. The events of 16:19-21 seem a little out of sequence. It would seem that Delilah awoke Samson, and he thought he would go outside, shake himself and kill the Philistines whom he was sure were in wait. But she started to tease him as before in their games of bondage; but this time, "she began to subdue him, and he began to weaken" (16:19 LXX; one meaning of 'Delilah' is 'the one who weakens'). "Began" is a strange translation; it is often translated to profane / humble. She spiritually abused him. And then she called the Philistines. He was powerless, physically, beneath that woman, and was therefore no match for them. The fact she was physically stronger than him when the Spirit of the Lord left him is proof enough that he was not a physically strong man in his own right. The way the apostate woman subdued him physically, in the name of a love / sex game, would have remained in his memory. He, the strong man of Israel, had been conquered by a worthless woman. His humiliation was to be typical of Israel's: "children are their oppressors (cp. the young lad at the feast?), women rule over them" (Is. 3:12). It is quite possible that Peter had Samson in mind, when he wrote of how "they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness... they themselves are the servants of corruption: *for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage*. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world... they are again *entangled* therein, and overcome..." (2 Pet. 2:18-20). Samson had been spiritually overcome, and therefore physically he was overcome and brought in bondage. Thus Peter understood that Samson is everyman.

"Torment" is 'humiliate', and is twice used of rape in Jud. 19:24; 20:5. It is quite possible that she sexually humiliates him in some form as he is tied up. Clearly the love he had for her was blind to the fact she had a seething hatred of him.

We note that "she called for a man" is not found in all texts; some say that she cut Samson's hair. Jack Sasson suggests: "Bringing him to sleep on her lap, she called to the man [Samson], then began to cut the seven braids on his hair".

Jdg 16:20 She said, The Philistines are upon you, Samson! He awoke out of sleep and said, I will go out as before and shake myself to be free of them. But he didn't know that Yahweh had departed from him-

See on Jud. 15:16. The way Samson was so deeply sleeping on Delilah's knees that he didn't feel them shave him, and then he went out and shook himself (this seems a fair translation)- all this could suggest he was drunk. There is no concrete evidence for this, but his love of vineyards would suggest he had a yearning for the forbidden fruit. And Sorek means the vine, and "Delilah" can be understood as 'vine woman'. He had broken the Nazarite vow by touching dead bodies, he obviously thought that having unshaven hair was only tokenistic and irrelevant to the real spirit of Nazariteship, and therefore he may have reasoned that alcohol was also another tokenism. Thus his reductionism destroyed him (almost). Perhaps it was brought about by a willful misunderstanding of God's waiving of the Nazarite ban on touching dead bodies; for after all, God had made Samson a Nazarite, and then empowered him to go and kill Philistines in personal combat, thereby touching dead bodies. So God waived one principle for a more important one; and yet Samson abused this, taking the principle far further than God intended, to the point that he ended up justifying sin as righteousness.

"He didn't know that Yahweh had left him" is the depth of spiritual tragedy. The Lord Jesus may have had this in mind when He spoke of how the rejected would not know what hour He would come upon them (Rev. 3:3). Samson went through the experience of rejection at the Lord's hands in advance of the actual judgment seat. He was set grinding in the prison- a figure which was later picked up as representative of the unbeliever generally (Is. 42:7; 61:1; 1 Pet. 3:19). He was as it were delivered to satan, that he might learn (1 Tim. 1:20); his own wickedness corrected him (Jer. 2:19). And this finally brought him to himself. His experience was a pattern for the apostate Israel whom he loved. Yahweh forsaking His people is associated with them cutting off their hair in Jer. 7:29- an evident allusion to Samson's shame. As the Philistines rejoiced over Samson and praised their god for their victory, so Babylon was to do years later, as Zedekiah like Samson had his eyes put out.

We have here a sober warning. Samson had broken the Nazirite conditions multiple times, and there is no mention of his cleansing nor rededication. He came to assume that letters of the law were irrelevant. And in the end, he thought that even his hair could be shorn. We see for all time that there is a limit to God's patience, and the spirit of His laws overriding the letters. We cannot practice reductionism to the end, whereby nothing remains. We cannot assume that we have a right to God's acceptance of us; we are in fact entitled to nothing but death. I explained on Jud. 15:18 that God had previously sought to put the brake on Samson's downward slide in all this, by forcing him to pray for salvation rather than automatically providing it. But the lesson, as ever with Samson, went unheeded. Just as he failed to learn the lessons from his first wife enticing him to share his secret and then betraying him.

Jdg 16:21 The Philistines seized him and put out his eyes, and they brought him down to Gaza, bound him with fetters of brass, and made him work at grinding in the mill in the prison-

"Bound" is the word used for how Delilah had bound Samson with weak things like grass and hair, just as the Israelites had bound him before handing him over to the Philistines. The same word is used. He now found that he was unable to break what he was bound with. He was truly an Israelite in bondage to the Philistines, the very thing he had so despised and given his life to fighting against.

Samson, who boasted that he had made donkeys of the Philistines, is now made as a donkey. Dagon was the god of corn, so Samson's grinding corn was showing him to be a servant of Dagon and not of Yahweh. He who had lusted with his eyes now lost his eyes.

He was given women's work in prison, grinding at the mill, in order to rub the point in (Ex. 11:5; Mt. 24:41). 'Grinding' was some kind of figure of speech for the sex act: "May my wife grind for another, and over her let other men kneel" (Job 31:10). "Take a pair of millstones and grind flour. Uncover your veil, strip off your skirt, reveal your thigh... Your nakedness shall be exposed, also your disgrace shall be revealed" (Is. 47:2,3). The "fetters of brass" with which he was bound would have recalled his games of bondage with Delilah, and the same word is translated "filthiness" in a sexual context (Ez. 16:36). The word used for 'prison' means literally 'house of binding'- an extension of Delilah's house, they would have joked. One can imagine how the story of how Delilah enticed him would have become the gossip of the nation.

The idea of binding the strong man must surely look back to Samson. The language can't just be accidentally similar (cp. Jud. 16:21). This means that the Lord saw Samson as the very epitome of Satan, even though ultimately he was a man of faith (Heb. 11:32). Thus the Spirit doesn't forget a man's weakness, even though ultimately he may be counted righteous.

Jdg 16:22 However the hair of his head began to grow again after he had been shaved-

The record seems to suggest there was a link between the growth of his hair, and God giving him strength again. This doesn't mean that there was some metaphysical link between his strength and his hair. Rather does it show how God responded to his faith and *what was behind the growth of his hair*, and therefore gave him strength to destroy the Philistines. It would seem that Samson decided to keep the Nazarite vow again. He was in no position to offer the inaugatory sacrifice which the law required; and yet he threw himself upon God's grace, trusting that his zeal would be accepted by God; that he, the sinner and failure and shamer of Yahweh, could be allowed to make that special act of devotion in Nazariteship. And he was accepted in this, as witnessed by the great power of the death of Samson. It must be emphasized that his strength was not tied up in his hair. He only ground in the prison a short time, until the great sacrifice was offered to Dagon in thanks for Samson's capture. In that time, his hair grew- but not very long, in such a short time (no more than months, Jud. 16:22,23). The growth of his hair is to be associated with his renewed determination to keep the Nazarite vow. He was reckoned by God as a lifelong Nazarite (Jud. 15:7); the time when his hair was cut was therefore overlooked by God. His zealous repentance and desire to respond to the gracious way in which God still recognized him as a lifelong Nazarite, although he wasn't one, inspired him to a real faith and repentance. It was this, not the fact he had some hair again, which lead to God empowering him to destroy the palace of Dagon.

The question arises: why did Samson tell Delilah that if his hair was cut, he would become weak? Surely he must have known within him that she would do it, in line with past experience? He went out as before to fight the Philistines, surely aware that he had been shaved, and yet assuming God would still be with him. He had come to realize that his long hair was not the real source of his strength, on some kind of metaphysical level. He saw that his strength was from the Spirit of God, not long hair or Nazariteship. He went out knowing, presumably, that his hair had been shaven, and yet still assumed he would have God's

strength. And even when his hair began to grow again, he still had to pray for strength (Jud. 16:28). He fell into the downward spiral of reductionism. He figured that if his hair was shaved, well it was no big deal. He was supposed to be a Nazarite all the days of his life, and yet perhaps he came to reason that because he had touched plenty of dead bodies, he therefore needed to be shaved anyway (Num. 6:9). He thought that therefore God would accept him in principle as a Nazarite even though he had broken the letter of Nazariteship, and therefore losing his hair was only a surface level indicator of spirituality. And yet there is also good reason to think that there was an association in Samson's mind between his hair and his God-given strength. For why did he "tell her all his heart" by saying that if he were shaved, he would lose his strength? And of course, when his hair was cut off, then his strength went. Samson saw a link between being a Nazarite and having strength (Jud. 16:17). When Samson went outside from Delilah and shook himself as he usually did, was he not shaking his hair free before attacking the Philistines, as if he saw in his hair the source of his strength? However, this must all be balanced against the evidence that Samson originally realized that his strength came from God, not his hair. Whilst he even had this realization, theoretically, when he gave Delilah the possibility of shaving him, he also at this time had the conception that his strength was associated with his hair length. I would suggest that this can be resolved by understanding that although his strength was not in his hair, this is how Samson came to see it. And therefore God went along with this view, and treated Samson *as if* his strength was in his hair. And therefore He departed from him when he allowed his hair to be shaved. If Samson had really told Delilah the truth about the source of his strength, he would have said: 'Faith, causing the Spirit of God to come upon me to do His work'. Samson knew this, and therefore he allowed her to shave him; and yet it was also true that in his heart of hearts, he also at the same time believed that his hair was the source of his strength. So he was the victim of reductionism, as well as tokenism. He came to see the mere possession of long hair as a sign of spirituality. And yet at the same time he reduced and reduced the real meaning of Nazariteship to nothing. Difficult as this analysis may be to grasp, I really believe that it has much to teach us; for the latter day brotherhood is afflicted with exactly these same problems.

Jdg 16:23 The lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to rejoice, for they said, Our god has delivered Samson our enemy into our hand-

The Philistines didn't kill Samson immediately; they wanted to prolong the agony of his death. It was evidently their intention to kill him. Perhaps it was their plan to torture him and then finally torture him to death at the feast to their god- cp. the Lord's planned death at Passover. The great sacrifice which they planned to offer (Heb. 'kill') was probably Samson. Dagon was the grain god, and Samson's burning of their grain would have been seen as a victory of Yahweh over Dagon. Now the Philistines were attempting to make Yahweh the loser against Dagon. Samson's desire to end his miserable life was nuanced against his desire to vindicate Yahweh. And Yahweh gave him the strength to do so.

Jdg 16:24 When the people saw him, they praised their god. They said, Our god has delivered our enemy, the destroyer of our country who has slain many of us, into our hand- See on Jud. 14:14. Gentiles praising their gods, mocking Yahweh, and then suddenly being destroyed was a scene repeated in Dan. 5:4.

Jdg 16:25 When their hearts were merry they said, Call for Samson so that he can entertain us. They called Samson out of the prison, and he performed before them. They set him between the pillars-

Samson suddenly called up out of the prison house (16:25) recalls Joseph (Gen. 41:14) and John the Baptist (Mt. 14:9). The same Divine hand was at work in such different lives, leaving the same hallmarks behind in the record. And the more familiar and thoughtful we are about Biblical history, the more we too will perceive this. LXX "they smote him with the palms of their hands, and set him between the pillars". This has strange relevance to the Lord's experience, also smitten with the palms of His tormentors, and put to death between two poles / crosses.

"Entertain us" is literally 'make sport'. I discussed on :21 the sexual aspects to Samson's humiliation. The same word is used in a sexual context in Gen. 26:8, when Isaac is observed 'sporting' with Rebekah.

Jdg 16:26 and Samson said to the boy who held him by the hand, Allow me to feel the pillars on which the house rests so that I can lean on them-

A read through all the recorded words of Samson will reveal a growing humility and spirituality. "Suffer me that I may... that I may" (16:26 AV) reflects a courtesy and humility distinctly lacking in his previous recorded speech. His growth came to its intended climax in the repentance and final peak of spirituality which he achieved in his time of dying. Or it may be that the utter exhaustion of Samson from their afflictions (prodding with sticks?) is revealed when he asks the lad "Suffer me..." (Heb. 'allow me to rest / take a break'). This pointed forward to the Lord's physical exhaustion, driven to the limit of human endurance, must be imagined.

God patiently worked through the weakness of Samson to achieve not only a great final victory over the Philistines, but also Samson's own salvation. The way Samson asked the lad to guide him to the pillars in the Philistine language, learnt in his mis-spent relationships with women, the way he knew the architectural structure of the Dagon-temple, where presumably he had been in his earlier love-hate affair with the Philistines- God didn't reject him for these earlier failures, but worked with him, making use of the knowledge and experience which Samson had picked up along the road of earlier failure. This is how God works with us, too- if only we would have the humility to realize it. And the least we can do is to replicate it in our dealings with our failing brethren.

Samson dying between the two pillars is broadly similar, as a kind of silhouette, to the Lord's death between two other crosses. The way the lad (also a Hebrew? for they spoke the same language?) "held" Samson's hand is significant, for the same word is translated 'to strengthen / encourage'. Perhaps the lad strengthened Samson as the repentant thief did the Lord.

Jdg 16:27 Now the house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about three thousand men and women watching while Samson performed-

The destruction of them all would have left a huge hole in Philistine power. And yet still Israel failed to capitalize on this victory, for by Saul's time, Israel were effectively in bondage to them again.

Jdg 16:28 Samson called to Yahweh and said, Lord Yahweh, remember me please, and strengthen me please, just this once oh God, that I may with one blow be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes-

Heb. "that I may avenge myself the revenge of one of my two eyes". His idea was that the death of all those Philistines would only avenge the loss of one of his eyes. The fact he had lost two of his eyes required, he implied, a revenge beyond revenge. He died very bitter. Or

we can understand him to desire vengeance for one of his eyes, believing that the vengeance for the other eye would come at the last day. In this case he still fails, even right at the end, to appreciate his sinfulness with his eyes and the rightful judgment for this. And yet still he will be saved, along with many others who likewise refused to appreciate their own sinfulness and resented their sufferings resultant from that.

Samson's name was an allusion to the sun god. The sun was thought to be the 'eye' of Heaven. Samson's dying request that he be avenged for the loss of his eyes suggests he died still with a strong sense of association with the sun god. See on :13.

We think of other spiritual heroes who made a suicidal death wish: Elijah, Jeremiah, Jonah and Job, along with Tobit and Sarah in the Apocrypha. But God only grants this wish to Samson. Again we have an anomaly in the story. The Samson story ends as it began, with God working through human weakness to achieve His purpose. And the weakness of the person, in Samson's case, isn't a deal breaker for their final salvation. There is such huge encouragement in this. We are left to ponder the motives for Samson's suicide. Suicide is usually assumed to be a case of the victim concluding they have no better reason to continue living. And Samson's miserable state, grinding eyeless in Gaza under cruel abuse, would certainly fit that scenario. We can connect Samson's suicide with the way that he knowingly gives Delilah the secret to his strength. That was in a way suicidal, because he knew what was going to follow. From that point onwards, he considered his life not worth living- because her psychological bullying of him led him to suicide: "When she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, he became tired to death" (:16). Possibly at that point he decided his life wasn't worth living. The love of his life was pressing him to death. And he gives in, setting in process a path that he knew would lead to his death.

But in a case like Samson's, it has to be factored in that a man may end his life because he considers his objective at the time to be of greater value than his own life. A soldier may charge the enemy knowing he will lose his life but kill many of their soldiers by doing so. This too was clearly present in Samson's decision. So again we are left with mixed motives, right at the end. And yet he will still be saved. God sees the good.

Samson desired vengeance for the loss of his eyes, and as such hints at his earlier comments that he had done to the Philistines as they had done to him, and he felt his behaviour to them was somehow in terms of an eye for an eye, the *lex talionis*: "If you do this will I not be revenged against you, and after that I will cease?" (Jud. 15:7). "As they have done to me, so I have done to them" (Jud. 15:11). He kills 30 men because his wife betrayed him. He burnt up the corn harvest because the wife he had abandoned had remarried. His expectation that he has the right to sex with her after her remarriage is unreasonable and betrays a sense of over entitlement. He kills many people because his ex-wife had been executed by the Philistines. He kills a thousand men with a jawbone because the Philistine authorities tried to arrest him. He wrecks a city gate because he was angry with himself for sleeping with a whore. Now he wants to kill 3000 people because he has lost his sight. The revenge he took was always far more than an eye for an eye, even though he sees it all as justified, legitimate revenge within the terms of *lex talionis* ["If you do this will I not be revenged against you, and after that I will cease?" (Jud. 15:7)]. The Mosaic examples of an eye for an eye are always careful to insist that any such punishment must never exceed the harm initially done. Samson seems to have had a sense of over entitlement and a genuinely warped sense of equality / measure for measure. Possibly an overbearing mother and distant, weak and ineffective father contributed to this narcissism. We note of course that the Lord's teaching was that "an eye for an eye" was not anyway the ideal standard of spirituality. And yet God worked through this, to begin the deliverance of Israel from the Philistines.

Like Paul and the crucified thief, Samson by his death came to a deep realization of the reality of judgment to come: "Remember me" must be read in this context. It carries the

connotation of 'remember me for good and therefore forgive me at the judgment' in Ps. 25:6,7; Lk. 23:46. It seems that Nehemiah was inspired by this at his end (Neh. 13:22,31; did he too come to a finer realization of his failures at the end?). "Remember me" was a cry only used prior to Samson by men in weakness: Gen. 15:8; Josh. 7:7; Jud. 6:22 (Gideon, Samson's hero, had used it). Yet now Samson appropriates it to himself in faith that he will be mercifully treated at the judgment. And his example in turn inspired Nehemiah. The intensity of Samson's repentance was quite something. It must have inspired Manasseh (2 Chron. 33:11), who like Samson was bound (16:21) and humbled (Jud. 16:5,16,19 AVmg.)- and then repented with a like intensity. And Zedekiah went through the same basic experience, of capture by his enemies, having his eyes put out, his capture attributed to false gods; and he likewise repented (2 Kings 25:7).

Samson is therefore listed amongst those who out of weakness were made strong (Heb. 11:34). A character study of Samson must remember this about him. This could suggest that he was even weaker than a normal man; or it could be a reference to the way in which out of his final spiritual weakness and degradation he was so wonderfully strengthened.

But Samson's death plea for vengeance against the Philistines for his two eyes sounds woefully human. Indeed, the RSV and RVmg. speak of him asking for vengeance "for one of my two eyes", as if he felt that even if God gave the destruction he asked for, this would only half avenge him. This would indicate a real bitterness, an unGodly hatred of both sinner and sin. In some ways, for all the intensity of weeping before God in repentance (16:28 LXX), Samson had not progressed much from his attitude in Jud. 15:7, over 20 years before- where he once again had admitted that his motive for 'seeking occasion against the Philistines' was partly just personal revenge. The spirit of not avenging oneself but leaving it to God to do was evidently something he never quite rose up to in his life (Rom. 12:19). "That I may be *at once* avenged of the Philistines *for my two eyes*" seems to be quite without any desire for the vindication of God's Name. Although it seems to me it was wrong, and betrayed some unspirituality, yet it is taken as the epitome of the desire of all the faithful for vindication through the coming of Christ (Rev. 6:10). Samson died therefore with some unconquered weakness, just as we will and as will our brethren. Yet we are assured in Heb. 11:34 that he will be saved in the end.

In the time of his humbling and mocking, in the wake of years of spiritual self-assurance, Job set such a clear prototype of Samson that Samson surely must have realized this, as he ground in the prison house. Job too suffered from blindness in his afflictions (Job 11:20; 17:5; 19:8; 30:12).

