1:1 After the leadership of Moses, there came that of Joshua. When he died, Israel expected that another such leader would be raised up. 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. The same is true in our generation.

1:3 This was effectively a lack of faith that God would give Judah victory; but God still worked through this lower level of faith shown by Judah, and gave them victory (:4). God so thirsts for relationship with us that He is prepared to accept lower levels of faith than the ideal; this shouldn’t elicit from us any sense of personal lack of commitment, but rather inspire us to greater patience with others whose faith isn’t on the highest level it could be.

1:14 We see here a wonderful spiritual ambition; not merely accepting the portion given by God and wondering how ever even this was to be possessed. Rather does Achsah have the ambition to ask for even more territory to possess.

1:21 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).

1:34 God’s grace to His people is reflected in how He records their weaknesses, and always focuses upon their obedience no matter how small. Thus the allotted inheritance of the children of Dan is described as too small for them (Josh. 19:47), although actually "the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the hill country, for they would not allow them to come down to the valley”. 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.

2:1-3 The Angel here speaks as if He is God Himself speaking. Both men and Angels can carry God’s Name (Ex. 23:21) and thus can functionally be as God, whilst not being God Himself in person. This explains how God’s Son, Jesus, isn’t God Himself but carries God’s Name (Jn. 5:43) and acts as God whilst not being God Himself.

2:9 *They buried him in the border of his inheritance*- So that when Joshua is resurrected at Christ’s return, he can go directly into his inheritance.

2:18 *It grieved Yahweh because of their distress*- God like the truly loving parent took no pleasure in punishing His children. The idea of eternal conscious torture of the wicked isn’t taught in the Bible; God has no pleasure at all in punishing sinners (Ez. 18:23; 33:11).

2:22 This is rather similar to God telling Balaam to go with the messengers of Balak, but to be obedient to His word. God as it were pushes people down the downward spiral if this is the way they choose to go. Obedience would be so much harder with the Canaanite tribes still existing amongst Israel; but God let this be so. We pray “lead us not into temptation” (Mt. 6:13) because it is possible for God to lead us into such situations, even though the process of temptation is totally internal to ourselves (James 1:13-15).

2:23 God drove out the tribes from Canaan slowly, not immediately- or at least, He potentially enabled this to happen. But Israel were to destroy those tribes “quickly” (Dt. 9:3); yet they chose not to. Because they didn’t want to be obedient to that, or at least to only be ‘slowly’ obedient, God went along with them and confirmed them in the level of response to Him which they chose.

3:1 *The nations which Yahweh left to test Israel*- The process of temptation is internal to the human mind (James 1:13-15; Mk. 7:15-23). But God can test us as He did Abraham (Gen. 22:1). It could be argued that God knows all about us anyway, and so the testing process is really to reveal us to ourselves. Another angle is that this language is relevant to the Angels, who were the practical manifestation of God at this time (see on 2:1-3), but their knowledge isn’t total (Mt. 24:36); it could be that some of our tests are to reveal us to our guardian Angels. The cases of Divine ‘testing’ of people are usually in the context of Angelic involvement with people.

3:2 *Might learn battle experience* - 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. God therefore works through His judgments of sin in order to try to positively teach His ways to people.

3:6 In nearly every reference to marriage to Gentiles, there is the comment that this would surely lead to adopting the religious views of the Gentile partner; views which inevitably take a man away from his covenant with Yahweh. The connection between marriage out of the covenant and adopting idolatry is emphasized: Ex. 34:12-16; Dt. 7:2-9; 1 Kings 11:2,3; Mal. 2:11; 2 Cor. 6:14. Dt. 7:4 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.

3:8 The book of Judges describes a consistent sequence of Israel turning away from God, being punished by neighbouring Arab enemies, and then being sent a 'saviour' - a 'Jesus'.   This points forward to how Israel will be brought to her knees by the future Arab oppression, resulting in the coming of the true Saviour (cp. Mt. 1:21).   It is significant that almost all the judges were initially rejected by Israel, and had various features which meant that they did not have charismatic appeal to the people.   Those facts make them all types of Christ.  The pattern of 'serving' their Arab conquerors and then 'crying unto the Lord' (: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 also represented Christ’s coming.   Their deliverances by the judges 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" (Obadiah 21). "Saviours / judges" may be an intensive plural referring to the one true saviour / judge, Jesus.