Job 30:1 mocked by youth = Judges 16:26

Job 30:6 The wicked dwell in the rocks = Judges 15:8

Job 30:9 "Now I am their song, yes, I am their byword" = Judges 16:25

Job 30:11 "He has loosed my cord and afflicted me" = In Judges 16:8 the same word is used of the cords with which Samson was bound, and which the Philistines loosed. Only a short time later God was afflicting him through Delilah (16:19)

Job 30:12 "Upon my right hand rise the youth; they push away my feet... they mar my path, they set forward my calamity". This indicates Job's poor eyesight and how the youth abused him. = This is exactly what happened to Samson. The lad made him dance, according to Jewish tradition, by poking Samson with sticks (16:25,26)

Job 30:17 "My bones are pierced in me in the night season: and my sinews take no rest". = Both Samson and Job came to fellowship something of the Lord's future cross: the unnatural darkness, the pierced bones, the constant ache of sinews: as Samson ground and danced, and as the Lord heaved Himself up and down on His sinews to breathe.

Job 30:19 "He has cast me into the mire (sometimes an idiom for prison), and I am become like dust and ashes" = As Samson in prison came to be like an ordinary man (dust and ashes; 16:11).

Job 30:20 "I cry unto You... I stand up" = Samson cried to Yahweh, standing up (16:28)

Job 30:24 "Howbeit he will not stretch out his hand to the grave" = Samson likewise would have come to the hope of personal resurrection.

According to Samson's appreciation of these links, so he would have reaped encouragement and hope. Job's last words were followed by a final humbling, and then the glorious justification of himself and the judgment of his enemies, to culminate in his future resurrection. One hopes that Samson saw the point and grasped hold of the hope offered. And this is not all. There were other words in Job which would have so comforted Samson at the end: "Behold, God is strong... He withdraws not His eyes from the righteous... and if they be bound in fetters, and be held in cords of affliction; then He shows them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He opens also their ear to discipline, and commands that they return from iniquity... but the hypocrites in heart... *cry not* (as Samson did) when He binds them" (Job 36:5-13).

There is further evidence, from later Scripture, that Samson's zeal was born from the word. A character study of Samson needs to consider what later Scripture implies about him. It seems that Jeremiah was one of several later characters who found inspiration in Samson, and alluded to him in their prayers to God, seeing the similarities between his spirit and theirs:

"O Yahweh [Samson only used the Yahweh Name at the end of his life], You know: remember me [as Samson asked to be remembered for good], and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors ["that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines"]... know that for Your sake I have suffered rebuke [the Philistines doubtless mocked Yahweh as well as Samson]. Your words were found, and I did eat them [cp. Samson loving the word and eating the honey which he "found" in the lion]: and Your word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart... I sat not in the assembly of the mockers... I sat alone because of Your hand [Samson's separation from an apostate Israel]... why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable?" [the finality of his blindness] (Jer. 15:15-17). If these connections are valid, Samson's love of the word was a very big part of his life.

Jdg 16:29 Samson took hold of the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and leaned on them, one with his right hand and the other with his left-

The way he chose to destroy the Philistines at the end by bringing down the posts of their temple (16:29,30) has some connection with the way he chose to take up the posts of Gaza. Perhaps he remembered his earlier failure and repentance in Gaza, and now he was back there (16:21), he repented again and wished to replicate his earlier repentance and victory for the Lord.

Jdg 16:30 Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines! He pushed with all his might and the house fell on the lords and on all the people who were there. So he killed more in his death than he killed in his life-

Perhaps here we have finally some repentance in Samson. The request to die with the Philistines may be a statement that he recognizes he had wrongly married and given his heart to Philistine women, and he deserved to die with them. Samson's desire to die with the Philistines could be read as suicidal. In this case, he had elements of weakness at the end, and yet he was accepted as dying in faith. Or it could be understood that he wanted to die because he believed that through his death, he would achieve God's plan for taking the gates of his enemies. In this case he would have had the spirit of Christ.

Samson's death was died in faith, and at his time of dying he had been made strong out of weakness, on account of his faith (Heb. 11:32-34). "Let me ('my soul', AVmg.) die with the Philistines" was surely a recognition that in his heart he had been a Philistine, for all his hatred of them and despising of them as uncircumcised, and thus outside the covenant (15:18). It could be that he was too hard on himself. Yet Samson wanted to receive the just desert for his life: to die with the Philistines. His mind may well have been on Scripture as he died, such as Josh. 23:10,11, which spoke of how one man would chase a thousand (he had earlier appropriated this to himself in Jud. 16:7)- *if* Israel took good heed to their *souls* (AVmg.). And perhaps Samson realized that he hadn't taken good heed to his soul, and therefore had ultimately been unable to chase a thousand men. And yet he died in faith, even though with a deeply appreciated recognition of his sinfulness. As with Paul and Jacob, deep recognition of personal sinfulness was a feature of their spiritual maturity. And as with Jacob, Job and Moses, Samson seems to have reached a progressively higher appreciation of the Name of God. His calling on Yahweh Elohim at the end, weeping before Him, was the first and only time he ever used that title; and the first time we actually read the covenant Name on his lips (cp. Jud. 15:18).

Samson's recalls the words of Heb. 2:14,15 about the Lord Jesus: "through death he (destroyed) him that had the power of death". Through His own death, Christ destroyed the power of sin, epitomized in the dead Philistines. Heb. 2:15 goes on to say that the Lord delivered "them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage". Those words are packed with allusions to the time of the judges- Israel in hard bondage to their Philistine masters, living in fear, until judges or 'deliverers' like Samson delivered them from their oppressors. The same great relief which Israel felt after Samson's deliverances of them, can be experienced by us spiritually. The sins, the doubts, the fears which we all have as we analyze our spiritual standing, should melt away when we recall the great deliverance which we have received.

The final effort of Samson, both to speak and to act, bowing himself (Heb. 'stretching himself out to his full extension') with all his spiritual and physical energy: this was the final effort of the Lord. Again, we see in both how we are lead to a final crescendo of spiritual effort at the end of life, although this may be articulated in various forms.

Samson died with a confession of unworthiness on his lips- in his case, that he deserved to die the death of a Philistine (Jud. 16:30)- but he will actually be in the Kingdom (Heb. 11:32).

Jdg 16:31 Then his brothers and all the household of his father came down and took him, and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the burial site of Manoah his father. He had judged Israel for twenty years-

The way the body was taken up by brave Israelites after Samson's death recalls the action of Joseph and Nicodemus. It was no accident that he was buried in the very place where his conscience was first awakened (Jud. 13:25); he maybe asked for this burial place, to show he had at last returned to his innocent spiritual beginnings. And yet we reflect that it was that small area which he had been called to liberate from the Philistines. His ministry began there, and we read a few incidents of his lashing out at Philistines in that area. But he didn't fulfil his mission potential. He was intended to liberate that area, and this would be the beginning of deliverance of all Israel from the Philistines. But he failed, and died there. And in Jud. 18 the people of the area flee northward from the Philistines. Yet despite not living up to the potential which he could, should and might have attained... he will still be saved.

Or we can reflect how the Philistines themselves described him as "our enemy, the destroyer of our country who has slain many of us" (Jud. 16:24). Which encourages us to

think that in God's wisdom, He has intentionally chosen to just record Samson at his worst, the low points of his life. To demonstrate that a believer [as Hebrews 11 treats Samson] may have very low moments, poor motivations etc. and yet still be a believer. It's no bad exercise to mentally write a spiritual autobiography of yourself, recording only you at your lowest moments. And yet by grace through faith, you too will be saved eternally.

JUDGES CHAPTER 17

Jdg 17:1 There was a man of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah- Jud. 17-21 contain various pictures of and insights into the apostasy of the tribe of Dan, providing the backdrop for a character study of Samson. These chapters seem chronologically out of place; they belong before the Samson story. Jud. 18:30 speaks of Jonathan the grandson of Moses, and Jud. 20:28 of Phinehas the grandson of Aaron (cp. Num. 25:11), which would place these events at the beginning of the period of the Judges, once Israel had first settled in the land. Dan's apostasy is suggested by the way in which he is omitted from the tribes of the new Israel in Rev. 7. Zorah, Samson's home town, was originally Judah's inheritance (Josh. 15:33-36), but they spurned it, and passed it to Dan (Josh. 19:41), who also weren't interested; for they migrated to the north and took over the land belonging to the less warlike Sidonians (Jud. 18:2,7-10). Their selfishness is reflected by the way they chide with him: "What is this that you have done *unto us*?" (Jud. 15:11). See on Jud. 13:1.

However, my considered take is that although there was an earlier migration of Danites from their inheritance as mentioned earlier in Judges, we will now read in Jud. 17,18 of the migration northward of just those Danites who lived in Samson's home area of Eshtaol. This is tacit acceptance that Samson had failed to liberate his local area, although God had set him up potentially to achieve this. So the record continues directly in the context of the Samson history. We note that in Deborah's time, the tribe of Dan at that time still remained in ships (Jud. 5:17), suggesting the Danites generally at that time had not yet left the territory assigned it by the sea.

Jdg 17:2 He said to his mother, The eleven hundred pieces of silver that were taken from you, about which I heard you utter a curse - I took them. His mother said, Yahweh bless you my son-

One theme of the history of Dan is the mixture between flesh and spirit, and this was to come to full term in the life of Samson. His idolatrous mother blesses him by Yahweh, and she is an idolater. 1100 pieces of silver would imply that this woman was very wealthy, for 10 pieces of silver a year was a good salary (:10), and so the apostasy we are to read of would likely have been amongst the wealthy leadership class. She had cursed the thief, but when she found it was her son, she turns the curse into a blessing. We compare this with how Jephthah didn't feel he could change such an oath once uttered. 1100 pieces of silver was exactly the amount of money which each prince of the Philistines was to pay Delilah for Samson's betrayal (Jud. 16:5). We wonder whether this woman may have been Delilah, or connected with her; for I gave some reasons for believing she was perhaps an Israelitess. Women typically didn't have money of their own; but this woman does, and Jud. 16 explains just how this may have come about. Sorek was on the border between Israelite and Philistine territory; and Samson grew up in Zorah and Eshtaol, on the northern sides of that valley. She refers to "*the Philistines* be upon you, Samson" as if neither she nor Samson were Philistines. Jud. 16:5 says that the Philistine leaders "went up" to her. We note that the camp of Dan, Zorah and Eshtaol are mentioned in Jud. 18:2,8,11,12, just as they are in Jud. 13. This also suggests that the storyline continues after Samson's death. Both Micah and Samson were from the tribe

of Dan. We note too that the Hebrew translated "that were taken from you" could as well be rendered "that were taken *by* you". This would be so appropriate to Delilah. Yet they had been apparently stolen- and Micah admits to being the thief. It is quite credible that he would have been revolted by his mother's behaviour and therefore stole one of the 1100 shekel payments.

If indeed the woman here was Delilah, it is also possible that Micah was the son of Samson and Delilah. It is psychologically credible that he resented what his mother had done to his father, and therefore stole the money paid to her. 'Delilah' uses the Yahweh Name, and Micah means 'Who is like Yah?'. The engraved and molten image[s] made with the money appear to be teraphim, and such family gods were usually made in memory of a dead father or ancestor; they were thought to be representations of their deceased spirits. Teraphim are associated with household worship in Gen. 31:19,34,35 (Rachel) and 1 Sam. 19:13,16 (Saul's daughter had teraphim in the form and size of a man, and placed it in a bed to double as her husband). It seems reasonable to guess that Micah's father had recently died... again inviting us to see the father as Samson, and the story of Jud. 17 following right on from the death of Samson in Jud. 16. The claim is often made that Jud. 17-21 come after Jud. 16, largely based on the account of Dan migrating northwards earlier in Judges. I suggest not all of them did, and the Danites around Samson did so only in Jud. 18. Higher critical theory is always seeking to argue for dislocation of Biblical texts, but careful reading usually shows this is all totally unnecessary. On the contrary, we see Jud. 17 and the rest of the story following on in perfect context from Jud. 16.

Micah stole money to make a molten image, but that image was in turn to be stolen from him by his Levite, one he trusted as his spiritual father and who was to him as a son (:11).

Jdg 17:3 He returned the eleven hundred pieces of silver to his mother and she said, I solemnly dedicate my silver to Yahweh for my son to make an engraved image and a molten image. Then I will give it back to you-

The grammar is ambiguous. It could be a past perfect, "I indeed had dedicated", or a performative perfect "I hereby solemnly dedicate". She had cursed her own son, although inadvertently, not knowing he was the thief. And curses were held to be of absolute power and veracity. This would explain why she immediately wants to spend the money on Yahweh and also on a molten image- to somehow reverse her curse she had placed on her own beloved son. Her comment in :2 "May Yahweh bless you" was a way of saying that she wished Yahweh to reverse her curse she had placed on her son, and replace it with a blessing. And yet in the end she only gives 200 of the silver pieces to this project. There are many Greek and Roman stories of a thief being cursed, fearing the oath and returning the stolen property- a part of which is then dedicated to a god. This could explain the ambiguity of "I solemnly dedicate / I had solemnly dedicated" the silver to Yahweh. She had dedicated 1100 to Yahweh, but her son stole it, she cursed him, he returned it- and so she now gives part of the sum to idol worship. And presumably the other 900 to Yahweh. We see how mixed were her motives and loyalties. Which is exactly the theme of the Samson story and this last section of Judges [Jud. 17-21].

It seems the idol was made from melting down the 200 silver pieces. The idol was therefore made from stolen silver, immediately casting a cloud over whether it could ever be legitimate in any religious context.

The idea seems to be that she would dedicate the money but somehow retain it within her power. His repentance therefore cost him nothing, and neither really did her supposed sacrifice to Yahweh; whereas it is a principle of sacrifice that it must cost us something, we must be left in deficit after it, in real terms (2 Sam. 24:24). We see how deeply Israel had fallen into thinking that idolatry was justified, because it was a form of Yahweh worship.

Their later placing of idols in the temple of Yahweh could only really have happened on that basis. And this has been the abiding temptation and tendency for God's people; to mix the flesh and the Spirit, to have a little of both, rather than making wholehearted commitment to Him. And it is seen too in the mixture of paganism with Biblical truths in the theology of standard Christianity.

Jdg 17:4 So he returned the money to his mother and she took two hundred pieces of it and gave them to the silversmith, who made it into an engraved image and a molten image, and they were put into Micah's house-

And then the rest of the money she returned to Micah (see on :3). "Micah" means 'who is like Yah!'. His mother had named him like this and he probably would have agreed with his name, hence he kept it; but this was the mere externality of religious devotion. For clearly they were idolaters, wrongly claiming to serve Yahweh through serving idols. See on :3.

Or we can translate: "So he restored the money to his mother (and his mother took two hundred shekels), and she gave it to the founder". The 200 would be roughly one fifth of 1100, which means he may have given this to his mother in obedience to the Mosaic command of Lev. 6:5 for a thief to return the stolen goods with a one fifth restitution. In which case we see how confused they all were, keeping parts of God's law and having a genuine conscience towards God; whilst being idolaters and very ignorant of His ways.

Another reading is that the woman said she would give the 1100 shekels to make an image, but in reality she only gave two hundred shekels for this and kept the rest. There is a connection with how Achan keeps Babylonian idol paraphernalia and also 200 shekels of silver (Josh. 7:21).

The Hebrew word for "Micah" in :1 and :4 is *Micayahu*, who is like Yah. But after he has established his shrine / house of gods, he is called *Mica*, without the 'yah' suffix. His best efforts to apparently serve Yahweh meant that in fact Yahweh was removed from him. And that is the paradox of so much religiosity.

Jdg 17:5 This man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and household gods and consecrated one of his sons to be his priest-

Micah was clearly a passionate religionist. The apostasy of such people was partly due to the failure of the priesthood. He therefore consecrated one of his sons to be a priest. Part of his apostasy, making his own holy place and ephod, was perhaps due to the fact that the sanctuary of Yahweh wasn't functioning properly. It was still in Shiloh (Jud. 18:31), but perhaps being abused as it was at the time of Eli, so that people didn't wish to attend it. Individual failure is always personally culpable, but this isn't to say that spiritual leaders aren't also to be held accountable by God for it.

"Had a shrine" could suggest Micah already had a place for his idols, and he added the ephod and teraphim constructed with the stolen money. "A shrine" is better as AV "an house of gods". But a *bait elohim* could as well mean "a house of God" as "an house of gods". The very same phrase is found in Jud. 18:31 "the house of God that was at Shiloh". This ambiguity continues that noted earlier on :3. He worships both Yahweh and many gods, in the same house. "And he made..." suggests that in addition to the 200 pieces of silver melted down to make an idol, he additionally made an ephod and teraphim. Quite possibly with his mum's money. Bethel and Shiloh were nearby, famed for their sanctuaries, and Jud. 20:18-28 shows that the sanctuary at Bethel was in use at the time. But Micah wanted his own sanctuary and priest.

The record is clearly allusive to Dt. 27:14,15: "The Levites shall proclaim aloud to all the men of Israel, "Cursed is the man who makes a statue and molten image, an abomination to Yahweh, the work of an artificer's hand, and places it in an occult place!". All the people will

respond and say, "Amen"". The Levite instead is blessing and participating in worship using a statue and molten image. Nah. 1:14 likewise refers to an idolatrous 'statue and molten image' within a 'house of god / elohim'. We recall that the Levites were chosen because they alone in Israel had killed Israelites who worshipped a molten image (Ex. 32:4,8). The Levite was a far cry from the intention for the Levites in Dt. 33:10: "They will teach Your decrees to Jacob and Your law to Israel, they place incense under Your nostrils, and a sacrifice on Your altar", at the place Yahweh chose- not the altar of an idol shrine.

Jdg 17:6 In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes-

The contrast is with how they did evil in the eyes of Yahweh (Jud. 3:7). Their eyes were seeing the opposite of God's eyes. And that is exactly what we are reading here in this story of Micah. What they thought was right in their eyes was evil in God's eyes.

This implies that the book of Judges as we have it was edited, under Divine inspiration, some time after Israel began to have kings. Perhaps during the exile, when again they had no king; and therefore the book becomes a warning to the exiles about likely apostasy. The lament may be that there was no authority, no teacher, no modelling of Godly living; because every man did what was right in his own eyes, rather than doing what was right in the eyes of Yahweh. For so often we read of Israel being condemned for doing what was wrong in His eyes. This is clear enough evidence that 'just follow your heart' is poor advice. For what is right in our own eyes results in the Godless confusion of what we find now at the time of the Judges. However it could be argued that having no human king was a good thing; for God didn't want them to have one. And therefore a situation where everyone judges things by their own judgment is in fact good; the problem was that the people didn't base their view upon God's word, His "eyes" or perspective, but solely upon their own unenlightened opinions.

Jdg 17:7 There was a young Levite who had been living in Bethlehem Judah-

Note the triple mention of the fact this Levite was from Bethlehem Judah, which wasn't a priestly city. Nor is he presented as living near any of the noted sanctuaries of Yahweh: Shechem, Shiloh, Gilgal, Mizpah, Bethel, Peniel or Hebron. We note the surprise of the Danites when they learn he is a Levite: "Who led you here? What are you doing in this place? What do you have here?" (Jud. 18:3). They are surprised to find a Levite not in a Levitical city nor at a sanctuary. He is repeatedly characterized in the record as not really being a Levite in practice. We could render "from the tribe of Judah". Yet he was also a Levite, a potential king-priest, seen as of great significance. And yet we will learn in Jud. 18:31 he was descended not from Aaron but from Moses, and therefore unqualified to act as a Levite.

I suggested on :3-5 that the apostasy of Micah and others like him was partly a result of the Levites to teach them a better way. And the absence of Levitical teachers, and the apparent non functioning of the sanctuary, would in turn have been a result of the people not paying tithes to the Levites so that they could do this teaching work. And so everything had spiraled downwards. Bethlehem was not a priestly city, and so this Levite had been living there but not working as a Levite. Presumably because his home city was a place where the tithes were not paid, this Levite had gone to live in Bethlehem looking for work.

Jdg 17:8 and he left the city to find a better place, and came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah-

A Levite leaving Bethlehem is exactly what we have in Jud. 19. The clear connection is perhaps to suggest that in fact nothing was learnt from these tragic events in Jud. 17,18, and the mistakes were repeated.

The Levites had no inheritance of land, and so life was extremely difficult for them when they were not paid tithes by the other Israelites. They became like this man, wandering labourers who went looking for any kind of work just to keep them alive. He perhaps went to the house of Micah because he was evidently wealthy; for his mother had 1100 pieces of silver to spend on religion, when a good salary was 10 pieces / year. That money was 110 years of good salary. The Levite likely went there in the hope of finding work in the house of a rich man.

Jdg 17:9 Micah said to him, Where have you come from? He said to him, I am a Levite of Bethlehem Judah, and I am looking for a place to live-

Not having their own land, the Levites were homeless when the tithes weren't paid, or if their priestly allotment was taken from them by the tribe where the priestly city was. I noted on the distribution of the priestly cities in Joshua that many were in areas not subdued by Israel, or in remote, peripheral regions. So the Levites became landless labourers, often homeless.

Quite possibly there is the intended contrast with the command for the Levite to travel to the place Yahweh would choose, and serve there: "If a Levite comes from any of your gates out of all Israel, where he lives as a foreigner, and comes with all the desire of his soul to the place which Yahweh shall choose, then he shall minister in the name of Yahweh" (Dt. 18:6,7). This Levite is just wandering around looking for a job in any place. Time and again, this Levite is presented as doing and being the exact opposite of what a Levite was intended to do. The implication of the record is that he was looking for a paid position as a priest, whereas the Levites were to live from the tithes of the people.

The allusion is to how Eli's descendants would beg for a piece of silver in return for priestly work (1 Sam. 2:36). This man was not blessed. The priests were intended to live from their portion of the sacrifices, but clearly they wanted payment in cash not kind and so had departed from those commands.

Jdg 17:10 Micah said to him, Live with me and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give you ten pieces of silver per year, a suit of clothing and your food. So the Levite agreed- Micah asked the young Levite, who was "unto him as one of his sons", to "be unto me a father and a priest" (Jud. 17:10,11- note the paradox), resulting in others likewise asking him to "be unto us a father and a priest" (Jud. 18:19). The point is, no matter how unqualified a person may be for the job, they may be pressed into being leaders because that's what nominally religious people so desperately need. They need someone to call 'father'; and it seems Pharaoh treated Joseph in the same way (Gen. 45:8). It is very noticeable amongst those who are themselves senior or heads of some kind of group, be it domestically or in the workplace. The way the Lord forbade this (Mt. 23:9) was therefore tantamount to disallowing any merely 'religious' approach to God. He personally was to be understood as Father, and a personal relationship developed with Him.

The priests were to be from the line of Aaron, whereas this Levite was a descendant of Moses (Jud. 18:30). Not all Levites were priests. Again we see how the whole situation was only an appearance of obedience to Mosaic law when in fact they were all being totally disobedient. It's not hard to see the similarities with various forms of high church Christian religions. But we need to look at our own lives and possibilities of being the same. For this is the difference between religion and spirituality. The prophets condemn priests selling their services (Hos. 4:4-10, Mic. 3:5-8). But Micah's hiring of the Levite was seen by him as his generosity to Yahweh. Again and again we see this mixture of flesh and Spirit.

Jdg 17:11 The young Levite was content to dwell with the man and became unto him as one

of his sons-

The paradox is that this young man was wanted by Micah as a father to him. Even though he was of an age and maturity to merely be Micah's son. It was as if Micah's religious impulse led him to by all means want someone to be his spiritual senior, no matter how young or unqualified they were. And we see precisely this mentality in all cultures of our world today.

These words are an exact quotation of Ex. 2:21: "And it pleased Moses to dwell with the man". The Levite was a descendant of Moses (Jud. 18:30). We are again given the impression of a man externally imitating a righteous man, but out of context- and in fact going against the spirit of that righteous man.

Jdg 17:12 Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest, living in his house-

It was priests who were to consecrate Levites; but Micah is just taking bits and pieces from God's true religion and making them part of his own do it yourself religious system. And we see this going on all the time, both now and historically. Biblical verses and precedents are taken quite out of context, and mixed in with paganism and human ways. And every reference to consecration of priests so far in the Bible have referred to consecration of the descendants of Aaron (Ex. 28:41; 29:9,33,35; Lev. 8:33; 16:32; 21:10; Num. 3:3). But the Levite was descended from Moses not Aaron (Jud. 18:30). He was also of mixed stock, also being from Judah. He wasn't even a pure Levite. But he lived in Micah's house, probably meaning he was accepted as part of Micah's household. The record often speaks of Micah's "house", whereas worship was meant to be in God's house.

Jdg 17:13 Then Micah said, Now know I that Yahweh will do good to me, since I have a Levite as my priest-

We feel almost sorry for Micah. He had a basic conscience, feeling struck by guilt that he had stolen a huge sum from his mother, equivalent to 110 years of good salary. He wants Yahweh in his life and His blessings, but he thinks it can be attained by mere externalities, and through worshipping other gods. He was desperate for teaching; and the Levite failed him in this, perhaps because he too had not been taught God's ways and law. This relief that he is now blessed by God is as noted on :3- a relief that now his mother's curse on him as a thief has been cancelled out by Yahweh. Or so he thinks, because he predicates the removal of the curse upon Yahweh accepting his idol shrine now he has a Levite as a priest. The curse had no real power, and neither did his scheme to have it reversed. If he had believed solely in Yahweh, rather than in Yahweh plus evil powers and gods, he would have made less mistakes and had far greater peace. Just as for many today. But in this case, both the Levite and the molten image were removed from Micah- in God's higher purpose, to try to lead him to repentance before God, and trusting in Yahweh's directly mediated blessing. There is intentionally no comment as to whether this achieved the intended end. We are left to ponder that, because that is one of the intended lessons of the story.

JUDGES CHAPTER 18

Jdg 18:1 In those days there was no king in Israel-

This seems to repeat Jud. 17:6 "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes".

This implies that the book of Judges as we have it was edited, under Divine inspiration, some time after Israel began to have kings. Perhaps during the exile, when again they had no king; and therefore the book becomes a warning to the exiles about likely apostasy. The lament

may be that there was no authority, no teacher, no modelling of Godly living; because every man did what was right in his own eyes, rather than doing what was right in the eyes of Yahweh. For so often we read of Israel being condemned for doing what was wrong in His eyes. This is clear enough evidence that 'just follow your heart' is poor advice. For what is right in our own eyes results in the Godless confusion of what we find now at the time of the Judges. However it could be argued that having no human king was a good thing; for God didn't want them to have one. And therefore a situation where everyone judges things by their own judgment is in fact good; the problem was that the people didn't base their view upon God's word, His "eyes" or perspective, but solely upon their own unenlightened opinions.

And at that time the tribe of the Danites looked for a place to live in, because up until then they had not come into their inheritance among the tribes of Israel-

Even when God punished Israel, He seems to later almost take the blame for their judgments; thus He says that He left some of the Canaanite nations in the land to teach Israel battle experience (Jud. 3:2 NIV). His grace is so positive about them in the way He writes about them. Yet elsewhere the presence of those remaining nations is clearly linked to Israel's faithlessness, and their survival in the land was actually part of God's punishment of Israel. Likewise "the coast of the children of Dan went out too little for them" (Josh. 19:47), although actually "The Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley" (Jud. 1:34). When Dan fought against Leshem, this one act of obedience is so magnified in Josh. 19:47 to sound as if in their zeal to inherit their territory they actually found they had too little land and therefore attacked Leshem. But actually it was already part of their allotted inheritance. Yet God graciously comments: "all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel" (Jud. 18:1). In similar vein, He almost excuses Israel's apostasy by saying that they had not seen the great miracles of the Exodus (Jud. 2:7). "The portion of the children of Judah was too much for them" (Josh. 19:9) almost implies God made an error in allocating them too much; when actually the problem was that they lacked the faith to drive out the tribes living there.

I suggested on Jud. 17:1 that the story line continues directly from the death of Samson to Delilah and her son making an idol. We note that the camp of Dan, Zorah and Eshtaol are mentioned in Jud. 18:2,8,11,12, just as they are in Jud. 13. The Spirit of God had moved Samson to deliver his tribe Dan from the Philistines in that very area (Jud. 13:25), but he hadn't lived up to that potential. In Samson's time, the tribe of Dan had not possessed the land given to them (Josh. 19:47,48). In Jud. 18 we read of how they gave up, and went up north to drive the people of Laish out of their territory, rather than dealing with the Philistines and having their intended tribal allotment. Samson was their potential means for inheriting the land they were supposed to. The Spirit moved him to be sensitive to this. Yet as we see in Jud. 15, they were prepared to live with the Philistines reigning over them. Samson perceived the potential and wanted to realize it; but his people didn't. And he himself failed to realize his own personal potential. Had he liberated Dan from the Philistines as God potentially enabled, the whole miserable story of Jud. 17-21 need never have happened. Yet he still will be saved, according to Hebrews 11.

Jdg 18:2 The children of Dan sent five men of their family, men of valour, from Zorah and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land and to search it, and they said to them, Go, explore the land! They came to the hill country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there- Zorah was Samson's hometown, and I suggested on Jud. 17:1 that Jud. 17-21 is further background about Samson. We see then that Samson's people had not inherited the land intended because they had not driven out the local inhabitants as God intended, and as was therefore potentially possible. And therefore they were looking to get more living space by settling another area which was easier to take over, taking a short cut to the Kingdom. The

invasion of Laish (:7) was because "The children of Dan did not drive out the Amorite who afflicted them in the mountain; and the Amorite would not suffer them to come down into the valley, but they forcibly took from them the border of their portion" (Josh. 19:47 LXX).

Jdg 18:3 When they were near the house of Micah they recognized the voice of the young Levite, so they went in there and said to him, Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? Why are you here?-

"Regarded the voice" may mean they noted that he had a different accent, and this corroborates with the way Ephraimites had a different accent to other Israelites (Jud. 12:6). Such internal harmony within the Biblical records is to me the clearest evidence of Divine inspiration.

We note the surprise of the Danites when they learn he is a Levite: "Who led you here? What are you doing in this place? What do you have here?" (Jud. 18:3). They are surprised to find a Levite not in a Levitical city nor at a sanctuary. See on Jud. 17:7.

Jdg 18:4 He said to them, This is what Micah has done with me, and he has hired me to be his priest-

This presumably implies that he showed them the ephod and other imitations of the tabernacle which Micah had made. The reference to the priest as a hireling is negative; for the Lord speaks of false shepherds as hirelings in Jn. 10. The way he quits Micah for the Danites presents him as a mercenary with no real care for his flock, and certainly not the spiritual 'father' that Micah hired him as. One cannot buy such relationships.

Jdg 18:5 They said to him, Please enquire of God to find out whether our journey will be successful-

We see again the deep religious conscience within these men of Dan, although it was so misplaced and mixed with idolatry.

Jdg 18:6 The priest said to them, Go in peace. Your way has the approval of Yahweh-

We get the impression that he just said this without making any semblance of looking at the mock ephod and urim and thummim which Micah had made. To claim to give Yahweh's approval in such an arbitrary way was really quite blasphemous. We think of how Nathan too quickly assumed God wanted to approve David's plan to build a temple; and how Micah initially told the king "Go up and prosper; and Yahweh will deliver it into the hand of the king" (1 Kings 22:15) when in fact this was not God's word. We too can assume we know God's will when in fact we don't. "Your way is before *Yahweh*" could be read as the Levite saying that Yahweh and not the *elohim* / idol gods could know their way. He uses a Hebrew word which can mean "in front of" or "opposite". He is hedging his bets and being purposefully ambiguous. He does not in fact have a prophetic word from God. Priests were consulted before warfare (1 Sam. 14:41; 23:9-13; 30:7,8; 2 Sam. 2:1; 5:19). They were intended to give inspired oracles from God, but using the urim and thummim: "Of Levi He said, Your Thummim and your Urim are with Your holy one" (Dt. 33:8). But here this Levite, who is not a priest, apparently gives God's word of blessing for warfare against their own brethren; and he does so without Urim and Thummim, the stones which were attached to the breastplate. Again we see how form has eclipsed content.

Jdg 18:7 Then the five men departed and came to Laish. They saw that the people there lived in security like the Sidonians, quiet and unsuspecting, and they were prosperous, lacking nothing-

See on :2. 2 Chron. 2:14 says "Hiram" was "son of a woman of the daughters of Dan",

whereas 1 King 7:14 says he was "the son of a widow of the tribe of Naphtali". Dan may refer to the town called Dan or Laish which was in the territory of Naphtali, but inhabited by Danites (Josh. 18:27; 19:47; Jud. 18:7). Here we see how an apparent discrepancy on a surface level reveals a deep evidence of the way the records do not contradict but dovetail perfectly, as we would expect of a Divinely inspired writing. But this is only apparent to those who respectfully search the entire scriptures, rather than bandying around a surface level contradiction with an eagerness which speaks more of their own fears the Bible is inspired than of deep factual persuasion.

Also they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone else-
"With anyone else" could be "with Syria", reading 'Aram' instead of 'Adam' ['with no man']. They were on the very border of Syria. The idea would be that they were too far from Sidon to be helped by them, and had nothing to do with Syria over the border. This change to "Syria" requires only a 'daleph' and 'resh' to be confused in the Hebrew alphabet; and these letters have only a miniscule difference which in early printed form is often obscure. This would be an example of the Divinely inspired Bible being infallible apart from having some errors caused by copyists.

"Had no dealings with any man" could be rendered "There was a dearth of heirs", and therefore nobody to dispute the theft of their inheritance.

Jdg 18:8 The men returned to their brothers to Zorah and Eshtaol, and their brothers asked them, What did you find?-

The business of sending out spies, who return with a good report which is eagerly believed by their brethren, all has a kind of similarity to the spying out of the land of Canaan at the conquest. LXX "what did ye bring back?" recalls the fruit of the land being brought back to show the Israelites by Joshua and Caleb. And so is developed the theme of misplaced idealism. For they ought to have taken the land allotment which God gave them. But they didn't and sought an easier way, by attacking softer targets elsewhere. Samson himself had shown this mixture of spirituality and human thinking.

Jdg 18:9 They said, Come on, let us go up against them, because we have seen the land, and it is very good. Do you doubt? Don't hesitate; go in to take possession of the land-

As discussed on :2,8, they are mixing the flesh and the Spirit. They quote the words of Moses and Joshua about the land of Israel being a good land, and urge each other to take possess "of the land". But they had ignored that commandment and had not taken possession of "the land". Instead they were using those words to encourage themselves to massacre a group of unsuspecting people in a very limited "land".

Jdg 18:10 When you get there, you will find an unsuspecting people, and the land is large. God has given it to you, a place where there is no lack of anything that is in the earth-

The men of Dan here quote the words of Dt. 8:9, but out of context. Those words were true of the entire land promised to Abraham. But the men of Dan didn't drive out the tribes from the land. Instead, they applied these words to a tiny, remote part of it in Laish, and encouraged themselves on the basis of these words to go and massacre a group of unsuspecting people and take their land- with the blessing of Micah's false gods. We note that the Danites are wrongly confident of God's blessing; just as Micah was, when he says he is sure Yahweh will bless him because he has a Levite as a priest for his shrine of idols (Jud. 17:13).

Jdg 18:11 Six hundred armed men of the family of the Danites set out from there, out of Zorah and out of Eshtaol-

I have noted on previous verses that the Danites were liking to imagine that they were as

Israel going up from Egypt to inherit the land of Canaan. In fact, they were leaving the area in the land they had been faithless to inherit, and were going to inherit just a tiny area where the people were weak. But they encourage themselves by alluding to the words of Joshua and Moses about inheriting the entire land. We therefore note that the 600 men "armed" or 'in ranks' may be seen as intended to imitate the six hundred thousand 'men in ranks' of Israel as they marched toward Canaan (Num. 11:21). However, a group of "six hundred men" is found so often in the records that we suspect that it may not be literal, but rather refer to a military unit or subdivision (Jud. 3:31; 18:11; 20:47; 1 Sam. 13:15; 14:2; 23:13; 27:2; 30:9; 2 Sam. 15:18).

Jdg 18:12 They went up and encamped in Kiriath Jearim in Judah. That is why they called that place The Camp of Dan, to this day; it is behind Kiriath Jearim-

I would consider the book of Joshua to have largely been written by Joshua, under Divine inspiration, although edited [again under Divine inspiration] for the exiles. And the book of Judges likewise. For the exiles too were set to reestablish God's Kingdom in the land and to inherit it again as the Israelites first did. The phrase "to this day" occurs several times in Joshua / Judges, and appears to have different points of historical reference (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28,29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:3; 23:8,9; Jud. 1:26; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19; 18:12). I would explain this by saying that the book was edited a number of times and the remains of those edits remain in the text. For God's word is living and made relevant by Him to every generation.

Jdg 18:13 They went from there to the hill country of Ephraim, and came to the house of Micah-

For 600 men to visit Micah would suggest that he was a well known leader in the area. We noted earlier that his mother gave him 1100 shekels of silver at a time when a good salary was 10 shekels / year.

Jdg 18:14 Then the five men who went to spy out the country of Laish said to their brothers, Do you know that there is in these houses an ephod and household gods, an engraved image and a molten image? Now therefore consider what you have to do-

The five spies had come to Micah for blessing on their journey, and obviously thought that Micah's set up of false gods modelled around imitations of Yahweh's sanctuary, along with a Levite for a priest, was all pretty cool. And they coveted it all for themselves. As in :25, they speak of their criminal and violent intents in an indirect way.

Jdg 18:15 They turned in there and came to the house of the young Levite, to the house of Micah, and asked him how he was-

They focus upon the Levite; he was clearly aware of their intentions, and was eventually not against them, as he saw he would get more income from being a spiritual father to a larger group. The landless Levite labourer who had come looking for work with Micah... became covetous and ended up with an excellent income.

Jdg 18:16 The six hundred armed men of Dan stood by the entrance of the gate-

They clearly so coveted Yahweh's supposed presence and help through the idols that they were willing to steal and kidnap to get it. They show the mixture of flesh and Spirit, of misplaced ideals, which were so typical of Samson their judge.

Jdg 18:17 The five men who had gone to spy out the land went in there and took the engraved image, the ephod, the household gods and the molten image; and the priest stood by the

entrance of the gate with the six hundred armed men-

The idol paraphernalia required five men to carry it. It was not therefore huge.

Jdg 18:18 When these men went into Micah's house and fetched the engraved image, the ephod, the household gods and the molten image-

The ephod was an imitation of the high priestly breastplate. The Hebrew reads strangely, as if the engraved image was the ephod, or closely associated with it. We fear that they had actually made an idolatrous image of Yahweh, exactly what he had forbidden. And they were worshipping the Baals in the name of Yahweh worship.

The priest said to them, What are you doing?-

The Levite was initially shocked, but soon went along with their evil plans. Although effectively they kidnapped him (:19).

Jdg 18:19 They said to him, Keep quiet, put your hand on your mouth and go with us, and be unto us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and a family in Israel-

See on Jud. 17:11. Micah had asked the young Levite, who was “unto him as one of his sons”, to “be unto me a father and a priest” (Jud. 17:10,11- note the paradox), resulting in others likewise asking him to “be unto us a father and a priest” (Jud. 18:19). The point is, no matter how unqualified a person may be for the job, they may be pressed into being leaders because that’s what nominally religious people so desperately need. They need someone to call 'father'; and it seems Pharaoh treated Joseph in the same way (Gen. 45:8). It is very noticeable amongst those who are themselves senior or heads of some kind of group, be it domestically or in the workplace. The way the Lord forbade this (Mt. 23:9) was therefore tantamount to disallowing any merely 'religious' approach to God. He personally was to be understood as Father, and a personal relationship developed with Him.

Jdg 18:20 The priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod, the household gods and the engraved image, and went with the people-

Why was he glad? Probably his motives were mixed, for that is the theme of this history of the tribe of Dan at this time. He was glad he could 'serve' more people, in his mixed up way, even though he was an idolater; and also glad at the offer, presumably, of more money than he was previously earning.

The ephod was only worn by the High Priest and had the urim and thummim within it to give answers. The priest gave a supposed answer from Yahweh to the Danites, using an ephod without the urim and thummim. The hollowness of spirituality is apparent.

"With the people" is literally “went in the midst of the people” - perhaps for his personal security; but more probably in imitation of the place appointed for the priests and the ark, in the middle of the congregated tribes, on the marches through the wilderness. Again we see the theme of surface level spirituality and allusion to Biblical ideas, but out of context and in fact as a front for sinful behaviour.