3:21 There are seven weak things which are mentioned in Judges as being the tools of God's salvation: a left handed man; an ox goad (3:31); a woman (4:4); a nail (4:21); a piece of a millstone (9:53); a pitcher and trumpet (7:20), a jaw bone of an ass (15:16). God delights to work through the weak; indeed, only if we perceive our own weakness can God work through us.

4:7 *I will deliver him into your hand*- It was God s desire to effect deliverance for Israel at the hands of a man, Barak; but he failed to live up to that potential, indeed the male leadership collapsed in Israel (5:7), and so God worked through a woman.

4:8,9 The incomplete faith of men like Baruch was counted as full faith by later inspiration (Heb. 11:32). God likewise counts our weak spirituality as total if we are in Christ, whose righteousness is counted to all those baptized into Him.

4:14 Deborah here 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, when she says that the Angels fought against Sisera (5:20).

4:21 We have to piece together all Scripture to get an accurate picture of events. 5:27 suggests he arose and then fell down, as if she didn’t kill him with just one blow as he lay asleep but had some struggle with him.

5:2 The examples of leaders amongst God’s people can influence the flock positively or negatively- when the leaders “offered themselves willingly”, so did the people (:9).

5:4 As so often in the Psalms, God’s people see the deliverances He works in this life as repeating in essence the great deliverance at the Red Sea and His entering covenant with His people, which things represent our baptism and deliverance from this world (1 Cor. 10:1,2).

5:5: *The mountains melted*- to a distant onlooker, the water flowing down the mountains gave the impression that they themselves were melting; not, of course, that they actually were. The Bible sometimes speaks of things as they appear to human eyes; hence the use of the language of ‘demon possession’ in the New Testament. Demons don’t exist, but the miracles of healing mental illness are described from the viewpoint of a human observer. This principle must be remembered when reading the account of creation.

5:6 This was the first time in which the curses of Lev. 26 and Deut. 28 began to be realized upon Israel. "Your highways shall be desolate" (Lev. 26:22) is alluded to here.

5:11 *His rule in Israel*- Israel at this time were the Kingdom of God on earth, a Kingdom which was overthrown when they repeatedly refused His Kingship over them (Ez. 21:25-27) and which will be re-established at Christ’s return (Acts 1:6).

5:13 The coming down of Yahweh is paralleled with the coming down of His willing people. One theme of this victory is that God’s people on earth acted in tandem with the Angelic movements in Heaven above.

5:14 Barak’s victorious warriors were civil servants and writers, not military men; in the same way as God used goldsmiths and traders to do the work of builders and engineers to rebuild Jerusalem’s walls at the time of Ezra. God often uses those not suited to a particular job to do it, because the victory must always be of Him and not of human ability.

5:19,20 The reference is to the Angels fighting on Israel’s behalf. If we walk in step with the Angels, success is assured. Here, Israel’s fighting is paralleled with the Heavens and stars [=Angels, Rev. 1:20] 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.

5:20 The Hebrew for 'courses' is almost identical with that for 'ladder' in the account of Jacob's vision of a ladder of Angels; it strictly means a 'staircase'. See on 4:14; 5:19,20.

5:23 *To help Yahweh*- The fact that God so loves us is itself a limitation to Him. Because in any relationship, one person usually loves more than the other. And the one who loves the most- which is unquestionably God- has the least power. This is why He, the more powerful in physical terms, speaks with such language of limitation. In a sense God requires not help from man; and yet in another sense He has delegated His work to us, and limits His achievements according to what we are willing to do.

5:24 *Blessed above women*- Lk. 1:28,42 alludes here, as if Mary was already as Jael who had killed Sisera, an incident typical of the Christ’s destruction of sin with the hammer of God's word. Mary is tied up with her son's victory- for He was part of her.

6:2 The Israelites who fled to the dens and caves at this time 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 which was perceived by God. God is so eager to perceive spirituality and faith amongst His people, despite their weakness in other areas; we should have the same positive attitude to each other.

6:12 *You mighty man of valour*- Gideon’s constant need for Divine reassurance indicates he wasn’t so brave; but God addressed him according to his spiritual potential. He does the same with us, hence the challenges He sometimes gives us which appear far beyond what we feel capable of.