Jdg 18:21 So they turned and departed, putting the little ones, the livestock and the goods in front of them-

Fearful that Micah would chase after them and attack them from the rear. Although Micah was outnumbered, he was so passionate about his idols and his priest that he was deemed capable of a very vicious attack upon them. Again we see the mixed motives of men at this time, burning down one side for Yahweh, and down the other for the flesh and idolatry.

Jdg 18:22 When they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men who were in the

houses near to Micah's house were gathered together and overtook the Danites-

Not only Micah but the folks in his village were passionately devoted to those idols. It wasn't a case of just making some more, but rather were they very deeply devoted to them. Again we see the mixed motives in them all. Chasing after those who had stolen teraphim is an exact repeat of Laban's behaviour against Jacob. But whilst Micah was open to vague Biblical allusions to support his apostasy, he failed to see the more pointed personal parallels between himself and the unspiritual Laban. We note the positioning of the "little ones" and goods (:21), recalling Jacob's great "company", the word used in :23. Clearly Jacob and Laban are in view here, but Micah doesn't get it.

Jdg 18:23 They shouted after the Danites, who turned round and said to Micah, What is the matter with you that you come with such a company?-

Although they were just presumably a few houses, all the men must have armed themselves and charged out against this far superior force. As noted on :22, they were so passionate about their idols.

Jdg 18:24 He said, You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and have gone away, and what else do I have? How then can you say to me, 'What is the matter with you?'

Despite his wealth and position within society, Micah told the truth when he said that his own little religion, pagan and perverting of Yahweh worship as it was, was everything to him. "What else do I have?" he dolefully and truthfully lamented. And we see this attitude in so many people. Their religion is by far the most powerful passion in their lives. But this doesn't thereby justify them as true believers, for Micah was far away from true worship of Yahweh.

Jdg 18:25 The Danites said to him, Don't argue with us, or angry fellows might attack you, and you will lose your life, with the lives of your household-

As in :14, they speak of their criminal and violent intents in an indirect way. They speak as typical criminals. 'You might just get attacked by a bunch of angry yobbos around here, you know. Best to go home, or else such a gang might not only kill you, but go to your houses and then murder all your families'. And yet they made this threat because they were so desperate to have those idols, which they thought meant Yahweh's blessing upon them. Again, we see how hopelessly mixed were their motives.

Jdg 18:26 The Danites went on their way, and when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his house-

Micah was willing to fight for his idols, such was his passion. But he realized he was outnumbered. A true believer in Yahweh would have believed that one in covenant with Yahweh could chase a thousand; and Judges has several examples of small groups defeating much larger armies. But Micah, for all his professed belief in Yahweh, was not a true believer, and assessed things in purely secular terms.

Jdg 18:27 They took what Micah had made and his priest and came to Laish, to a people unsuspecting and secure, and attacked them with the sword, and they burnt the city with fire-

Although Micah had paid for some of his idol paraphernalia to be made by others, he was ultimately the maker of it. The stress is that these things were what his hand had made. And there is an intended juxtaposition between their having the idols and the priest with them, and then slaying unsuspecting people without giving them the chance to first make peace and accept the God of Israel, as required in the law of Moses. They burnt the city with fire as if they were replicating Joshua's conquest of the land, again reflecting their terrible mixture of

motives and desire to just take bits and pieces from Yahweh's ways and ignore the rest. Just as many do today. See on :28.

Jdg 18:28 There was no deliverer, because it was far from Sidon and they had no dealings with anyone else-

See on :7, probably "with Syria", the neighbouring power just over the border.

It was in the valley that lies by Beth Rehob. They built the city and lived there-

If they intended to live there, we enquire why they first burnt the city and then rebuilt it- when they could have lived in the houses already standing. I suggest that they burnt it because they wanted to appear to be following the law about devoting a city to Yahweh, and copying Joshua's example of burning some of the cities he took. But as explained in :27, they were utterly oblivious to whole masses of basic Mosaic teaching. Like many today, they thought that just obeying a few out of context Biblical principles would justify them living like any other unbeliever.

Jdg 18:29 They called the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born to Israel, but the name of the city before was Laish-

Unlike how Israel very often did, they didn't allow the old names to remain, but renamed this after their ancestor Dan, meaning 'judgment'. Again we see an attempt to follow the culture of their Israelite religion on a surface level, when their hearts were far from it.

Jdg 18:30 The Danites set up for themselves the engraved image, and Jonathan the son of Gershom the son of Moses and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the time of the captivity of the land-

Jud. 17-21 contain various pictures of and insights into the apostacy of the tribe of Dan, providing the backdrop for a character study of Samson. These chapters seem chronologically out of place; they belong before the Samson story. Here, Jud. 18:30 speaks of Jonathan the grandson of Moses, and Jud. 20:28 of Phinehas the grandson of Aaron (cp. Num. 25:11), which would place these events at the beginning of the period of the Judges, once Israel had first settled in the land. Dan's apostacy is suggested by the way in which he is omitted from the tribes of the new Israel in Rev. 7.

"The land" is "the ark" in some manuscripts. See on :31. But I see no reason why the Assyrian or Babylonian captivities are not in view; for Judges was rewritten or edited under Divine inspiration during the captivity. This would mean that the Danites in this peripheral location on the very borders of the land quietly continued their apostacy all through the various reforms of the kings, as well as the time of David. And this is really what we understand from the many laments that Israel had persistently and consistently worshipped idols throughout their generations.

Jdg 18:31 So they set up for themselves Micah's engraved image which he had made, using it all the time that God's house was in Shiloh-

Here and :30 emphasize the "engraved image", and I suggested on :18 that this could have been an image of Yahweh- exactly what was prohibited so strongly. Clearly they didn't bother going to the sanctuary because they considered that they had their own absolutely legitimate sanctuary to Yahweh, replete with a direct descendant of Moses as priest. Even though he would not therefore have been a Levite. And they worshipped an image for Yahweh.

It is tempting to think that "until the captivity" in :30 is effectively parallel with 'the time God's house was in Shiloh'. I noted on :30 that the captivity in view may have been of the ark, and not of the people to Babylon or Assyria. The house or sanctuary of God was in Shiloh

only until the time of Saul. When the ark went into captivity with the Philistines, and the sanctuary moved to Nob and then to Gibeon in the time of David, the time period in view may have finished. However I suggest that out of the three recorded places where the sanctuary was located (Shiloh, Nob and Gibeon), Shiloh was the nearest of them to Dan. The idea may therefore be that even when the sanctuary was relatively near them, they didn't go to it. They had their own sanctuary right in their own town. We note again the description of the sanctuary as "the house", even though no temple was then built- another reminder that these records were rewritten after the temple had been built, probably during the exile.

We must recall that Shiloh was nearby. The point is that despite having God's house close by, Micah seeks to build his own idolatrous house of God, and considers that he is worshipping Yahweh by so doing. The warning is to all who have a form of Godliness but deny the power / Spirit thereof (2 Tim. 3:5).

JUDGES CHAPTER 19

Jdg 19:1 In those days, when there was no king in Israel-

This seems to repeat Jud. 17:6 "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes".

This implies that the book of Judges as we have it was edited, under Divine inspiration, some time after Israel began to have kings. Perhaps during the exile, when again they had no king; and therefore the book becomes a warning to the exiles about likely apostasy. The lament may be that there was no authority, no teacher, no modelling of Godly living; because every man did what was right in his own eyes, rather than doing what was right in the eyes of Yahweh. For so often we read of Israel being condemned for doing what was wrong in His eyes. This is clear enough evidence that 'just follow your heart' is poor advice. For what is right in our own eyes results in the Godless confusion of what we find now at the time of the Judges. However it could be argued that having no human king was a good thing; for God didn't want them to have one. And therefore a situation where everyone judges things by their own judgment is in fact good; the problem was that the people didn't base their view upon God's word, His "eyes" or perspective, but solely upon their own unenlightened opinions.

There was a Levite living on the farther side of the hill country of Ephraim, who took a concubine out of Bethlehem Judah-

Not having their own land, the Levites were homeless when the tithes weren't paid, or if their priestly allotment was taken from them by the tribe where the priestly city was. I noted on the distribution of the priestly cities in Joshua that many were in areas not subdued by Israel, or in remote, peripheral regions. So the Levites became landless labourers, often homeless. This Levite appears to have been somewhat better off, and had a relationship with a woman other than his wife from Judah, far from where he was living. He had presumably met her in his various travels as a landless man. But immediately we get the impression he is not going to be a spiritual man- for he had another woman apart from his wife.

This Levite is presented as very similar to that of Jud. 17,18. I suggest the following connections are too specific for this to be unintentional. Both are introduced with the comment that there was then no king in Israel. This Levite is a "wayfaring man", a traveller always on the move, who was living temporarily ["sojourning"] in mount Ephraim, and his concubine was from Bethlehem. The Levite of Jud. 17 is also presented as a traveller, a man of the road looking for a better deal. He too lived temporarily in mount Ephraim, at Micah's home. He too had lived in Bethlehem, which is where the Levite's concubine came from in Jud. 19. It's quite possible that the young Levite of Jud. 17 has now grown up, and his sons had become priests at Dan (Jud. 18:30). But he for whatever reason is now travelling again,

possibly returning to live with Micah in mount Ephraim. We suggested earlier that Micah's parents were Samson and Delilah. In this case we see how the semi-spirituality of Samson led to the tokenistic version of spirituality of Jud. 17 and 18; and now that theme continues in Jud. 19-21. Here again we will see God's people doing externally the right thing, with allusion to God's law- when they were in fact just following their own flesh. Although Samson will be saved, his bad behaviour as a judge / leader of Israel for 20 years sowed these bad seeds. For he too was a complex mixture of flesh and Spirit, although God judged the "Spirit" side to be finally dominant. But those who followed his bad examples didn't have that strand of sincere faith and spirituality- and we see in Jud. 19-21 where that leads.

Jdg 19:2 His concubine was unfaithful to him, and went away from him to her father's house to Bethlehem Judah, and was there for four months-

Again the impression is reinforced that neither this Levite nor his woman on the side were very spiritual people. He was effectively unfaithful to his wife, and she was unfaithful to him. The fact she left him and returned to her family may have been because she feared he would physically abuse her- which he eventually does by cutting up her body into parts, showing himself no better than the men who raped her to death. And suggesting she indeed had reason to fear his abuse. Her unfaithfulness to him could have been punished by death. And yet the huge fuss made about her death therefore seems inappropriate to the fact that in God's book, she deserved death anyway.

"Unfaithful" is LXX "she scorned him". The record paints the Levite as someone the reader is also intended to scorn. The Hebrew can also be read as "she rejected him". It could be argued that the account sets up sympathy for the woman, although she has been unfaithful. People are unfaithful for a reason, and the reason is explained at length- the Levite was a sociopath and effective murderer, probably an alcoholic, a pig of a man despite his religiosity. Possibly the four months wait was to determine whether or not she was pregnant. It's possible that the trauma the woman went through was all the worse because she was pregnant. What appears to be the case on the surface is going to be revealed to be the very opposite- and that is a theme of Judges 13-21, that surface level spirituality conceals very raw flesh.

In the whole miserable story in Jud. 19-21, I personally have sympathy for none of the characters. They present as sinful and fully culpable for the consequences of their sins. But I do have sympathy for the concubine, and I suspect that's the intention of how the inspired narrative is written. She goes to her father for protection, but he hands her back to her husband. Her father presents as totally obsessed with socializing with the Levite rather than caring for his daughter. She is taken with the Levite probably against her will; for she has run away from him. She is presented as having no say in anything. She is grabbed [Heb.] by her husband and thrown out to a gang of rapists. She is used by them and then returns to her husband for protection. He doesn't even open the door. He is 'making merry' with the old man, the host; or possibly keeping a religious feast using bread and wine. She collapses on the doorstep. Her husband tells her to get up. But she is either dead or unconscious. She is taken by her husband and then cut into pieces to make a point. She is unloved, used and abused. And the men who were supposed to care for her actually abused her and failed her. But our first encounter with her is when we learn she has committed adultery and returned to her father. Adultery is of course wrong. But how many times has an adulterer been judged harshly and their partner praised as virtuous. When we know that the sins of the apparently innocent partner were very great, far greater than the adultery they provoked their partner to. And so it is here, I suggest. And so we go on through life, finding patience and comfort in these scriptures as we see basic human life repeat; there's nothing new under the sun. A misjudged woman 3000 years ago resonates with misjudged people in our age.

Jdg 19:3 Her husband went after her to persuade her to return. He had his servant with him and a couple of donkeys, and she brought him into her father's house. When her father saw him, he was pleased to meet him-

"To persuade her" is Heb. 'to speak to her heart'. The phrase is always used of sincere love or grace, given to one who didn't deserve it: God to unfaithful Israel (Is. 40:2; Hos. 2:14), Joseph to his brothers (Gen. 50:21), Boaz to Ruth (Ruth 2:13). Perhaps this is being described from his perspective; it was how the Levite wished to present himself as acting. Quite possibly he took this approach because he recognized that it was his behaviour which had driven her to her actions. We will soon read that he doesn't love her at all; and anyway, he spends his time drinking and feasting with her father rather than speaking to her. We are set up to see the Levite as insincere. I noted on :2 that the Levite hardly loved his concubine. And yet it seems that on another level he did. This is typical of the theme of mixed motives in Judges. We note too that girl's father seemed to like her married lover. We get the impression that this was a case of male drinking partners getting on well with each other, and not interested in the fact she had been unfaithful; they just wanted to get the family relationship back together. She may well have been pregnant by the Levite- hence his interest in having her back; he visits her after four months to see if she's pregnant, finds she is, and so he wants her back. For he couldn't have really loved her to cut up her body as he later does. The "couple" of donkeys were literally two donkeys (:2). As he was wealthy enough to have a concubine, a servant and donkeys, we wonder why he didn't bring a third donkey- for the concubine to ride on. The conclusion is surely that he didn't care for her; and his desire to get her back may well have been because she was pregnant with his child.

We note the similarities with the previous Levite just described in Jud. 17,18. He appears on the surface to do the right thing when he is hollow inside. So here, this Levite appears to do the right thing by ensuring he safely returns home his wife who had cheated on him. But his heart is very far from that. His apparent spirituality and love is just a disguise; the way he seizes her and pushes her out to her rapists, the way he talks to her limp body on the doorstep, the way he cuts her up and never laments her... shows he had only hatred and not love for her. The joyful father in law and apparent happy fellowship between the Levite and his father in law... all belies his real feelings. The father of the concubine likewise presents as uncaring for his daughter. He may simply have been happy the marriage was going to be restored so he didn't have to return the bride price.

Jdg 19:4 His father-in-law, the girl's father, persuaded him to stay, and he stayed with him three days, eating and drinking and sleeping there-

Eating and drinking are associated with illicit sexual behaviour, so we wonder whether the "sleeping" was also in this area. Hence in :6 "enjoy yourself" comes after eating and drinking. We can assume that the drinking involved drinking alcohol to excess, and we note that the Levite mentions that he is carrying plenty of wine with him in :19. It all builds up the impression that this Levite is not a very spiritual person; and neither is his concubine nor her family.

"Persuaded" is literally to grasp or to force in some way. It is the same word used of how the Levite grasps / takes / forces the man's daughter and throws her out to the mercy of her rapists (:25) and how he grasps / takes her body and cuts it up. The same word is used of how Amnon seized / grasped Tamar to rape her (2 Sam. 13). The English translations blur these connections. The word definitely has the idea of forcing; Saul takes / grabs Samuel's robe until it tears (1 Sam. 15:27). We wonder if the father of the woman, possibly under the influence of alcohol, somehow forced the Levite, possibly in homosexual rape. For he forces the Levite to 'sleep the night'. The Levite's response to the man's daughter, his concubine, is

therefore an understandable psychological response- although obviously so wrong. He would have gone his way so angry with the man, and with his daughter, his concubine. In this case, we can understand *why* someone commits a gross sin, we can discern the anger issues behind it, we can detect how he has transferred his anger onto the victim [in this case anger with the father was transferred to his daughter]... but perceiving the processes going on doesn't make the sin any less culpable. Be it theft, love of wealth, sexual perversion, unlove in any form...

However, we note the strong desire of the girl's father to entertain the Levite and restore the marriage. Quite possibly he was like Micah in the previous story- he thought that having a Levite in the family was sure to bring blessing. Again we see a case of form without content.

Jdg 19:5 On the fourth day they arose early in the morning, and he got ready to depart-
LXX "he stood up to depart" could imply he had been drunk before that.

And the girl's father said to his son-in-law, Strengthen yourself with something to eat and then go on your way-

The man clearly likes the Levite and wants him to stay with him at all costs, recalling the apostate Micah of Jud. 17 by all means wanting the unspiritual Levite to stay with him.

Jdg 19:6 So they sat down, ate and drank together, and then the girl's father said to the man, Please stay another night and enjoy yourself-

"Enjoy yourself" clearly suggests these men were drinking to excess and possibly misbehaving sexually; see on :4. AV "let thine heart be merry", the phrase used of the apostate Levite in Jud. 18:20 whom we have suggested may have been the same Levite: "The priest's heart was glad".

Jdg 19:7 When the man got up to go, his father-in-law urged him to stay, so he stayed there again-

We get the impression that the Levite just couldn't resist the temptation to drink.

Jdg 19:8 On the fifth day he got up early to leave, and the girl's father said, Please refresh yourself and stay until the afternoon; and they ate together-

They ate but didn't drink together as planned. The girl's father managed to delay him until afternoon, when the logical time to start the journey was in the morning (:9). But the Levite can't make an early start because he is always so drunk the night before, and can't get up early. That is the clear implication. We get the impression of weak will and carnality in this man. The record focuses upon the two men; the girl, who may well have been pregnant which was why he wanted her back so as to claim the child, didn't feature in their behaviour. The Levite is presented as not caring for her- building up to the impression that what he will do with her body and the fuss he will make is all hypocritical.

Jdg 19:9 When the man, his concubine and his servant got up to leave, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said to him, Look now, it's nearly evening; please stay all night. Stay here and enjoy yourself, and tomorrow set off early and go home-

Afternoon was an unwise time to start the journey, as they would need to find somewhere to stay at night; and travel was dangerous and lonely after dark. The truth is, this Levite is so alcoholic that he was always drunk at night, and so early morning starts weren't what he was capable of.

Jdg 19:10 But the man wouldn't stay that night; he got up and departed, and went towards Jebus (that is Jerusalem) with his two saddled donkeys and his concubine-

We are left to wonder as discussed on :3 why a man wealthy enough to have a servant, a

concubine and donkeys didn't bring a third donkey for the (pregnant?) concubine to ride. We get the impression from "his two donkeys and his concubine" that the concubine had to walk whilst he and his male servant rode the donkeys. Continually the impression is built up that he didn't really care for the girl at all, and the outcry he was to make was hypocritical.

Jdg 19:11 When they were near Jebus, the light was almost gone, and the servant said to his master, Please come and let us go into this city of the Jebusites, and stay the night there-
The servant was clearly fearful of travelling at night, knowing the dangers from wild animals and robbers. He had no particular fear of the Jebusites, showing that Israel was reconciled with the local inhabitants- because they worshipped the same gods.

Jdg 19:12 His master said to him, We won't go into the city of a foreigner whose people are not Israelites; we will go on to Gibeah-

Again we see the theme of mixed hearts in Judges. The Levite is presented as very unspiritual; but he refuses association with non Israelites. He will not even sleep a night in a Gentile inn- although there was no Mosaic prohibition of coming into the home of a Gentile. We recall at the time of Peter that New Testament Judaism had made entering the home of a Gentile an unlawful thing. And it was the same hypocrisy behind this Levite here. The unspiritual Levite with his donkey is the image used by the Lord in His parable of the good Samaritan, and it also features an inn which the Levite refused to use to assist the injured man. The Lord therefore presents this Levite in a bad light.

We note the Levite left Bethlehem, David's home town, and encountered disaster at Gibeah, Saul's home town. Perhaps the idea is that departing from the house of David will lead to disaster.

Jdg 19:13 He said to his servant, Come and let us get to one of these places; we will spend the night in Gibeah or in Ramah-

These were about two or three hours journey further on from Jerusalem where they were.

Jdg 19:14 So they went on and towards evening they were near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin-

This was to be the "Gibeah of Saul". We note Saul was from such an unspiritual place with such an awful spiritual history. But for all that bad background, the Spirit of God would have turned him right around- had he wished it. For bad background is no obstacle to the transforming work of the Spirit. Gibeah was intended to be one of the Levitical cities and possibly one of the extra cities of refuge (Josh. 21:17 AV "Geba" is Gibeah). Josh. 24:33 ESV confirms this: "Eleazar the son of Aaron died, and they buried him at Gibeah, the town of Phinehas his son, which had been given him in the hill country of Ephraim". The Levite went there expecting support, but didn't find it. He experienced what his wife did from her father. Yet "the Levite" is listed along with the widow, alien and orphan for whom all Israel had a special duty of care (Dt. 12:12,18,19; 14:27-29; 16:11-14; 26:11-13). We see the dysfunction and failure of religion. And how we experience in essence what we do to others, not as karma, but so that we might ourselves learn and repent. In this sense, God was even trying with that miserable Levite, to lead him to repentance. The men that should have provided him with support actually want to rape him. They act just like the men of Sodom. We are left to conclude that the Levite would have been better off staying with the Gentiles in Jebus than with the Israelites of a priestly city.

Jdg 19:15 They stopped there to spend the night in Gibeah. They went in and sat down in the street, because no-one took them into his house for the night-

Again (see on :12), the Lord may have this incident in mind when He says that He will condemn those at the judgment who in this life did not take in strangers (Mt. 25:43). We are intended to reflect that he would have been better treated had he arrived in Jebus that night than he was amongst the Israelites in Gibeah. The fact nobody showed hospitality was a reflection of the unspirituality of Gibeah. "The street" is better 'the square'.

Jdg 19:16 In the evening there came an old man from his work in the field. He was from the hill country of Ephraim and he lived in Gibeah, but the men of the place were Benjamites- He was therefore from the same area where the Levite was living (:1). This was surely Divine providence. Perhaps the men of Gibeah were so xenophobic that they also hated even this old man who was from another tribe. And the old man, being a stranger himself, was moved to show kindness to strangers. The more we perceive our own condition, the more natural it will be to reach out to others in that same condition. If we are convicted of our sin and God's grace towards us, we will more naturally and easily reach out with God's grace to other sinners.

Jdg 19:17 When he saw the traveller in the street the old man said, Where are you going? Where have you come from?-

These words are a direct quote of the Angel's words to Hagar, when she is fleeing from Sarah and has nowhere to go, and faces death and danger alone in the desert (Gen. 16:8). Clearly the old man was faithful to Yahweh and immediately thought in terms of Biblical and spiritual precedent, and wished to act as the Angel had acted to Hagar when He 'found' her. We should be the same, always thinking in terms of Biblical precedent. But it is also the old man who offers the mob his daughter and the Levite's concubine; so concerned is he to follow the culture of hospitality and preserve his own pride of face.

Jdg 19:18 He said to him, We are on our way from Bethlehem Judah to the far side of the hill country of Ephraim. I am from there and I have been in Bethlehem Judah. I am going to the house of Yahweh, and no-one has taken me into his house-

This was a lie; the man was returning home, and not going to Bethel or to the sanctuary of Yahweh. We note the term "house of Yahweh" again indicates the records here were edited [under Divine inspiration] during the exile, or at least after the temple had been built. The Levite may mean that he was a Levite who served in God's house, and therefore Israel ought to have taken him into their houses; but they were so apostate and even against Yahweh's sanctuary and the Levites that they did not. He may also be implying that it was because he served in Yahweh's house that these apostates wouldn't have him in their houses. Which may have been true, but was very hypocritical for a man who has been drunk the last five days. Maybe indeed the Benjamites despised the sanctuary of Yahweh, and the Levites; and this was the real reason why Yahweh allowed their destruction at the hands of the brethren.

Jdg 19:19 Yet we have both straw and fodder for our donkeys and bread and wine also for me and for the maidservant and for the young man who is with us. We don't need anything-

The fact the Levite mentions he has plenty of wine with him suggests he may well have been an alcoholic; for we recall him drinking wine to excess with his woman's father for some days before this journey. It all builds up the impression that this Levite with his donkey is not a very spiritual person, and the Lord's parable of the good Samaritan may well have this Levite in view- presenting him as an unspiritual man. Even worse, the bread and wine and ample provision could suggest that the Levite suggests that they enjoy spiritual fellowship and keep some kind of religious feast, presumably to Yahweh. They were interrupted in

doing so by the mob, pushed their women out of the door to be gang raped... whilst they got on with their religion. Again we see how form had eclipsed content.

Jdg 19:20 The old man said, Peace to you! But I will provide for you; don't stay all night in the street-

The story is clearly a repeat of the actions of Lot toward the Angels he met on the streets of Sodom. Again we are asked to see that situations repeat within the lives of God's servants. And we are to perceive this, being always comforted that we are not alone; the biographies we have in the Bible are to comfort us that we are not travelling uncharted territory, no experience is not completely unique to us. We begin thinking that the old man is going to be a kindly Godly figure. But again we are disappointed- for he offers his own daughter to the mob, and does nothing to help the abused concubine who collapses with her hands on his doorstep, begging for shelter in his house- and doesn't find it from her. Like the concubine's father, the old man is eager to provide hospitality to the Levite, but couldn't care for his concubine.

Jdg 19:21 So he brought him into his house and gave the donkeys fodder, and they washed their feet and ate and drank-

The old man comes over as spiritually minded (:17) and although an old man, like a true seed of Abraham, still entertaining strangers. But as discussed on :20, this was all just a surface appearance. Constantly in these accounts we find that first impressions aren't true.

Jdg 19:22 As they were enjoying themselves-

The same phrase is used about how the Levite got drunk repeatedly with his father in law. The Levite basically tells the old man that he has wine with him and they can have a nice time together with it, if he stays at his place (:19).

The wicked men of the city surrounded the house, beating on the door; they said to the owner of the house, the old man, Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may have sex with him!-

This is a repeat of the situation in Sodom, and "that righteous man" Lot is paralleled in the old man- weak, but spiritual and with God in his heart. The Hebrew stresses: "Some of the wicked men of the city". Not all the men of the city, nor all of the wicked men, just some of them. One lesson from the story is that the a whole community should not be punished for the sins of a minority. As a result of this surrounding of one house, Gibeah was to be surrounded and totally destroyed (Jud. 20:29).

The desire to rape the Levite was not merely a matter of sexual lust. If a man raped a man, the victim was seen as feminized, and the rapist had thereby shown his power over the victim. The desire to rape was therefore also related to xenophobia and hatred of the Levite. And yet Gibeah was supposed to be a priestly city, where the Levite should get a warm, supportive welcome. Just as his wife's father's home ought to have been a safe space for her.

Jdg 19:23 The owner of the house went out to them and said to them, No my brothers, please don't act so wickedly; since this man is my guest don't do this disgraceful thing-

The culture of protecting guests was very strong, and the care of the man was partly from pride, and partly from genuine concern to protect a Levite. Again, as always in Judges 17-21, a case of mixed motives. The man says that to rape his visitor would be "wicked" and a "disgraceful thing". But he apparently thought that the mob raping his daughter and the visitor's wife would not be anything like so "wicked". Even though the term for "disgraceful thing" is used in God's word about rape and sexual immorality (Gen. 34:7; Dt. 22:20,21). Possibly he thought that the example of Lot ["that righteous man"] justified him. Lot offered

two women to the mob, his two daughters. Maybe that's why the old man offers not only his daughter but another woman, the Levite's concubine. This would continue the theme of merely following Biblical precedent in a cardboard, lifeless way, whilst ignoring the Bible's deeper moral teaching- in this case, that rape of a woman and sexual immorality is a "disgraceful thing".

Jdg 19:24 Look, here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. I will bring them out now and you can use them and do with them what seems good unto you, but don't do any such disgusting thing to this man-

The old man perceived, surely, the similarities with Lot in Sodom. For we saw on :17 how he knew the book of Genesis very well, and had already quoted from Genesis 17. And the events of Lot in Sodom were only a little later, in Gen. 19. So it may be that he made this desperate offer thinking that he was justified in it by Lot. He failed to perceive that the Biblical characters are not at all spotlessly righteous, and it is for us to perceive that and learn from their mistakes- rather than taking a simplistic approach which considers them all as pale faced, perfect saints. The wrath of Israel was upon Benjamin and Gibeah for what was done. But they were overlooking the fact that this man of Ephraim, with the full consent of the Levite, had in fact offered the Levite's concubine to these men. They had even invited them to do "whatever seems good unto you". And the men did so. And yet Israel's wrath ignores all this and focuses instead upon those they wish to focus their wrath upon. There is very much injustice and lack of consideration of all factors in their judgment of the situation. And one of the lessons from the errors all around in this narrative is that we are not to judge- simply because we cannot judge. We are incapable of factoring in everything.

The similarities with Gen. 19 are clear:

- Travellers arrive in the city in the evening.
- A man who is himself an alien notices them in the street / square
- The travellers plan to spend the night in the open
- At the insistence of the host, the travellers agree to spend the night in his house.
- The host washes the guests' feet (implied in Gen. 19:2,3)
- Host and guests share in a fellowship meal.
- Base men of the city surround the house.
- They demand that the host "bring out" [both times] his male guests ["them that have come to you" used both times] to them that they might commit homosexual gang rape.
- The host protests this display of wickedness.
- When the protests prove futile, the hosts hand over a substitute female, a "virgin" involved both times, inviting the mob to "do to them what is good in your eyes", but not to the guest[s]. Both Lot and the old host "went out to them". Both times, the offer doesn't satisfy the mob.

- Both men use hospitality culture as an excuse to do the wrong thing.

The clear similarities and points of contrast with the scene in Gen. 19 invite us to see an inversion of things. The visitors were not Angels, here they are a Levite and his wife. The old man offers his guest's wife and not just his daughter to gratify them (:24). Indeed in :24 he uses the word for "rape", which Lot doesn't do. On one hand, he seeks to show himself a wonderful host. But offering your guest's wife to rapists rather undermines that image. His apparent extreme hospitality culture is undercut by his failure to be even basically hospitable. And he is only externally, mechanically following the similarities with Lot. Lot was threatened personally, with the door shut behind him, talking to the mob. The old man isn't personally in such danger as Lot was.

The Hebrew is literally "do to them what is good in your eyes". This continues the theme of Judges, that without a king, Israel did what was good in their own eyes. And that "good"

was shown here to be gang rape. Clearly and powerfully the point is made: If man is left to do whatever he finds good in his eyes, then this is where it leads. There has to be some moral restraint and submission beneath good moral leadership.

We note it was the old man who offered the Levite's concubine to the mob. Our first impression of a kindly, hospitable old man is again questioned. Presumably the Levite had presented his concubine to the old man as a woman he didn't love, who had been unfaithful to him and was worthless to him. And the Levite makes no attempt to persuade the host to solely offer his own virgin daughter to the mob. Again and again we see how surface level impressions are shown as a thin veneer. And we are thereby constantly bidden to self examination.

Jdg 19:25 But the men wouldn't listen to him, so the man took his concubine and brought her out to them and they raped her and abused her all night until the morning, and when the day began to dawn they let her go-

This fact was not given its full weight. It was the Levite who had given his concubine to them. Instead of giving his life for his wife, he gave her to humiliation and death in order to save his own skin. Again we see that the Levite didn't love the woman. And if he had, he would not have cut her body up. Perhaps he justified himself by thinking of how Abraham and Isaac had [wrongly] given up their wives to save their own skin. Again, Biblical precedent was used wrongly. The men of Gibeah "wouldn't listen" and the same term is used of the whole tribe of Benjamin in Jud. 20:13. "Took" is literally "seized". The Levite forced her to go out to them, possibly to her death. And yet he and all Israel were to demand that Benjamin "hand over" the men of Gibeah as if they had been her murderers (see on Jud. 20:13). See on :29. "Abused" is the word used in Jud. 20:45 of how the men of Benjamin were "abused" [NEV "killed", AV "gleaned"] to the end by the men of Israel. It seems so out of proportion- terrible as was the abuse of the woman, the abusing of almost every last man of Benjamin was a disproportionate response. But that is the end result of the mentality of "guilt by association" and letting "an eye for an eye" not remain at one eye for one eye. Responses never seem to remain at that; "an eye for an eye" was actually a call for restraint in response.

Jdg 19:26 Then the woman went back and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was, and lay there until it was light-

"Her master" is a phrase suddenly used here and in :27. Perhaps the idea is that she belonged to the Levite. He was her master and should have been caring towards her as his property. He was not. And so the eager belief of the narrative that this poor man had cruelly lost his beloved wife... is suspect. It was created like that, and upon that was built in any case a huge over reaction. The implication is that she was alive when she got to the house; she was not murdered by the rapists. She died on the doorstep- because the Levite didn't open the door and pull her in.

Jdg 19:27 Her master got up in the morning and opened the door and went out to continue on his way, and there was his concubine fallen down at the door of the house with her hands on the threshold-

The idea may be that she had been trying to open the door, or at least knock upon it; hence GNB "with her hands reaching for the door". But the Levite, who surely didn't go to sleep that night, hadn't opened the door to pull her in and care for her. See on :26. The whole style of the narrative in :26-28 gives the impression that the Levite callously acted as if nothing had happened the night before. This is typical of how conscience less people act when they have committed major crimes, and again suggests that he in fact murdered her. For the record

later says that she was murdered- but the rapists raped her and she was still alive when she returned home. The murderer was surely her husband. It could be argued that the murder isn't recorded but we are intended to infer that. Or perhaps his refusal to open the door and help his wife was in fact counted as murder, the classic sin of omission.

Jdg 19:28 He said to her, Get up, and let us be going! but there was no answer. Then he put her up on the donkey and set off for home-

This clearly reflects his despite of her. It was obvious that she was either dead, or severely wounded; likely she was covered with blood. But he gruffly tells her to get up and be going. There is no attempt to enquire of her welfare or to assist her. It is absolutely clear now that the Levite doesn't at all love or care for her; indeed it was him who had given her to the rapists. He was wrong, they were wrong- but Israel were to make the mistake of so much human 'judgment', and seek to find one party guilty and the other totally innocent.

Jdg 19:29 When he had come into his house, he took a knife and cut up his concubine, and divided her, limb by limb, into twelve pieces, and sent them throughout all the regions of Israel-

Again as noted on :28, we have the final evidence that he didn't love her. For a man would never do this to a woman he loved. He was clearly offended that nobody had taken him in, and that he had been threatened with male rape. And he was seeking to wreak a terrible vengeance against the city and tribe- because of his own hurt pride. The twelve pieces going to the twelve tribes would have included Benjamin.

LXX "He took his sword, and laid hold of his concubine"; AV "he took a knife, and laid hold on his concubine". "Laid hold" can be translated 'to seize'. The implication may be that she was still alive; hence he had to seize her. Just as in :25 he seized / took hold of her and forcibly pushed her out of the house towards her rapists. But he sends her body parts around Israel as if this is the anger of love, anger with the rapists and desiring justice against them. But in fact he has no love for his wife; his anger is with her and all this drama is an outcome of that.

We note that there is no confirmation of her death. Some manuscripts add in :28 "for she was dead" but many omit that. One moment he assumes she's alive, telling her to get up. The next we read that he takes her home and inside the house cuts her body up. He later claims that the attackers had raped her until they had killed her (Jud. 20:4-7), but he makes that claim at the same time as saying they had tried to kill him- which also isn't entirely true. And the comment of :25 is that "they let her go" at dawn; they didn't kill her. She managed to get herself to the door of the house, but the Levite was not looking to help her, and she died on the doorstep. Only after he had done drinking, possibly to excess, did he awake in the morning, open the door, and found her on the door step. Any reasonable man would surely have been looking to assist her once she knocked on the door. There is no mention that she was dead. This silence is significant, and invites us to conclude that he took her inside the house and killed her, or possibly took her to his home and there killed her with his "sword" (LXX, NEV "knife"). The record comments in Jud. 20:4 that the Levite was the husband "of the woman who was murdered". The record says she was murdered. But the rapists raped her and let her go; they didn't murder her, as she was alive afterwards. If she was murdered, then this could only have been by the Levite.

There are clear connections and parallels with the situation in 1 Sam. 11 when Israel are oppressed by the Ammonites. Saul's cutting up of an animal and sending parts throughout Israel leads to the deliverance of Jabesh-Gilead by Saul of Gibeah. The Levite's cutting up of his wife and sending the body parts leads to military action against Gibeah and Jabesh-Gilead; but now by Israel against Israel. But Saul saved Jabesh, whereas the results of the

Levite's actions nearly destroy it (Jud. 21:10,11). So the mechanical imitation of Saul achieved the very opposite results. We note how Gibeah and Jabesh figure together in both passages. The old host in Judges 19 tells the mob that he will bring out the women, so that the mob can 'do to them what is good in your eyes' (Jud. 19:24). In 1 Sam. 11, the men of Jabesh-Gilead tell Nahash that "tomorrow we will come out (s.w.) to you and you will do to us all that is good in your eyes" (1 Sam. 11:10). Saul was seized by "the spirit of God" (1 Sam. 11:6). He takes a yoke of oxen (the Levite also had a yoke, Jud. 19:3 Heb.), cuts them into pieces and sends them throughout Israel. With a threat of consequence if Israel don't respond. Israel muster to him, just as Israel do in response to the cutting up of the concubine. Saul splits them into three groups [as Israel were in three groups in their final storming of Gibeah, see Jud. 20] and leads them to victory. It seems to me that the Levite was totally wrong in what he was doing, but typical of other situations in Jud. 14-18, he acts externally like a man [Saul] did upon whom the Spirit of God had come. He gives the impression, therefore, that he is acting according to the Spirit- when he is acting according to the flesh. And so often God's people do the same. Saul dismembered an animal and sent it throughout Israel, leading to Israel's salvation. But the Levite dismembered his wife and sent the parts throughout Israel, resulting in Israel's self destruction. Again we see the theme of surface level imitation of a spiritual event in the past, whereas the reality is totally unspiritual.

Likewise the way he as a priest cuts up her body into parts with his knife suggests he was offering her as a human sacrifice- clearly implying he is doing this to Yahweh. "Limb by limb" could mean "according to the bones" as if he cut up the body without breaking any bones, as if she were a Passover sacrifice. This would have created a huge outflow of blood. His allusion may have been to the way the body was thought to comprise 12 parts; but he ends up prefiguring his dismemberment of all Israel in her 12 tribes. All this fits in with the theme that began with Samson in Jud. 13- of flesh and Spirit hopelessly mixed, doing the things of the flesh under the guise of vague out of context Biblical allusion. "He took a knife..." is the phrase of Gen. 22:6,10, twice used of how Abraham "took the knife to kill his son". Clearly the Levite thinks this justified his action. But again, he is reading or recalling wilfully out of context, merely to justify his own anger against his unfaithful wife. There are a number of incidental connections with the scene of Abraham offering Isaac. None of them alone are significant, but put together they suggest that the inspired author of Judges 19 seems to "riff" on the Gen. 22 text. So Jud. 19:6 describes how the Levite and his father-in-law "ate, the two of them together", as Abraham and Isaac "went, the two of them together" in Gen. 22:6,8. "He lifted his eyes and saw" occurs in both Gen. 22:13 and Jud. 19:17, as does "he arose early in the morning" (Gen. 22:3; Jud. 19:5). Both Abraham and the Levite travel with at least one saddled ass and a servant. Perhaps the impression is that the Levite perceived the similarities, but then out of context thought this would justify him too taking a knife and sacrificing his family member.