6:12,13 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. God told Gideon: “Yahweh is with you” [you singular], and yet Gideon responds: “Oh, my Lord, if Yahweh is with us…” (: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 (7:14,15). He still found it so hard to believe that God treated him as so important to Him. It could be that Gideon intentionally misunderstood the offer of personal strengthening by arguing back that if Yahweh is really with us, then why are they suffering so much (6:13). He flinched at the personal call of his Angel 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. 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 “I will be with you” (: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.

6:13 Gideon knew that God forsaking Israel was a punishment for their sin (as in 2 Kings 21:14; Is. 2:6; Jer. 23:33). God would forsake Israel only if they forsook Him (Dt. 31:16,17; 2 Chron. 15:2). This opens up our understanding of Christ’s cry from the cross “Why have You forsaken me?” (Mt. 27:46). It seems He was so identified with us that He genuinely felt He was bearing the punishment for sin as a sinner; thus although He never sinned, He genuinely felt as a sinner, so that not even our sin means that Christ can’t empathize with us.

6:31 Joash told the Baal worshippers to let Baal plead for himself, rather than them pleading for him. He was saying that they were assuming that they had to ‘play God’ for Baal; they had to 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. He doesn’t need us to as it were apologize for Him through ‘apologetics’; He Himself is witness unto Himself regardless of us.

7:4 God said that He would try / judge the people with Gideon at the waters- but they effectively judged themselves by deciding with their own freewill whether to kneel down [as before an idol?], or lap. Idols were worshipped by kneeling before them, and perhaps those who lapped rather than knelt were the minority with sensitive consciences to Yahweh, not wanting to even ‘go there’ by even vaguely appearing to have anything in common with idolatry.

7:10 Gideon’s constant need for reassurance is found throughout the record. Yet God knew that potentially, Gideon was a brave, faithful servant of His (6:12); and yet He made concessions to Gideon’s weakness and need for human company, whilst at the same time strongly teaching him that God saves by the few and the weak (:7). He works in the same way with us, teaching and stretching us whilst sensitive to our weaknesses and fears.

7:12 Saul tried to copy Gideon in his own fighting with his enemies (1 Sam. 11:11 = Jud. 7:16; 1 Sam. 13:5 = Jud. 7:12; 1 Sam. 14:24,28,31 = Jud. 8:4,5). We too should be inspired by Gideon’s victory in our battles. See on 13:15.

7:14,15- see on 6:12,13.

7:19 *They had but newly set the watch*- This was humanly speaking the worst time to attack, when the guards were fresh and alert. Likewise going in to battle cumbered with pitchers and trumpets rather than weaponry was a sign of trusting in God for victory rather than human strength. God’s battle plans often specifically require us to attain victory in a way which is foolish and weak in human terms.

7:22 God so often destroyed mighty armies by setting them against each other. Division is not only a human work, but is used by God to destroy communities which displease Him.

8:3 *Then their anger was abated*- The Proverbs are full of allusion to Israel’s earlier history; Prov. 15:1 “a soft answer turns away wrath” clearly alludes here. Gideon could’ve responded that they could’ve come to help him in his hour of need but chose not to, and now wanted to share the glory of the victory. But he speaks humbly to them. We don’t always have to state truth as it is; rather there are times when we must follow the things which make for peace with people, however wrong they may be (Rom. 14:19). See on 12:2.

8:6 This was the exact spirit of Israel’s suspicious cousins when they were on their way from Egypt to Canaan (Num. 20:17,18). They should have learnt the lesson from Divine history.

8:23 Here we again see how Israel were God’s Kingdom on earth; this Kingdom was overturned when the last king of Judah was removed (Ez. 21:25-27) and will be re-established on earth at Christ’s return (Acts 1:6).

8:24-27 When Gideon received the golden earrings of the Ishmaelites, 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, just as we are tempted to do so often.

8:27 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 internal sinful tendencies which we must struggle against. The idea of a snare is that it results in a sudden and unexpected destruction. 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 frequent 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 for wealth in our generation is the equivalent of idolatry in the Old Testament.

8:30 Although Heb. 11:32 speaks of Gideon as one of the faithful who will be resurrected to live eternally in God’s Kingdom on earth at Christ’s return, it seems that he rested on the laurels of earlier spiritual victories, and in later life became complacent. Although this is a failure we should avoid, we are comforted by God’s grace in still accepting Gideon.