The idea of cutting up an animal and sending out the pieces was similar to cutting a covenant. Saul did the same in order to muster Israel to battle. But the idea was 'May you also be cut to pieces if you don't respond'. It was highly manipulative. The Levite was cleverly seeking to get all Israel to come against Gibeah, and they fell for his plot. The anger issues of one man were thereby allowed to cause a holocaust, as seen in Adolf Hitler. His break up with his woman was made the break up of all the community; as has been seen in church groups to this day. And the dismembered body spoke of the divided state of Israel, only united "as one man" in doing evil. We note in passing the double symbolism of a divided body. The Lord broke the bread, the symbol of His body, as the sign of His personal, individual giving of His body to each member of His spiritual body. But the divided body is also a symbol of a hopelessly divided body, the reality of which has caused so many to

stumble from the Faith. But the Lord is identified even with His body in that. Likewise the cup of wine is a double symbol, of Divine judgment and also as "the cup of blessing".

Jdg 19:30 All who saw it said, Such a deed has never been done or seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of Egypt until this day! Consider it! Decide what should be done-

The gruesome record of the Levite cutting up his wife's body and sending parts of the body throughout all Israel has much to teach us of the power of the memorial service. It was done so that all who received the parts of that broken body would "take advice and speak [their] minds" (Jud. 19:30). LXX "Take counsel with yourselves about her, and speak out". They were to examine themselves in the light of those body pieces, and give an opinion. It was designed to elicit the declaration of their hearts, and above all to provoke to concrete action. Splitting up a body and sharing it with all Israel was clearly a type of the breaking of bread, where in symbol, the same happens. Consider some background, all of which points forward to the Lord's sufferings:

- The person whose body was divided up was from Bethlehem, and of the tribe of Judah (Jud. 19:1)
- They were 'slain' by permission of a priest
- They were dragged to death by a wicked Jewish mob
- They were "brought forth" to the people just as the Lord was to the crowd (Jud. 19:25)
- "Do what seems good unto you" (Jud. 19:24) is very much Pilate language
- A man sought to dissuade the crowd from their purpose- again, as Pilate.

There should be a like effect upon us as we receive the emblems of the Lord's 'broken body'- the inner thoughts of our hearts are elicited, and we are provoked to action.

JUDGES CHAPTER 20

Jdg 20:1 Then all the Israelites went out, and the congregation assembled as one man- Religious people love to experience the unity which comes from having a common case of apostasy to fight against and judge. But this is not the unity of the Spirit. Recall how the Lord's enemies were united together by their common cause against Him. Such things recorded in the Bible reflect the absolute psychological and sociological credibility of the records. They assembled as one man [repeated in :11, and implied in :8 where not one man was to return home until Benjamin were punished], in apparent unity, in order to effectively dismember Israel by cutting off one of their own tribes. Their unity actually led to the worst civil war of their history so far. And thus is continued the theme of a guise of spirituality resulting in deeply fleshly behaviour.

From Dan to Beersheba and from the land of Gilead, to Yahweh at Mizpah- Beersheba became effectively the southern border of Judah (Josh. 15:28), hence the common phrase "from Dan [in the north] to Beersheba [in the south]". But this was not at all the southern border promised to Abraham, which was the "river of Egypt". God effectively recalculated the boundaries for Israel, as He came to realize that they simply didn't have the spiritual ambition to go and possess the full extent of the land promised to Abraham. Thus "the river" on the eastern boundary effectively was recalculated as the Jordan and not the Euphrates; and likewise the southern border shifted northwards from the brook of Egypt to Beersheba. God has a similar flexibility with us too.

The very extreme north of Israel's northern borders, in Dan or the former Laish, was inhabited by the apostates whom we have seen described in detail in Jud. 17,18. For them to go charging off in judgment upon Gibeah was grossly hypocritical, when they had slain a

whole community of unsuspecting people in a primitive land grab, and installed a terribly apostate religious system there.

As in previous incidents in Jud. 17-19, what appears to be spiritual behaviour is hollow inside. Dan was idolatrous (Jud. 18:30,31). And the appearance of righteous unity "before Yahweh" to uphold His Truth was in fact nothing more than civil war fuelled by jealousy and hatred.

"And from the land of Gilead" is mentioned because at the time of Jephthah, Gilead had warred with Ephraim (Jud. 12:4,5). But as happened at the Lord's crucifixion, formerly opposed parties come together when they get caught up in a feeding frenzy to fight supposed apostasy and to dish out harsh judgment. We see the same in church politics today.

Jdg 20:2 The leaders of the people from all the tribes of Israel took their places in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand armed soldiers-

"Thousand" especially when used in a military context often doesn't mean a literal 1,000, but rather means a military subdivision. This gathering is described from the point of view of the tribes generally, for "all the tribes of Israel" presumably excluded Benjamin. The record reminds us that for all the huge dysfunction at this time, they were called still "the people of God". We need to remember this when we understandably shake our heads at the dysfunction of our brethren.

We could argue that they had already prepared for war before the judicial enquiry was made. Justice wasn't done and there was clearly a bias towards a conclusion at the outset. Yet to judge unjustly was something God's law expresses His especial hatred of. Sending body parts to all Israel was used by Saul as a call to arms in 1 Sam. 11, and the Mari texts have examples of similar things being done with human bodies at the time- as a call to arms. The assumption was therefore being made that crime had been committed, the perpetrators were identified, and now needed judgment. The gathering of such a huge number of soldiers suggests they already had the end result in view- a campaign against Benjamin. They came out as one man (:1) to consider the case, and then after the investigation they were again as one man (:8). The hint is that they had already decided this incident was to be their alibi for attacking Benjamin, and what they did after the judicial enquiry was what they had already decided to before it. We suspect that Judah and possibly Ephraim were after Benjamin's land for themselves, and were therefore eager for an excuse to subjugate or wipe out the tribe of Benjamin. They hadn't taken the land from the Canaanites, and were living in the uplands. Benjamin had some good lowland territory, and they coveted it. Instead of driving out the Philistines and others, they considered it easier to slay their own brethren and steal their land inheritance. Benjamin was one of the smallest tribes and had a very small inheritance- perhaps they assumed that it was easy to destroy such a small tribe. In the end, after the destruction of the 10 tribe kingdom, Benjamin was indeed effectively subsumed into Judah, and the two and a half tribe kingdom was known simply as "Judah".

Jdg 20:3 Now the Benjamites heard that the Israelites had gone up to Mizpah. The Israelites said, Tell us how this wicked thing happened-

The implication is that the Benjamites weren't represented at the Mizpah conference. The whole decision and chain of events was based solely on the word of the Levite, who we saw throughout Jud. 19 was hardly a man of integrity. The basis upon which they judged the case was unwise in the extreme. We learn from Jud. 21:5 that they had threatened death to anyone who didn't come to this gathering. So the Benjamites stood condemned to death just because they didn't attend a meeting. Just as some have been disfellowshipped for "long continued absence" from a church. This is not at all Biblical, and the attitude of the Israelites here was not at all in accord with the Law of Moses. Nor did they take any advice from God about this;

they simply promised death to any who didn't attend their gathering. Perhaps this was why they thought they were justified in slaying the Benjamites- because they had broken the Israelites' self declared law and commandment to come to Mizpah.

The "wicked thing" was presumably the death of the concubine. It's unclear whether the question is asked of Benjamin or the Levite. They ask this question of the accused before the accuser has even stated his version of events. The Levite then gives his version, and Benjamin say nothing. The question begs the assumption that a wicked thing has happened. But the nature of the wicked thing has not been defined. They are assuming and presuming the Levite's story as being true, even before he formally states it.

Jdg 20:4 The Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered, I came to Gibeah in Benjamin, I and my concubine, to stay the night-

See on :3. He begins absolutely factually, although not volunteering that his woman had run away from him, had been unfaithful to him, and he and her father had been drinking for five days solid before the incident.

We note the Levite is only called a Levite twice (Jud. 19:1; 20:4). He is repeatedly called "the man"; and we wonder whether he was a Levite. The "Levite" we met in Jud. 17,18 was in fact only a half Levite, being also from Judah. And he was descended from Moses, not Aaron, making him not a priestly Levite at all. We are surely invited to wonder whether this "Levite" was much of one at all.

"The woman who was murdered" is the Divine commentary. We are left to work out who murdered her, bearing in mind that the Hebrew for "murdered" usually refers to intentional, premeditated murder and not manslaughter (Ex. 20:13; Dt. 5:17). We noted on Jud. 19 how the same word is used for the Levite 'seizing' the concubine and forcing her out to the mob; and for how he 'seized' her and then used his knife to cut up her body. This is a strange word to use if in fact she was a dead body. In any case, he was surely her murdered as a sin of omission. For she came to the house he was staying at, knocking at the door, desperate for help. And he didn't open the door nor assist her.

Jdg 20:5 The men of Gibeah came after me and surrounded the house at night. They intended to kill me, and they raped my concubine and she is dead-

Now he begins to twist his story. There is no record that the men of Gibeah wanted to kill him. It was not all the men of Gibeah, but a group of yobbos who were probably drunk, who had demanded gay sex with him. And he doesn't volunteer the fact that he himself suggested they rape his concubine, and he gave her to them with no attempt to defend her, but the opposite. He carefully avoids saying that they murdered her, just that "she is dead". For I suggested on Jud. 19:26,27 that she made her way back to the door of the house, but he refused to open the door and help her. He was in fact responsible for her death. Nor does he mention his crude comment to her corpse in Jud. 19:28. He calls the mob "the lords of Gibeah" (Heb.), when the record doesn't state this. He is trying to elevate the incident to a higher level and thereby vilify the whole town and its leaders. He leads the audience to believe that they raped her unto death. He doesn't say "they killed her" but leaves that implied. Notice all the personal pronouns in :4-6. It's all about him... I, me, my. We note all Israel respond positively to the Levite's words, and see nothing wrong in his dismembering his wife- they respond positively to it. There is no outrage at his callousness, nor any probing of his story. And that says a lot about them.

There was a requirement of two witnesses in the Mosaic law, especially for murder (Num. 35:30; Dt. 17:6, 19:15). This was because typically the accuser is a witness; but other witnesses are required rather than the word of one accuser. But the Levite alone testifies; the old host doesn't. The rape of his daughter isn't mentioned by the Levite, surely because he

doesn't want to bring the old man as a witness. The law required that Israel's judges were to "make a thorough enquiry" (Dt. 17:4; 19:18) in such cases. They treat Gibeah as an idolatrous city (Dt. 13:13-18) but without the required careful investigation beforehand. And the rape of a woman by "some" of the men of the city isn't the same as a whole city turning to idolatry. There is no "thorough enquiry". The Levite's testimony is simply believed, even though we as readers know that he is being deceptive. Because what he says doesn't match fairly with what we know happened from Jud. 19. He speaks in the Hebrew of "the lords [Heb. *baal*] of Gibeah" when there is only mention of the "men" [Heb. *ish*] of Gibeah doing the crime in Jud. 19:5. He says that the men tried to kill him when in fact they wanted to rape him. He says they raped his concubine "and she is dead", using language in such a way as to lead the hearers to think they murdered her. But he is conflating murder with rape.

One simple take away from the Levite's recounting of events is that it's a human tendency to rewrite or re-state our narratives- to our own advantage. Omitting the real issues, focusing on a few facts, twisting and inventing a few things... until the narrative appears totally in our favour. And then to drag others into that narrative. Rather than humbly accepting that we are big time sinners who can be saved by grace. And another take away is to avoid the mentality of guilt by association. Most of Benjamin were destroyed because of the supposed sins of a minority. Saul of Gibeah of Benjamin later killed all the priests at Nob in a similar guilt by association killing (1 Sam. 22:19). We wonder whether he was subconsciously motivated in this by what Israel and the Levites had done to him and his town and tribe.

Jdg 20:6 I took my concubine and cut her in pieces and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel because they have committed this disgraceful and abominable act in Israel-

"The inheritance of Israel" is a claim to great spiritual discernment, claiming to rightly perceive that all the land was Israel's inheritance, and implying a lament that they had not inherited all of it. "Disgraceful act" is AV "lewdness", and we note in Lev. 19:29 that one cause of "lewdness" in the land would be prostituting a woman and causing her to be a whore. But this is what the Levite had done by suggesting the men sleep with her, and facilitating this. And finally all Judah were to go into captivity for "lewdness" (s.w. Jer. 13:27; Ez. 16:27; 23:29, especially the "lewdness" of the Levites, Hos 4:9). "Committed this... abominable act in Israel" is a direct quotation from the sons of Jacob wanting to destroy the entire town of Shechem for the apparent rape of Dinah (Gen. 34:7). But Simeon and Levi, ancestor of this Levite, were condemned for what they did to Shechem. Their response was considered by God disproportionate. But the Levite quotes a Bible verse and precedent, without attention to context- which would have revealed that in fact the situation with the rape of Dinah was not a precedent for going in and destroying the town where the rape had occurred. And finally all Israel were to be condemned for having "Committed... abominable acts in Israel" (s.w. Jer. 29:23). All the evidence therefore is that the course of judgment and action they were to now undertake was wrong and hypocritical.

Jdg 20:7 Now you Israelites, all of you, give your advice and counsel-

The fact they had gathered together in such numbers in response to the body parts being sent is evidence that their presence itself showed what they thought should be done. This request for advice was therefore a mere formalism and not at all sincere.

Jdg 20:8 All the people arose as one man saying, None of us will go to his tent, neither will any of us go home-

What we now read is a classic example of a groupthink overtaking an assembly. They were

themselves deeply apostate and astray from God, lost in idolatry and apostasy. But the idea of punishing that which was obviously wrong was very attractive to them, and they experienced great unity amongst themselves in their desire to judge this matter harshly. They entered into a feeding frenzy against Gibeah and the Benjamites. The fact we are to leave judgment to God and believe that "vengeance is [alone] Mine, I will repay", is in fact an intended brake upon the human desire to judge and punish. But Israel ignore it here, as God's people have done so often.

Jdg 20:9 This is what we will do to Gibeah: we will go up against it by lot-

They seem confident they could destroy such a small town, which could only muster seven hundred fighters [perhaps "hundred" is also a term for a military subdivision]. Their over confidence was going to be judged by God. For they are reasoning here like the Israelites did before they attacked Ai and were defeated.

Jdg 20:10 and we will take ten men of every hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and a hundred out of every thousand and a thousand out of ten thousand, to get food for the army so that when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin they can punish them for the disgusting thing they have done in Israel-

They decide the judgment and even the exact method of it without any request to God to guide them, and without hearing Gibeah's side. They decided the testimony of the Levite was true, purely on his say so.

Jdg 20:11 So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united as one man-

We think of the unity of Herod and Pilate when they had the common cause of destroying the Lord Jesus, and the unity of otherwise disparate forces and entities against the Lord Jesus in the latter day prophecies.

Jdg 20:12 The tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin saying, What is this disgusting crime that has been committed among you?-

They quote the words of the Levite in :6, calling it a "disgusting crime". They don't enquire of God for wisdom as to how to proceed, or how to establish the facts of the case. They uncritically repeat his words and assume the crime has been committed, and judgment has been passed and the men of Gibeah must be slain. They are not open to any further discussion nor consideration of evidence. Not that any counter evidence had even been presented. The alcoholic Levite had to be right, because this was the path they wished to take.

Jdg 20:13 Now surrender the wicked men of Gibeah so that we may put them to death and put away evil from Israel. But Benjamin would not listen to their brothers the Israelites-

The tragedy of this situation between "brothers" is emphasized by the Divine record. The reasoning of the Israelites is that the men of Gibeah were provenly wicked and must be put to death. A kidnapper also had to be "put to death" (Ex. 21:16), and it could be argued that this is effectively what the Levite had done to his concubine. Why Benjamin refused to surrender the men of Gibeah is not recorded. But we imagine they disagreed with the way the judgment had been arrived at, and more than questioned the credibility of the sole witness, the Levite. That mixed up man was to have a lot of blood on his hands as a result of his hypocrisy, and desire to judge others for what in essence he himself was guilty of. And we see such people in the body of believers today. The punishment of being "put to death" was for murder (Lev. 24:17), and we see from :4 that they were assuming that the men of Gibeah had murdered the woman. But they hadn't. She walked back to the house, and died due to the Levite's inattention; and quite possibly, the Levite murdered her. Homosexual sex was to result in

being "put to death" (Lev. 20:13). But whilst the men at Gibeah had wanted this, they didn't do it.

The argument was that they had to put away evil from Israel. But Dt. 17:6,7 was clear that this should never be done on merely the testimony of one man. The Israelites were directly breaking this commandment, as the Levite was the only witness at Mizpah: "At the mouth of two or three witnesses shall he who is to die be put to death. At the mouth of one witness he must not be put to death. The hand of the witnesses must be first on him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall put away the evil from the midst of you". We can imagine Benjamin raising all these objections- and being ignored. They had surely heard from the authorities in Gibeah their side of the story, and yet saw that the other Israelites were not open to it at all. The Israelites however shrouded all this non-compliance with God's law beneath an appearance of doing what His law said. For "hand over..." is quoting from Dt. 19:12, where the murderer must be handed over to the elders for execution. The sad irony is that it can be argued that the men of Gibeah hadn't actually committed murder- that was done by the Levite, or so we are left to infer. But Dt. 19:12 speaks of the extradition of a murderer to the blood avenger by the elders. It's doubtful that any of those demanding the blood of the 'murderers' were 'avengers of blood'. And as discussed throughout Jud. 19, I suggest that it was the Levite not the rapists who committed the murder.

Jdg 20:14 The Benjamites gathered together out of their cities to Gibeah to go out to fight against the Israelites-

Again we note that they "gathered together", matching the earlier descriptions of them acting "as one man" in this matter. There was a groupthink mentality, a feeding frenzy which led to an obsession to judge and destroy, with no attention to facts nor to the Divine commands about how decisions should be arrived at in such cases. And this kind of thing goes on often enough within the body of believers today. Only a deeply secure and personal relationship with God will save us from being caught up in this kind of groupthink mentality.

Jdg 20:15 The Benjamites numbered twenty six thousand swordsmen out of the cities, besides the seven hundred chosen men of Gibeah-

Gibeah must have been relatively small if they had only 700 fighters, a small proportion of the Benjamites. Although we recall that terms like "thousand" and "hundred" are often not literal, but refer to military subdivisions. LXX gives 25,000, which would more or less fit with the numbers in :44-46.

Jdg 20:16 Among all these soldiers there were seven hundred chosen men who were left-handed, each of whom could sling stones at a hair's breadth and not miss-

Left handed people were considered strange and often relegated to the periphery of society in primitive societies; we see again how almost all the judges had something which made them despised and rejected. And yet it was exactly that group which God delighted to use to save His people (Jud. 3:15). We notice how God used left handed people to give David victory (1 Chron. 12:2 "they use both the right hand and the left in slinging stones and in shooting arrows from the bow. They were of Saul's brothers of Benjamin"), and to punish their hypocritical brethren (Jud. 20:16). He seems to rejoice in using those whom man despises.

We can assume that Benjamin were noted by the other tribes for having this regiment of left handed men. We are here reading the perception of others; for it is somewhat hard to believe there was in fact a regiment of slingers who were all left handed. But Benjamin means 'son of the right hand', the firstborn- something Judah and the other tribes bitterly resented. It's as if they were known as 'left handers', famed for their left handed slinging

regiment- as a dig against their role as being sons of the right hand. And this tension was behind the way the Israelites were eager for an excuse to wipe out the tribe of Benjamin. Left handedness is associated with sexual deviance, homosexuality and femininity in some African cultures, and it quite likely was in the time of Judges 20.

Jdg 20:17 The men of Israel apart from Benjamin were four hundred thousand swordsmen, all warriors-

Again we note that terms like "thousand" and "hundred" are often not literal, but refer to military subdivisions.

Jdg 20:18 The Israelites went up to Bethel and asked counsel of God. They said, Who shall go up for us first to battle against the children of Benjamin? Yahweh said, Judah first-

This comes over as very hypocritical and inappropriate. They had not asked counsel of God about how to judge the matter. They had all eagerly condemned Gibeah to destruction, without referring to God, and in studied disobedience to His word (see on Jud. 20:13). Yet having made their own judgment, they then made a great show of asking His advice as to which tribe should lead the assault, or, should attack Gibeah first (Jud. 20:18). Yet God responded to their request. He said Judah should go first. He wanted to use this incident to punish Israel, as well as Benjamin. And as so often, His judgments are in terms of brethren destroying each other, rather than Him doing it directly Himself. Jud. 21:15 notes that it was Yahweh who made a breach in Israel over this matter. He worked through it all. It was His way of judging His apostate, hypocritical people. Division and conflict amongst God's children is therefore somehow of Him- but it is His judgment upon the community.