9:7 *Listen to me... so that God will listen to you*- Jotham was speaking prophetic words from God. Insofar as we hear God’s word, so He will hear our words in prayer; if His words abide in us, we shall know His will, and our will becomes His will, and thereby our prayers according to His will are heard (Jn. 15:7). See on 13:9.

9:9,10 People of true integrity will get on with what they are obviously called to do by God, rather than seeking leadership for the sake of it, swaying around in a light and meaningless way above others.

9:18 *You...* *have slain his sons*- Abimelech personally had slain Gideon’s sons, but the people of Shechem had enabled it by their lack of resistance. The Bible doesn’t teach ‘guilt by association’, but there is also a sense in which communities are counted as guilty for allowing evil to be perpetrated by individuals.

9:23 *God sent an evil spirit*- To say that demons were cast out of someone is to say that they were cured of a mental illness, or an illness which was not understood at the time. People living in the first century tended to blame everything which they couldn’t understand on imaginary beings called ‘demons’. Mental illness being hard to understand with their level of medical knowledge, the people spoke of those afflicted as ‘demon possessed’. In Old Testament times, an evil or unclean spirit referred to a troubled mental state (as here and 1 Sam. 16:14; 18:10), in that the ‘spirit’ often refers to the mind or disposition. Note that in every Old Testament reference to evil spirits, they were sent *by God*, not a personal, sinful ‘Satan’ being.

God is capable of sending a spirit of disunity between people, as He did to Egypt (Is. 19:1,2,14). God created the division between Israel and Judah as a punishment for their apostasy. Whilst division between people is a work of the flesh, it’s also true that God confirms people in the divisions they wish to have, and He does this as a punishment. There are times when people who have an existing disagreement encounter situations which involve genuine misunderstanding and unfortunate coincidence of circumstances which confirm their division yet further; and this ‘extra’ factor in their relationship breakdown is sent by God. In this sense stubborn hearts are also sent from God (Ps. 81:13); God can work positively and negatively directly upon the human heart. Likewise God confirms a desire for unity amongst His people.

9:27 This was some kind of dedication of the harvest to Baal; yet God had commanded that the firstfruits of the harvest should be given to Him, and His people should rejoice before *Him* (Lev. 19:23-25). We see here how Israel appropriated pagan rituals and mixed them with Yahweh worship, in the same way as an apostate church took the pagan Winter solstice festival of December 25 and applied it to Jesus. We too are ever tempted to worship our own flesh in the guise of Yahweh worship- e.g. we may gossip, kidding ourselves that this is in the defence of God’s Truth (as if it needs any defence by us); hoard huge wealth under the excuse we may one day use it for God.

9:54 Abimelech therefore knew that it was a woman who had thrown the millstone; presumably he had looked up at her and seen her and assumed that a woman could never kill him as a man. His despising of the person of another and assumption of intrinsic superiority because of his gender led him to his death.

9:56 Abimelech appeared to have had a very blessed and successful life; but the lesson of the story is that finally, sin catches up with us and will have its judgment, if not in this life, then at the day of judgment when Christ returns.

10:13 *I will save you no more*- But they begged Him, and He did. Likewise in Hosea, He said He would love them no more, but just couldn’t bring Himself to do it (Hos. 9:15; 14:4). These aren’t contradictions, but rather a window onto the passion and emotion of God; how His love is greater than His anger with sin. And this God is our God.

10:16 *His soul was grieved*- There is in the Hebrew text here something which defies translation. We read there that God was so hurt by Israel's sufferings that in sympathy with them, "His nephesh ["soul"] was grieved / shortened" or expended. The phrase is used in 16:16 and Num. 21:4 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. 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. We also see here how God truly takes no pleasure in punishing His children; eternal conscious torment of the wicked isn’t a Bible teaching (Ez. 18:32; 33:11).

11:2 Again we see how God worked to save Israel through a man whom others despised and rejected, looking forward to His Son, Jesus, the stone whom the Jewish builders rejected who became the corner stone (Mt. 21:42).

11:7,8 Israel’s attitude to Jephthah was their attitude to God; they rejected Him, but turned to Him in times of trouble. The way Jephthah speaks in :7 and :12 suggests he appreciated this, and took comfort from it.