We could possibly infer that "the Israelites" meant the entire army. Their army has mustered (:17), and all is ready for the advance against Gibeah. But apparently they all then march off to Beth-el, 10 miles away, to consult Yahweh. And yet they were at Mizpah where there was some presence of Yahweh (Jud. 20:1). Such a change of position at such a moment is almost incredible, until we realize the huge power of mere religion. People are desperate to do their religious thing and feel they have God's blessing, even when they are set on going against His will.

This verse forms an inclusio with the beginning of Judges in Jud. 1:1,2: "The children of Israel asked Yahweh, Who should go up for us first against the Canaanites, to fight against them? Yahweh said, Judah shall go up. Behold, I have delivered the land into his hand". We observe from this connection how that instead of focusing upon their common enemies and striving together to inherit and possess the Kingdom of God, God's people were now focused upon in-fighting. And God confirms them in that. That is very much the story of His people in our times. And there are other connections between the beginning and end of Judges. Both mention how Jerusalem is still in the hands of the Jebusites (Jud. 1:21; 19:11,12). There has been no progress towards real possession of the Kingdom. Israel collectively weep (Jud. 2:1-5 cp. 20:23,26; 21:2-4). We also reflect how the Israelites' asking 'Who should go up first?' is an attempt to recall their earlier history. But it is just mechanical imitation with no spirit in it. God responds almost sarcastically by saying: 'Judah'. But Judah were thereby going to their destruction and not to victory.

God was clearly confirming Israel in their own self division. He says Judah should go first- into a battle that will decimate Judah. But why did God choose Judah to go first and suffer the most? I suggest there was always tension between Judah and Benjamin. Judah was the demoted firstborn, and "Benjamin" was the beloved son of Jacob, called "the son of my right hand" because firstborn blessings were given with the right hand [as when Jacob blesses the sons of Joseph]. Benjamin was the only son born after Jacob's name was changed to Israel, the only son not involved in the betrayal of Joseph and deception of Jacob. Jacob's life

was bound up with the life of Benjamin. He was the favourite son after Joseph left home and disappeared at 17; he was the son of Rachel, the favourite wife, and she died to as it were bring him to birth. God was confirming them in their hatred of each other. For He confirms men in the bad path in which they want to go.

Jdg 20:19 The next morning the Israelites got up and encamped against Gibeah-

Perhaps we are to understand that they ignored the command that Judah should go up first (:18); for it seems they all went up. The information we will now be given about the battle is one of the most detailed battle reports in the Bible. Perhaps the idea is to highlight the awful tragedy of brother fighting brother.

Jdg 20:20 The men of Israel went out to fight against Benjamin and took up battle positions against them at Gibeah-

As in :19, it is stressed that the Israelites went to fight against Benjamin, apparently ignoring the command that Judah should go up first (:18); for it seems they all went up. And this is twice stressed (:19,20). They were not really interested in following God's ways and word, as shown by the way they had misjudged the entire situation; see on :13.

Jdg 20:21 The Benjamites came out of Gibeah and destroyed twenty-two thousand Israelites on that day-

God had apparently sent the Israelites to their destruction by saying that Judah should go up first (:18). He was confirming His people in their misjudgments and lack of love toward each other; see on :18.

Jdg 20:22 The men of Israel encouraged one another and took up their positions again in the place where they had stationed themselves on the first day-

They make no new strategy. They encourage one another, as if they are doing God's work, fighting for the right cause. It was all such a case of misplaced ideals. They assumed their cause was just and that they were doing the right thing. The only thing they asked God about was which tribe should go up first. Assumptions that we are right are especially common amongst those who claim to "have the truth".

Jdg 20:23 They went up and wept before Yahweh until evening, and they asked Yahweh, Shall we go up to fight again against the Benjamites, our brothers? Yahweh said, Go up against them-

The request was really its own answer. Should they fight against "our brothers"? Obviously not. You do not fight and kill your brothers. The way they express the request like this surely suggests they were nagged in their conscience by the inappropriacy of fighting their brethren. See on Jud. 21:3. Their weeping before Yahweh recalls Joshua's after the defeat at Ai. They ought to have perceived the similarities; and realized that the defeat was because Israel had sinned. They were at fault. But they lacked the humility to realize this, and so Yahweh told them to go up again- to their destruction. As explained on :18, this was all God's judgment of His own people, but as often, He chose to work through people destroying themselves, rather than His direct destruction of sinners. We recall earlier in Judges how Israel had wept before Yahweh in order that the Gentile tribes might be driven out of the land (Jud. 2:4,5). They are treating their Benjamite brethren like Gentiles. Yet they weep before Yahweh to destroy them. Likewise it seems their total destruction of Benjamin is done in order to fulfil the commands to totally destroy the Gentile inhabitants of the land. This is what happens once we fail to see our brethren as brethren- they then become as the Gentile world to us. The definition of who is within the body of Christ therefore becomes critical for us in our day.

Again and again we see how mixed are their motives, and how surface level was their devotion to Yahweh and true spirituality.

Jdg 20:24 The Israelites went against the Benjamites the second day-

"Went against", AV "came near against", is not quite the phrase we would expect to describe men going up against others in battle. It is the term used about 'coming near' in [often illicit] sexual encounter (Gen. 20:4; Lev. 18:6,14,19; 20:16; Dt. 22:14; Prov. 5:8; Is. 8:3; Ez. 18:6). The idea is that the Israelites were effectively raping the Benjamites, doing to them what they had accused the Benjamites of doing to the Levite's wife. See on :45.

Hosea twice claims that the "sin of Gibeah" was the sin of all Israel: "These men are steeped in corruption as in the days of Gibeah. He will remember their iniquity, He will punish their sins... Since the days of Gibeah you have sinned, Israel. There they stand. Shall not war overtake the guilty in Gibeah?" (Hos. 9:8,9; 10:9). Yet the sin of Gibeah historically was the sin of the men of Gibeah, defended from judgment by the tribe of Benjamin. But Hosea says that all Israel sinned as the men of Gibeah did. And that is what the Judges record brings out in Jud. 19-21. The tribes who judged Gibeah for their sin also suffered judgment- because in essence they were equally guilty.

Jdg 20:25 Benjamin went out against them from Gibeah the second day, and destroyed another eighteen thousand Israelite men, all armed with swords-

"The second day" doesn't have to mean the day after the battle on the first day; for in the gap between, Israel had been to Bethel to get God's advice. It is the second day of the battle recorded. The Israelites fought so weakly because surely they had a deep sense that this was not a battle they should be fighting- against their brethren. See on :23.

Jdg 20:26 Then the Israelites, all the people, went up to Bethel and wept and sat there before Yahweh and fasted that day until evening. They offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to Yahweh-

Peace offerings were offered in times of Israel's sadness and defeat (Jud. 20:26; 21:4) as well as in times of exaltation of spirit and joy. In our traumas of life, we need to remember that the only thing that matters is our peace with God, the joyful fact that we have nothing separating us. As Israel made their peace offerings at those times, so we too should consider the possibility of breaking bread, perhaps alone, as we meet the desperate traumas of our lives.

However the usual order is sin offering, burnt offering [speaking of subsequent dedication to God] and then the peace offering, celebrating the peace with God now enjoyed. But there is no mention of a sin offering. Israel still refused to accept how much they were in the wrong. For if they did, they would not have gone ahead with another battle against Benjamin. See on Jud. 21:4.

"All the people" is AV "and all the people", as if the massive losses meant that not only the soldiers but the common people were alarmed at the huge losses, and wanted to know whether they should continue.

Jdg 20:27 The Israelites asked Yahweh (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days-

Again as in :26 it is stressed that they asked Yahweh for guidance- when as a people they were generally very far from Him. Their desire for guidance indicates the problem of bad conscience they had, as well as the fact they had lost forty thousand in the previous two attempts to execute the judgment they had decreed without asking His guidance. Clearly any victory they may now win was going to pyrrhic [a victory at such cost it is hardly a victory].

"Those days" could refer to the days of this conflict; the ark had been brought from Shiloh to Bethel in order to seek God's blessing upon their judgment of their brethren. This was proof enough that the mere external symbols of religion did not at all imply God's blessings upon them.

Jdg 20:28 and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron ministered before it)-

Phinehas and the ark had come especially from Shiloh to Bethel for this situation, and was then returned to Shiloh (Josh. 18:1; 22:12; Ps. 78:60). But the mere external symbols of religion did not at all imply God's blessings upon them.

In this whole miserable episode of Jud. 19-21, Phinehas is the only person who is named. All other characters are anonymous. And we wonder whether that reflects how despite their surface level religiosity, they have no abiding place in God's purpose. Their religiosity left them as nobodies. Just as Benjamin very nearly lost his name.

Shall we yet again go out to fight against Benjamin our brother, or not? Yahweh said, Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver him into your hand-

See on Jud. 18:30. The sanctuary was presumably a day's journey away from Gibeah. Israel become the more desperate for Yahweh's guidance as their conscience niggled the more at them- for their request was really the answer. Fighting against their brother was wrong. As discussed on :18, this whole bloodbath was willed by God as a judgment upon all His people, at their own hands.

Jdg 20:29 Israel set ambushes all around Gibeah-

The strategy for taking Gibeah is very similar to that for taking Ai, and we wonder if the strategy was communicated to them by God in :28. They were to perceive the similarities. They had likewise been over confident of taking Gibeah, and they had so far failed because like Israel in the first battle of Ai, they were being punished because of their sins. This was mirroring how "some of the wicked men" of Gibeah had surrounded the house of the old man in Jud. 19:22.

Jdg 20:30 They went up against the Benjamites on the third day and set themselves in position against Gibeah as before-

"As before" invites us to imagine them clinging on in faith to God's words of :28 that "tomorrow I will deliver him into your hand". Through their unwisdom and wrong behaviour, they were being brought to faith in God's word.

Jdg 20:31 The Benjamites went out against them and were drawn away from the city. They began to fight the Israelites as before, on the highways on the way to Bethel and Gibeah, and in the field, killing about thirty men of Israel-

Josh. 8:13-16 describes the strategy to take Ai in just the same terms. Clearly the same lesson was being taught- that victory was to only be through turning their backs before their enemies, a sign they were under Divine curse. Through realizing that, victory would be given. There are so many deliberate connections with the battle against Ai- which Israel had initially failed to take because one of them had taken forbidden things from Jericho. There was an initial defeat; an ambush set west of the city (:33,36, as "behind the city" of Ai, Josh. 8:4). The attackers purposefully retreat so that the enemy think that as previously, the attackers are fleeing (Josh. 8:6 "as before" cp. Jud. 20:32,39). The men of Ai didn't realize an ambush had been set (Josh. 8: 14) as with Gibeah (Jud. 20:35). The men waiting in ambush both times rose up and charged quickly, setting the city on fire (Josh. 8:19 cp. Jud. 20:33,37). The soldiers of Ai and of Gibeah saw smoke rising from their city (Josh. 8:20; Jud. 20:40). A surrounding "desert" is mentioned both times (Josh. 8:24; Jud. 20:45). The men of Ai and

Gibeah were killed on the roads and in the desert (Josh. 8:24; Jud. 20:46-48). All in both cities were put to the sword (Josh. 8:26,27; Jud. 20:48). All these similarities are intentional. On a surface level, Israel followed a Biblical precedent. But in fact they were treating their own brethren as if they were Gentiles of Ai.

Jdg 20:32 The Benjamites said, We are defeating them as before. But the Israelites said, Let's retreat and draw them away from the city to the highways-

Israel were punished for their over confidence, thinking it needed only a part of their army to overcome Gibeah. And now the Benjamites are punished for their self confidence. Reliance in the arm of flesh is so displeasing to God.

Jdg 20:33 All the men of Israel arose up from their camp and set themselves in position at Baal Tamar, and the ambush charged from Maareh Geba-

We note the old pagan names were still used- another indication of the overall apostasy of all Israel. The Israelite army was split into three groups; the one at Baal-tamar, the one which formed the ambush behind Gibeah, and then the third which first directly approached Gibeah. This division into three companies echoes the strategy God used with Gideon.

Jdg 20:34 Ten thousand chosen men out of all Israel attacked Gibeah and the battle was severe, but the Benjamites didn't know that disaster was upon them-

The severity of the battle at this point implies that even more Israelites died at this time. God was punishing His people, as He often did the Gentiles, by turning their swords against themselves. And conflict within the church is likewise His judgment.

Jdg 20:35 Yahweh defeated Benjamin before Israel, and the Israelites destroyed twenty five thousand one hundred armed Benjamites that day-

This describes the deaths on that day, not counting any previous deaths in the other battles on the other days. We note that Yahweh gave the victory; as discussed on :18 this was all of Him, He gave victories to both sides, He was the one who made the gap in Israel (Jud. 21:15), because this was His way of punishing His sinful people; see on :34.

Jdg 20:36 Then the Benjamites saw that they were defeated, for the men of Israel had given way to Benjamin, trusting in the ambush which they had set against Gibeah-

We would rather read that they had trusted in Yahweh, but it seems they trusted more in their battle strategy.

Jdg 20:37 The men in the ambush rushed into Gibeah, spread out and put all the city to the sword-

The battle strategy of Abimelech, setting an ambush (Jud. 9:32), rising early and rushing upon the city of his one time brethren (Jud. 9:33), was replicated by the Israelites in Jud. 20:37. The same Hebrew words are used. But it was a case of copying an example just because it was recorded in Divine history, following precedents which were in fact not at all good. Hollow imitation of the behaviour of others is an abiding temptation for us today.

Jdg 20:38 Now the appointed signal between the men of Israel and the ambush was that they should send up a great cloud of smoke out of the city-

This matches the signal of the sun glinting from Joshua's spear in the capture of Ai, and likewise the smoke signal from within the city. The similarities are so exact, because the point was that like Israel in the first battle of Ai, the 11 tribes had sinned and were being punished for it.

Jdg 20:39 Then the men of Israel would turn in the battle. Benjamin began to attack and killed about thirty of the men of Israel, for they said, Surely they are being defeated as before-

The whole account of the taking of Gibeah is repeated twice over, because we are really being urged to see the similarities with Ai; and take the implication that the Israelites had sinned as Israel had at that time and were being punished for it. It was they and not just the Benjamites who needed to eradicate evil from amongst them.

Jdg 20:40 But when the smoke began to go up out of the city, the Benjamites looked behind them and saw the whole city going up in smoke-

Exactly as in the capture of Ai (Josh. 8:20); see on :39. "The whole of the city" [also :48] is their allusion to Dt. 13:16 "And you shall burn the [whole] city with fire as a whole offering unto Yahweh". See on :48. They were again doing the wrong thing but liking to cover it with a veneer of spirituality. Anger, fear and partaking in a feeding frenzy of hatred and judgment cannot be done sincerely in the name of some vague Biblical allusion.

Jdg 20:41 Then the men of Israel turned on them and the men of Benjamin were terrified, seeing that disaster had come on them-

This is the fear of men facing condemnation. Why were they condemned? Not because of the reason that the other Israelites had given for their condemnation. For this was in any case a too heavy judgment for refusing to cooperate with the kangaroo court called by the Israelites. We recall how the Levite perhaps rightly claimed that he was given no hospitality because he was perceived as serving in the sanctuary at Bethel (Jud. 19:18). Maybe indeed the Benjamites despised the sanctuary of Yahweh, and the Levites; and this was the real reason why Yahweh allowed their destruction at the hands of the brethren.

"Disaster" is literally "evil"; the word used of the evil done to the concubine at Gibeah (Jud. 19:23; 20:12,13). It seems obvious that they realized evil was upon them in the sense of military defeat; and we wonder why this is mentioned. Therefore it makes more sense to understand this as meaning that they realized that the evil done to the concubine was now coming upon them. This implies they had previously refused to repent nor to recognize that "evil" had been done. They supported the xenophobic rape of foreigners because they had some deep seated hatred of the other tribes and perhaps Levi specifically.

Jdg 20:42 So they fled before the men of Israel towards the wilderness, but they could not escape the battle, and the Israelites who came out of the cities destroyed them there-
There was a widespread hatred of the Benjamites amongst the general population.

Jdg 20:43 They surrounded the Benjamites, chased them and ran them down as far as Gibeah toward the east-

This appears to be another Gibeah which was on the way towards the rock of Rimmon where they were aiming for (:45).

Jdg 20:44 Eighteen thousand valiant men of Benjamin fell-

See on :46. Albert Barnes in his commentary discerns here and in the surrounding verses a poetical form of language, as if this was a victory song later sung. To gloat over such a massacre was wrong, and soon the Israelites were going to be repenting for it. Such gloating at the time reflects again an unspirituality in Israel; for God Himself doesn't rejoice over the death of the wicked.

Jdg 20:45 They turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and the Israelites killed five thousand of them along the way and chased them to Gidom, killing two thousand more-

AV "they gleaned of them in the highways five thousand men". But "glean" is s.w. abused, mocked, defiled. We are again given the impression that they treated Israel just as the men of Gibeah had treated the Levite's concubine. They were no better. See on :24.

Jdg 20:46 So that day twenty-five thousand valiant fighters of Benjamin were killed-

A "thousand" often refers to a military unit or subdivision, rather than literal 1,000. See on :47. 18,000 fell in :44, and then another 7,000 in :45, and 600 escaped (:47). The LXX gives different figures, but if we take those figures as they are, we conclude that the victories they won on the first and second days were achieved without loss. This meant that the men of Israel were slain very easily- they fought weakly because their conscience told them they were fighting for a wrong cause. The Benjamite victories were therefore clearly of God, as was their defeat in the third battle (:35) - all part of His way of judging His totally sinful people at the point of each others' swords.

Jdg 20:47 But six hundred men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and stayed there four months-

A group of "six hundred men" is found so often in the records that we suspect that it may not be literal, but rather refer to a military unit or subdivision (Jud. 3:31; 18:11; 20:47; 1 Sam. 13:15; 14:2; 23:13; 27:2; 30:9; 2 Sam. 15:18).

Jdg 20:48 The men of Israel went back to Benjamin and put to the sword everything in the towns, including the livestock, and anything they found. All the towns which they found they set on fire-

This is exactly the language used of the destruction of Canaanite cities by Joshua. We note they didn't take the animals for themselves. All was as it were sacrificed to Yahweh. They were treating their brethren like Canaanites. And yet we note that the tribes of Israel had at this point not zealously driven out the Canaanites and possessed their land. Their apparent zeal to obey Yahweh's commands about the Canaanites was misplaced, a twisting of His word to justify their own bloodlust and self justification. Truly we are to take the lesson that in conflict between brethren, there are never victors, only losers. Hosea twice (Hos. 9:9; 10:9) warns that all Israel will be punished "as in the day of Gibeah". His point surely is that all Israel sinned in essence as did Benjamin. They were no better. And continued to be no better. Even at the time, the losses on both sides [Israel and Benjamin] were so great that the lesson was even then taught- they were all as bad as each other. The body of Israel was divided and thereby destroyed or seriously damaged, just as was Benjamin.

"All the towns" and the language of complete destruction is allusion to how they saw them as 'devoted' to Yahweh; see on :40. They have in mind Dt. 2:34; 3:6, of devoting a city or people to destruction. The Israelites were determined to make the tribe of Benjamin a *herem* or total devotion to Yahweh, the equivalent of a whole burnt offering to Yahweh. The Levite likewise cut his wife up into parts as if she was a whole burnt offering. But they are confusing their own blood lust and hatred of their brethren with zeal for God. As happens so often.

JUDGES CHAPTER 21

Jdg 21:1 Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpah: Not one of us will give his daughter to a Benjamite as wife-

Here we have another repetition of theme, that of unwise oaths. For Jephthah had done the same. And it resulted at very best in his daughter going unmarried. We think too of Joshua's over hasty oath to the Gibeonites. We are to discern the hand of God in all these things and to learn from the repeated mistakes of His people as recorded in the Biblical record. We are surely intended to contrast this with how the Israelites had freely given their daughters to marry Gentiles. Their oath is therefore hypocritical. It is religious extremism, not spirituality. They treat their own brethren as if they are worse than Gentiles.