11:8 Both illegitimate children like Jephthah and Ammonites were excluded from Yahweh’s congregation (Dt. 23:2,3). But God brought the Israelites to such desperation that they had to recognize that the letter of God’s law couldn’t save them. Jephthah could have reasoned that because his brethren excluded him, therefore he would have no passion for his own people and would certainly not fight for them. But he adopted, as we should, a more gracious perspective. Whatever the rejections suffered at the hands of God’s hypocritical people, he still saw them as God’s people and identified with them. This is a lesson for the many who have been unjustly excluded from congregations of God’s people over technical issues which weren’t their personal fault; this is no reason to be unfaithful to or cease to identify with God’s people as a whole.

11:24 Jesus spoke about demons as if such things existed, even though He did not believe they did; for demons referred to idols, which have no real existence (1 Cor. 8:4). In a similar way, faithful Jephthah spoke of the idol Chemosh as if he existed.

11:27 We are in God’s judgment presence in this life just as much as we will be in the last day. The day of the Lord is coming, but it is even now (Mic. 7:4 Heb.). Jephthah understood this when he said that Yahweh the Judge *is* judge “this day”. Because God *is* judge right now, this means we should realize that He will and does judge here and now.

11:35 **Jephthah** could have redeemed his daughter from the vow he involved her with (Lev. 27:4). But he decided in his mind: "I have made a vow to Yahweh and I can’t go back on it”. 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. Another possibility is that Jephthah was ignorant of the Lev. 27:4 provision that he could rescind a vow. In which case we learn that someone can be of great faith and acceptability to God even if they are ignorant of part of His word. This shouldn’t justify us in a careless attitude to His service, but rather should inspire our toleration and acceptance of our more ignorant brethren.

12:2 An identical thing happened to Gideon- see on 8:3. Gideon could’ve said the same as Jephthah, but instead gave a soft answer and turned away wrath (Prov. 15:1). Here, Jephthah answers the complaint on a purely factual level- and conflict ensued. We are perhaps left to conclude that we can answer provocation in either of these two ways- it’s not a moral issue, it’s totally our choice, but we can avoid conflict if we take the “soft answer” route.

12:6 *Shibboleth* means ‘the river’, so presumably the Gileadites made them ask if they could cross ‘the river’.

12:8,10 The double connection of Ibzan with Bethlehem exemplifies how all the judges- the Hebrew word means ‘saviours’- were types of Jesus, the ultimate ‘saviour’ of God’s people. The Hebrew form of “Jesus” means ‘Yahweh is saviour’.

13:5 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), "Yahweh delivered (Israel) into the hand of the Philistines" (:1). It is emphasized in 14:4 that "at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel" (see too 15:11). The point is hammered home in 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. They remained under the Philistines, even during his ministry. One interpretation of his life is that 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. This provides comfort not only to us in our weakness, but assists us in more positively and hopefully perceiving others whose weaknesses are so apparent to us. When she relayed the incident to her husband, Samson’s mother omitted to repeat the part of the Angel’s conversation about Samson delivering Israel from the Philistines (: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.

13:7 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". Yet he broke the Nazirite vow by touching dead bodies and having his hair shaven (Num. 6:6). 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. This is the problem with eagerly making use of God’s concessions to human weakness. However, it may be that God counted his desire for the high standard of Naziriteship 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 sometimes be what God earnestly looks for.

13:8 *The child who will be born*- We see here Manoah’s respect and belief of his wife’s word, which he accepted as God’s word. When a wife says she is pregnant because an Angel visited her- it’s quite something for the husband to believe that, especially in a culture which stereotyped women as untruthful and likely to be unfaithful. Manoah’s example likely inspired Joseph centuries later when Mary said the same. Manoah’s respect of his wife’s word was again put to the test in :9,10.

13:9 *God listened to the voice of Manoah*- His hearkening to *God’s* word led to God hearing *his* word in prayer- see on 9:7. Manoah asked for the prophet (whom he thought the Angel was) to come again and tell them how to train their new child. His prayer was answered- but actually, his request wasn't specifically dealt with. The Angel came- not a prophet, as he asked- and confirmed to Manoah that really his wife was going to have a child. The spirit behind his request was understood and answered, rather than the actual words which he spoke.