Jdg 21:2 The people came to Bethel where they sat until evening before God, raising their voices and weeping bitterly-

They had likewise sat before God, i.e. before His manifestation and presence in the ark and priesthood, when they had enquired why they had been defeated twice when fighting the Benjamites. It was tears all around, as they began to realize the extreme folly of what they had done. But it was grief they themselves had brought about. Their weeping before Yahweh recalls Joshua's after the defeat at Ai. The great victory they had just won was in reality a defeat for Israel. Because in conflict between brethren, there can only be losers. Any apparent victory is in fact a further loss.

Jdg 21:3 They said, Yahweh, the God of Israel, why has this happened to Israel, that there should be today one tribe missing from Israel?-

If Yahweh was indeed Israel's God, then to destroy a part of Israel was clearly to have sinned against Him. This is what we do whenever we separate or effectively cut off a part of the body of Christ. As noted on Jud. 20:23, the request was really its own answer. Should they fight against "our brothers"? Obviously not. You do not fight and kill your brothers. Why has this happened? Because they had done it. So often our prayers reveal their own answer. We see this in David's prayers as recorded in the Psalms. Some of them end up providing the answer to the opening question or struggle. This is one advantage of praying out loud, of verbalizing our questions to God. The answer sometimes becomes apparent just through the process of verbalizing our thoughts.

They ask the God of Israel why one tribe has almost perished from Israel. They imply that Israel's God should preserve Israel. Yet it was they who had dismembered Israel. This is a classic case of blaming God for what is clearly man's fault.

"Why did God let this happen?" is a common question today. But the answer is simply that man made it happen. The history here is a helpful window onto the question. There is no recorded answer of God to their question, as there isn't today. But the humble, reflective mind will immediately see the answer as soon as the question is framed. It's not a case of God letting things happen, but of man making bad things happen. In this case, Yahweh confirmed them in their course of action, by saying that Judah should go up first and be destroyed by Benjamin.

Jdg 21:4 Next day the people rose early and built an altar and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings-

Peace offerings were offered in times of Israel's sadness and defeat (Jud. 20:26; 21:4), as well as in celebration. In our traumas of life, we need to remember that the only thing that matters is our peace with God, the joyful fact that we have nothing separating us. As Israel made their

peace offerings at those times, so we too should consider the possibility of breaking bread, perhaps alone, as we meet the desperate traumas of our lives.

But as in Jud. 20:26, we note that the usual order is sin offering, burnt offering [speaking of subsequent dedication to God] and then the peace offering, celebrating the peace with God now enjoyed. But there is no mention of a sin offering. Israel still refused to accept how much they were in the wrong.

Jdg 21:5 They asked, Who is there among all the tribes of Israel who didn't come up to the assembly before Yahweh? For they had taken a solemn oath that anyone who didn't come up to Yahweh to Mizpah should surely be put to death-

The implication of Jud. 20:3 ["The Benjamites heard that the Israelites had gone up to Mizpah"] is that the Benjamites weren't represented at the Mizpah conference. And Israel had threatened death to anyone who didn't come to this gathering. So the Benjamites stood condemned to death just because they didn't attend a meeting. Just as some have been disfellowshipped for "long continued absence" from a church. This is not at all Biblical, and the attitude of the Israelites here was not at all in accord with the Law of Moses. Nor did they take any advice from God about this; they simply promised death to any who didn't attend their gathering. Perhaps this was why they thought they were justified in slaying the Benjamites- because they had broken the Israelites' self declared law and commandment to come to Mizpah.

Jdg 21:6 The Israelites grieved for Benjamin their brother. There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day-

Their requests to God for guidance about attacking Benjamin had featured the phrase "our brother". They ought to have followed their conscience toward God, and their sense that any murder of a brother must be wrong. Instead the power of groupthink and transferring the guilt of their own sins onto Benjamin was stronger than that. And now they grieve for what they had done. Their exclusion and cutting off of their brother had in fact diminished all Israel. And this is what we do to the body of Christ by cutting off parts of it; it is as Paul puts it, as bizarre as cutting off our own limbs. The body will not function well without those limbs. I suggested on Jud. 20:2 that initially, the other Israelites wanted to destroy Benjamin in order to take their territory. But now they apparently genuinely repent. We see how even in the depths of unspirituality, there is still an element of conscience. And that is the theme of Judges 13-21, that flesh and Spirit were hopelessly mixed in God's people at this time. So mixed that the mere presence of 'Spirit' element did not at all guarantee their salvation. We think of the rejected in the Lord's parables addressing him as "Lord, Lord"; and the foolish virgins eager to enter His Kingdom when it was all too late. And yet Jabesh Gilead was in Manasseh. By making Benjamites intermarry with another tribe, they were weakening Benjamin's claim to the land.

As noted on :3, God was silent in response to their enquiries. They don't get it- His silence was to elicit within them the awareness that it was their fault, not His, and their questioning of Him was inappropriate. They fail to get this, and so go ahead in yet more folly. Just as man does so often. Their efforts to save their brother will involve murder, kidnap and forced marriage- showing that their apparent 'love' and 'repentance' concerning Benjamin was fake. And Israel will do these things against Jabesh Gilead, probably the only city which had responded rightly to their demand to go and fight Benjamin.

Jdg 21:7 How shall we provide wives for those who remain, since we have sworn by Yahweh that we will not give them our daughters as wives?-

It seems the idea was that if the virgins were stolen and forced to marry, then the oath not to

freely give daughters as wives was still kept. Even though it involved kidnapping, forced marriage, and the murder of many innocent people, including children. All these gross sins were done in order to keep a foolish and hasty oath. The appearance was that they were careful to avoid the sin of breaking an oath. But they commit far greater sins in order to avoid that sin. The real issue was that they didn't want Benjamites to marry their daughters. Again we see how badly things go when there is no personal devotion to Divine principle, and rather a desire to appear religiously correct in order to justify what man wants to do naturally. Another attraction of stealing the virgins was that there would then no issue about the husbands needing to pay the usual bride price.

Here we have one of several examples of men caught up in unwise oaths. We think of Darius promising to slay anyone who prayed to anyone apart from himself; of Herod vowing to do anything for the daughter of Herodias, including murdering John the Baptist. They could get out of their oaths by humility... but they didn't. In this case, the easiest option would have been to just repent of their oath and let the remaining Benjamites marry women from other tribes. But for all their apostacy, they had a legalistic mindset. And there was a pride factor in their society when it came to not following through on an oath. As many do today, they went to the most bizarre lengths to get around the oath they had made, and to save face. And yet their bizarre method of getting around it was all the same unethical, and involved the massacre of yet more of their brethren at Jabesh Gilead, and the kidnapping of girls from Shiloh. It would have been far better to humble themselves and retract their rash oath. We see this lesson repeated in the rulers who swore too hastily, resulting in Daniel and John the Baptist suffering greatly- just because the rulers were too proud to take back their words.

Jdg 21:8 They asked, Which of the tribes of Israel didn't come up to Yahweh to Mizpah? They found that none from the camp from Jabesh Gilead came to the assembly-

We note that they had not attempted to murder these people because they had not come to the meeting at Mizpah. And yet they apparently used Benjamin's absence from that meeting [when it was clearly biased against them from the start] as justification for slaying Benjamin (:5). So clearly the whole miserable, quasi legal process was set up from the start in order to cut off Benjamin. And this is how church politics so often goes, when there is a predetermined desire to cut someone off.

Jdg 21:9 For when the people were counted, none of the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead were there-

We wonder why Jabesh did not attend. Perhaps they like Benjamin had seen through the manic feeding frenzy of the groupthink, and had objected to the absolutely unBiblical judgment being taken- with so much depending on just one questionable witness, with Dt. 17:6,7 being so totally ignored. See on Jud. 20:13. And yet still Israel were impenitent for all that; and they were to go ahead and punish Jabesh with a massacre, killing even innocent children, because of it. The implication is that absolutely every town of Israel outside of Benjamin was represented in this great assembly, including the totally apostate people of Laish of Dan (Jud. 17,18). Only Jabesh didn't come. This is the extent to which the people were caught up in a shark tank feeding frenzy of judgmentalism, self congratulation and hatred against their brethren. These things happen today; brethren are demonized and hated on a mass scale on flimsy grounds by brethren who are only as weak as themselves. It is a basic psychological reaction, the unchecked movement of the flesh rather than of the Spirit.

Jdg 21:10 The congregation sent twelve thousand valiant fighting men and commanded them: Go and put the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead to the sword, including the women and children-
The idea was, a thousand from each tribe, following the principle of Num. 31:4. Yet they

were following an isolated Biblical precedent in a very misplaced way- for they were going to massacre innocent people, all because they were too proud to accept they had made a foolish oath (see on :7). We see here a common human feature- of apparent obedience to the letter of the law, whilst breaking the obvious spirit of the law. We think of the Jews being scrupulous to be ritually clean for the Passover- at which they crucified God's Son. It's a case of having a plank in our own eye whilst noticing the splinter in the eye of another.

Jdg 21:11 This is what you are to do: kill every male and every woman who is not a virgin- Whilst it is not recorded that this was done, this massacre of their own brethren was necessitated by their refusal to humble themselves and retract their oaths, as discussed on :7. They had not really learned the depth of their sin- for here they were advocating the cutting off of yet more of their brethren in a massacre, for the sake of undoing the damage done by cutting off their brethren from Benjamin. They had not learned the lesson.

More exactly, "You shall devote to utter destruction" or "cherem" (Lev. 27:28). They were also alluding to the uttermost destruction of the Midianites in Num. 31:7,17. But they failed to perceive that they are again treating their own brethren as Gentiles.

Jdg 21:12 They found among the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead four hundred young virgins who had not known man by lying with him, and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh in the land of Canaan-

This may imply they did not in fact destroy Jabesh as they had promised to Yahweh to do, and as the elders had told them to do. The town was still inhabited at the time of 1 Sam. 11:1. It seems they were very selective in their obedience, and yet claimed such utter and careful loyalty to Yahweh. The record continually demonstrates their hypocrisy and ignorance of true spirituality, whilst having a knowledge and apparent devotion to isolated parts of God's law. The same is seen amongst so many professing to be God's people today. Yet "saved alive" in :14 implies they did indeed massacre the town. The description of the conflict with Jabesh as a "war" in :22 suggests that there was indeed bloodshed, probably on both sides; and yet despite that, the required number of young female captives weren't taken. So all the bloodshed and "war" just didn't achieve the desired end anyway. The logical process in thought behind the decisions taken in all this appears very lacking in wisdom. Clearly they did not progress on God's advice, but only on their own.

The treatment of these women is not far from rape. The rape of two women by Benjamites leads to the effective rape of 400 women by the rest of Israel, and kidnapping and forcible marriage of another 200. This is how out of proportion was Israel's response.

Jdg 21:13 The whole congregation sent an offer of peace to the Benjamites who were in the rock of Rimmon-

They 'proclaimed peace', using the same phrase as in Dt. 20:10: "When you draw near to a city to fight against it, proclaim peace to it". But the Israelites did this to the few remaining Benjamites *after* they had massacred most of them (Jud 21:13). This was typical of how Israel at this time were taking fragments of God's law and applying them, but absolutely out of context. Whilst they disregarded the majority of the Law, both in letter and spirit. And we see this in the wider Christian movement. Bits and pieces of Divine principle are used in a misplaced way, when the majority of God's revelation and will is ignored.

Jdg 21:14 So then Benjamin returned and they gave them the women whom they had saved alive from Jabesh Gilead, but they weren't enough for them-

"Saved alive" implies they did indeed massacre the town. They had clearly had a bad conscience about fighting against Benjamin their "brother". But they fail to really grasp why

that was wrong. For in the flush of final victory against Benjamin, they now go and do exactly the same sin of murdering their brothers. And in this case, for no reason other than that Jabesh hadn't come up to some kangaroo court they had set up to judge Benjamin. They were acting absolutely against God's will and without any seeking of His guidance. And all because, as discussed on :7, they lacked the faith to let God resolve the issue of the remnant of Benjamin having no wives; and because they lacked the humility to take back their oath not to let their daughters marry Benjamites.

Jdg 21:15 The people grieved for Benjamin because Yahweh had made a gap in the tribes of Israel-

AV "repented them", they had a change of mind. But this is not necessarily the same as perceiving their own moral wrong. There is no reference to their seeking counsel from God as to whether or not to massacre yet more of their brethren in Jabesh, which was apparently of another tribe and east of the Jordan [presumably it was near the wadi Jabesh which is east of Jordan]. The people had not asked counsel of God about how to judge the matter. They had all eagerly condemned Gibeah to destruction, without referring to God, and in studied disobedience to His word (see on Jud. 20:13). Yet having made their own judgment, they then made a great show of asking His advice as to which tribe should lead the assault, or, should attack Gibeah first (Jud. 20:18). Yet God responded to their request. He said Judah should go first. He wanted to use this incident to punish Israel, as well as Benjamin. And as so often, His judgments are in terms of brethren destroying each other, rather than Him doing it directly Himself. See on Jud. 20:7. It was Yahweh who made a breach in Israel over this matter. He worked through it all. It was His way of judging His apostate, hypocritical people. The same word is used of His making a breach upon Uzzah, in judgment (2 Sam. 6:8). A breach from Yahweh is a judgment for sin (Is. 30:13; Ez. 22:30 s.w.). Division and conflict amongst God's children is therefore somehow of Him- but it is His judgment upon the community. Alternatively we can read this as the people still not facing up to the enormity of their sins. It was they who had made a breach in Israel, but they blame it on Yahweh. The ambiguity is intentional. They had made the breach, and blamed God for it [see on :3]. And yet He had confirmed them in what they really wanted to do, which was to dismember Israel. Just as whether the Levite murdered his concubine is ambiguous.

Jdg 21:16 Then the elders of the congregation said, How shall we provide wives for those who remain, since the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?-

A wife is "from the Lord", not from purely human device. Massacring a town to steal their virgin daughters, and then kidnapping girls from a Passover dance... is all the way of the flesh. We see how misguided were these people, partly concerned with the Divine concept of raising up seed for their brother, and yet with no basic moral backbone at all. They would have been better to have faith that God would provide, in His own wonderful way- rather than massacring Jabesh and kidnapping girls.

Jdg 21:17 They said, There must be an inheritance for the surviving Benjamites so that a tribe will not be blotted out from Israel-

They are arguing from the basis of the levirate law, that brothers must somehow ensure that seed is raised up to their brother in the case of death. But, as noted on :16, they are focusing upon just one aspect of Divine truth, and ignoring the wider moral teachings of the Mosaic law and indeed of basic ethics and morality. "There *must* be an inheritance..." again reflects their legalistic mind, driven by a devotion to quasi logic to do things which were plain wrong on every count. An inheritance is "of the Lord", just as a wife is (:16); their attempt to play God in all this just made things far worse. And we must ponder whether our own spirituality is no more, at times, than out of context obedience to a few Biblical commands, whilst our

flesh runs rampant and we refuse to humble ourselves beneath the essence of a truly spiritual life.

Jdg 21:18 We can't give them wives from our daughters since the Israelites have taken this oath saying, 'Cursed be he who gives a wife to Benjamin' -

I discussed on :7 how if they had humbled themselves and retracted their oaths, then they would not have needed to do the bizarre and sinful things which they did- massacre of Jabesh Gilead and kidnapping young girls. Their legalistic mindset is incredible; and yet they themselves were far astray from Yahweh themselves, and this was why they had been punished at the hands of the Benjamites, losing 40,000 men.

Jdg 21:19 They said, Look, there is an annual feast of Yahweh in Shiloh, which is on the north of Bethel, east of the highway from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah-

If the feast involved dancing (:21) then it was likely the feast of the Passover, with the girls replicating the dancing of Miriam and the women. The exact geographical description is given so that the Benjamites knew precisely where to go. But they ought to have been celebrating Yahweh's deliverance of His people by grace, rather than using it as an opportunity to kidnap wives for themselves. But again this is mixing the flesh and the Spirit. The girls were to be kidnapped during a feast to Yahweh, without consequence. But the Canaanite tribes also allowed bride kidnapping during feasts. They were following a pagan practice. And it has been observed that "The Pokot people of East Africa permit kidnapping unmarried women during the summer solstice ceremonial cycle".

Jdg 21:20 They instructed the Benjamites: Go and lie in wait in the vineyards-

This bizarre idea of grabbing young unmarried females was all necessitated by the impenitence of the Israelites and their refusal to humble themselves and retract their oath, as discussed on :7.

Jdg 21:21 and watch. When the daughters of Shiloh come out to join in the dances, then rush out of the vineyards and each of you catch a wife from the girls of Shiloh and go to the land of Benjamin-

The language of lying in wait in ambush and then rushing forward upon the unsuspecting is the language of how the Benjamites had finally captured Gibeah, and how Israel had captured Ai. Again, we see the misplaced idea of appealing to past precedent in God's dealings with His people. They wished to follow some aspects of God's ways in the past, whilst ignoring the vast majority of His teaching, even on a most basic moral level. And we wonder whether the majority of those identifying as 'Christian' at this point in world history are not similar.

Jdg 21:22 When their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, we will say to them, 'Allow them to do this because we didn't get wives for them in the war-

The war is presumably the war against Jabesh of :12. The way it is called a "war" suggests the people of Jabesh fought back. There would have been yet more bloodshed, and it seems there were fewer virgin women captured than the Israelites had initially imagined. "Allow them" is literally 'show us grace'. Like many today, they spoke of grace with no idea of what it really means. They use the grace argument when the whole story shows that nobody knows anything about grace. Rather this is stilted legalism and yet further abuse of people. In response to the grabbing of one woman, the concubine, they are going to grab hundreds of women against their will. And to kidnap a person was a capital offence (Ex. 21:16).

You didn't give them to them, so you are not guilty'-

Perhaps they mean 'Not guilty of breaking the oath not to give your daughter in marriage to

Benjamites'. But the way of humility would have been to simply ask God to forgive them for a rash oath, or to just leave it all to God to decide, with faith He would somehow work it out. But when there is no human answer visible, then we tend to abandon faith in God and go for these kinds of bizarre human ways of resolving things.

Or the idea may have been that to give a daughter in marriage to a man of another tribe was a sin. But as the daughters had been taken away forcibly, it wouldn't count as a sin. We note their extreme legalism. And yet as legalists often do, they seriously contradicted themselves. For in this case, it would have been a sin for Benjamites to be marrying women from another tribe. So their solution to the problem was only leading people into sin. There seems no direct statement in the law of Moses that intermarriage amongst the tribes was a sin, although the implication of the principles of inheritance amongst the tribes was that it was far from ideal.

Jdg 21:23 So that is what the Benjamites did. They took wives for each of them from the girls who danced, and carried them off. They returned to their inheritance, rebuilt the cities and lived in them-

See on :22. Carrying them off implies to captivity. They were treating these Israelite girls as prey, taken in some Divinely sanctioned war. But God had not been consulted, and was not in any of this.

Jdg 21:24 Then the Israelites departed each to his tribe and family-

This is perhaps stating the obvious but in order that we imagine them returning home, with only tales of woe and not glorious victory. For they had lost 40,000 of their own men, and slain a huge number of their brethren both from Jabesh and all Benjamin. And arranged the kidnap of innocent girls from their families. Not much to boast about to their families. And so the point is made, that in conflict between brethren, there are only shameful losers.

Jdg 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel; each man did that which was right in his own eyes-

This implies that the book of Judges as we have it was edited, under Divine inspiration, some time after Israel began to have kings. Perhaps during the exile, when again they had no king; and therefore the book becomes a warning to the exiles about likely apostasy. The lament may be that there was no authority, no teacher, no modelling of Godly living; because every man did what was right in his own eyes, rather than doing what was right in the eyes of Yahweh. For so often we read of Israel being condemned for doing what was wrong in His eyes. This is clear enough evidence that 'just follow your heart' is poor advice. For what is right in our own eyes results in the Godless confusion of what we find now at the time of the Judges. However it could be argued that having no human king was a good thing; for God didn't want them to have one. And therefore a situation where everyone judges things by their own judgment is in fact good; the problem was that the people didn't base their view upon God's word, His "eyes" or perspective, but solely upon their own unenlightened opinions.