**13:15** The record of Samson and his parents has a large number of situations where he was connected into the experience of those who had gone before; they were intended to learn the lessons, as we are to turn God’s word into flesh, making the historical accounts have practical relevance to life today. Consider: Manoah's desire to detain the Angel (cp. Gen. 18:5). Manoah's desire to detain the Angel and offer sacrifice was exactly that of Gideon (6:18). His belief after he had seen the Angel ascend (13:20 = 6:21), and his subsequent fear, were again expressed in the words of Gideon (13:21,22 cp. 6:22). As Gideon was, perhaps subconsciously, the hero of Manoah, so Samson followed his father's spirituality in this (see on 14:1; 15:4). It seems he lived out parental expectation, and imbibed the spirituality of his father without making it his own. Born and raised believers, beware. See on :24; 14:1,3; 15:4,15,19; 16:24,25.

13:24 *The child grew, and Yahweh blessed him*- cp. Samuel, John, the Lord Jesus- all chosen from the womb.

13:25 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. 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.

14:1 Judah also did wrong in Timnah (14:1) with a woman, and was deceived and shamed by her (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. See on 13:15.

Samson "went down" to take a Philistine girl for wife (: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 (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.

14:2 It could be argued that because the father was responsible for his son's marriage partner (12:9; 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.

14:3 The disappointment of Samson's parents cp. that of Esau's (cp. Gen. 26:35; 27:46; 28:1). See on 13:15.

“Is there never a woman among the daughters of your brothers” 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 (13:25 Heb.). Samson gave no good answer to his parents: simply "Get her for me; for she is right in my eyes" (repeated in :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). But she was 'right in his eyes' 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.

14:4 The whole question of Samson's marriage is overshadowed by the fact that "It was from Yahweh”; He used this failure to deliver His people. 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 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. 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.

14:5 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 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 (s.w. 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 (14:15-17 = 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.

*To the vineyards-* Why did he as a Nazirite go for a walk in vineyards, among the forbidden fruit? 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 if interest’, so Samson fooled about with what was forbidden- just as we all tend to. He later teased Delilah to tie him with seven “cords” (16:7), 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; cutting out the eye that offends.

14:6 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 (16:17). He was therefore just an ordinary man, made strong by the Father after the pattern of the Saviour he typified. The stress is on the way in which the Spirit came upon Samson (14:6,19; 15:14), as it did on other judges (3:10; 6:34; 11:29). The New Testament gifts of the Holy Spirit were likewise for specific things at specific times, and were withdrawn once the intended work had been done.

14:10 Samson was a Nazirite to God (i.e. in God's eyes?) all his life (13:7)- although he broke his Naziriteship by contact with dead bodies (14:19; 15:15 cp. Num. 6:6) and probably here by drinking wine at his wedding ("drinking feast"). 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.

14:16 “Why should I tell *you*” implied that his wife should expect that he was closer to his Hebrew parents than to her. 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, :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. Yet it seems no accident that he chose Timnah, '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).

14:18 They had to declare the riddle "and find it out" (:12). This would indicate that they had to actually find the carcass of a lion with honey in it. They ploughed behind his wife as a heifer, and so were led by her to Samson's secret place of meditation where the dead lion was (:18).

14:19 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. Our motives can be terribly mixed, even when doing God’s work.

15:2 He seems angry that he had let himself fall too deeply for that Philistine girl (14:19), and "utterly hated her" (15:2). He transferred his anger with himself onto someone close to him; and we must beware we deal with our guilt and sin by repentance, rather than transferring it onto another and harshly punishing them for our own sin. Yet Samson really loved that girl (14:3,17; 15:1,7,11), even though he also hated her (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 marriages look more questionable.

15:3 He burnt those vineyards in a desire to be "blameless in regard to the Philistines". 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, nor by transferring our sin and deserving of judgment onto others.

15:4 As the Spirit came upon Gideon (6:34), so it is described as coming upon Samson (14:6). It seems that when Samson visits his wife with a kid and uses this as an excuse to kill many Philistines, this was planned by him to reflect Gideon's zeal. The way Gideon brought a kid to Yahweh (6:19) may reflect how Samson came with a kid (15:1). He then 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 (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. As Gideon "went down" to destroy God's enemies (7:9), so Samson justified his 'going down' to the Philistines to take their women, as well as to destroy their warriors (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). See on 13:15.

15:5 Burning up the corn and vineyards of the Philistines was 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 (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).

15:11 *As they did to me, so have I done to them*- 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, causing famine as a result, was what they had done to him emotionally. Yet it is curious how he loved the Philistines and yet hated them; was humble and yet had too high an opinion of himself. We see the same contradictions of human nature within ourselves. The Philistines had earlier said that they wanted to take Samson "to do to him as he did to us” (: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. It seems his zeal for God was also very humanly motivated.

15:12 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). 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.

15:14 When he was strolling in the Timnah vineyards, a lion had come across him (14:5). 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 (14:6). 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 NT. The Spirit came upon the apostles and they were filled up with is, 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.

15:16 Samson slaying Philistines with a jawbone suggests Shamgar slaying Philistines with an ox goad (15:15 cp. 3:31). See on 13:15. Samson grabbed a jaw-bone and exalted that with that he had slain a thousand men at Lehi. This was a conscious allusion to Josh. 23:10 (and Lev. 26:8), that one faithful man would chase a thousand. 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 fulfil the prophecy. 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: a left handed man (3:21); an ox goad (3:31); a woman (4:4); a nail (4:21); a piece of a millstone (9:53); a pitcher and trumpet (7:20).

15:19 Samson dying of thirst crying desperately for water recalls Hagar's experience (15:19 cp. Gen. 21:19). See 13:15.

16:1 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. 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. The warnings about not looking at a strange woman recall how Samson saw the Philistine girl in Timnah and the prostitute in Gaza (14:1; 16:1). The wicked woman lying in wait to kill the simple man (Prov. 23:25-27) is a clear enough reference to Delilah and her henchmen lying in wait in the bedroom. And yet, for all this reflection upon Samson, Solomon went and did par excellence according to Samson's well-studied folly. And we can do the same, in principle. There is this vast distance between knowledge and belief.

16:3 Samson went in to spend the night with the prostitute, but Samson lay there only until the middle of the night. Then he got up and took hold of the city gate. 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. We must ever examine our motives.

16:7 *Cords*- see on 14:5.

16:9 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 Nazirite. 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 Nazirite tried to take fire into his bosom again.

16:13 "If they tie me..." (:7) now changes to " If you [singular]" ; 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 psychological condition. 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). A man can know something about someone on one level, but in love act and feel towards them in a quite different way than this knowledge requires.

16:17 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 Naziriteship. 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 (: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 Nazirite 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 Nazirite even though he had broken the letter of Naziriteship, 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 Nazirite and having strength (: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?

16:20 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- 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. He had broken the Nazirite vow by touching dead bodies, he obviously thought that having unshaven hair was only tokenistic and irrelevant to the real spirit of Naziriteship, 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 misunderstanding of God's waiving of the Nazirite ban on touching dead bodies; for after all, God had made Samson a Nazirite, 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.  The idea of binding the strong man (Mt. 12:29) must surely look back to Samson. This means that the Lord saw Samson at that time 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.

16:22 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, 16:22,23). The growth of his hair is to be associated with his renewed determination to keep the Nazirite vow. He was reckoned by God as a lifelong Nazirite (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 Nazirite, 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.

**16:24** Gentiles praising their gods, mocking Yahweh, and then suddenly being destroyed (16:24) was a scene repeated in Dan. 5:4. See on 13:15.

**16:25** Samson suddenly called up out of the prison house (16:25) cp. Joseph (Gen. 41:14), John (Mt. 14:9). See on 13:15.

16:30 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 plea for vengeance against the Philistines for his two eyes (:28) sounds woefully human. 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 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). 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).

16:31 Heb. 11:34 says that that Samson was a man of outstanding faith- yet the record 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 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 reflection on Samson needs to bear this in mind. He seems to have lived the rest of his life full of faith and zeal- although I this doesn’t in any way minimize the mistakes he made.

17:3 We see here the continued theme of Judges- that the people confused serving the true God with serving idols. The man repents, he has a conscience; and his mother isn’t an atheist, she’s not rejected Yahweh; but their morality has become so confused. We see the same all around us today both doctrinally and practically, and we can easily be sucked into the same nexus of confusion unless we base our conscience, faith and understanding upon God’s revealed word. The fault for the situation is also put upon the fact there was no leadership, and people did what *they* felt was right rather than what God had declared in His word (:6). There is no ‘light within’, as the Proverbs frequently declare, the way that seems right to man is often not (Prov. 14:12; 16:25; 21:2).

17:10,11 Micah asked the young Levite, who was “unto him as one of his sons”, to “be unto me a father and a priest” (note the paradox- the son is as a father), resulting in others likewise asking him to “be unto us a father and a priest” (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. There’s a desire in most people for religious leadership rather than forging a direct relationship with God through personal response to His word and accepting His system of mediation between Him and us, which in our day is through His Son.

18:2 Again we see the quasi spirituality of the people at this time; this sending out of spies was framed in the language of Joshua sending out spies and then taking the land. They likewise say that the land is “good” (:9) just as the faithful spies said; and their description of the land as lacking nothing good (:10) is quoting Moses’ words about the land in Dt. 8:9. But these Danites hadn’t taken the land assigned to them by Joshua (:1). Mixing the flesh and the spirit is the way to total destruction; unless we are completely devoted to God’s ways we will fail.

18:6 The men ask him to enquire of “God” but he immediately replies that “Yahweh” is blessing their plans. He didn’t know the true God in practice but he used all the right language. There are other examples of men assuming all too quickly that they are speaking on God’s behalf (2 Sam. 7:3; 1 Kings 22:15-17). We aren’t to assume that we instinctively, intuitively know what God’s will is, but to base our view upon His revealed word.

18:19- see on 17:10,11.

18:24 *What else do I have*- This man’s false religion meant everything to him; he was very religious, but didn’t know the true God. Sincerity of devotion won’t save us if we are devoted to the wrong understanding of God; those like Cornelius who sincerely seek the true God will find Him, but religious devotion of itself isn’t serving God in spirit and truth as He requires (Jn. 4:24).

19:12 This man was likely an alcoholic (note he got drunk four days in a row, and took wine with him, :19), a polygamist and hard hearted and brutal toward his woman (he told her when unconscious and gang-raped to just get up and carry on the journey, :28). Yet he still had a religious conscience, and thought that separation from the Gentile world was important; we note that he emphasized the externality of his religious devotions in :18. But separation from the flesh must begin internally; it’s no good to be separate from the world and yet live the life of the flesh in our private lives.

19:30 This was done so that all who received the parts of that broken body would “consider" and be motivated in response. 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 (: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 Jesus was to the crowd (:25); “Do... what seems good unto you" (: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 body- the inner thoughts of our hearts are elicited, and we are provoked to action.

20:1 *As one man*- Repeated in :8,11. In the same way as disparate parties became united in killing Christ, so self-righteous anger against brethren who are scapegoated can produce an apparent unity (Lk. 23:12; Acts 4:26). But the parties soon go back to their anger with each other once the group they have set up as their common enemy is either destroyed or the situation moves on.

20:16 We read of men being able to sling stones and not miss “a hair’s breadth”- an idiom which of course isn’t literally true. The Bible uses such inexact language at times in that it uses human terms; which explains why the New Testament speaks of ‘demons’ as if they exist whereas elsewhere it shows clearly that they have no real existence.

20:23 Both sides were in the wrong. But God as it were lead the idolatrous and hypocritical Israelites further down the downward spiral. We learn from this that division amongst God’s people is in a sense sent from Him in the sense that He confirms divisive brethren in their position they wish to adopt, and even uses it to destroy communities which displease Him. Even with Gentile nations, His preferred manner of destroying their armies was to turn their swords against themselves.

21:2 This repentance of people who had many other weaknesses in their lives is similar to the situation in 17:1-4. It shows there is a religious conscience in people, no matter how far they stray from God. We should bear this in mind when we become discouraged in our preaching by the thought that ‘nobody’s interested’. People are, passively.

21:4 Peace offerings were offered in times of Israel's sadness and defeat (see too 20:26). 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.

21:5 Israel made oaths before Yahweh which they didn’t keep and yet God worked through their failure in order to preserve His people... we see here how God works through human self-righteousness, failure and hypocrisy, in order to do His work and save people. We likewise shouldn’t totally turn away from those guilty of such things but try to patiently work through them still to God’s glory.

21:24 *Each man did that which was right in his own eyes*- It was right that there was no human king in Israel, because God was their king. This statement may therefore not be a criticism, but rather an observation- that in the absence of a human king, the people were to make their own personal decisions about what was right and wrong, just as we should. The sad thing was that Israel turned away from God’s word and therefore lost a correct sense of right and wrong.