

Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 23%

Weekly Readings will cover: Judges 15 through Judges 21

Sunday: Judges 15

Monday: Judges 16

Tuesday: Judges 17

Wednesday: Judges 18

Thursday: Judges 19

Friday: Judges 20

Saturday: Judges 21

Current # of email addresses in the group: 599

I hope you each have enjoyed your second week in the book of Judges. What powerful stories and examples for us to learn from! We now enter into our third and final week in the book of Judges. This will also be where we take a break for the Fall Holy Days (Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles & the Eight Day). I considered trying to fit one more week of study in before the Feast, but with all the additional sermons and planning that the Holy Days require, I need to prioritize those messages. We will not start back on the reading program until October 8th (a 3-week break). I hope during this time you are greatly fed by God with messages about the second coming of Jesus Christ, Satan being locked away, the excitement of the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ, and the beauty of God's plan for all of mankind through the second resurrection!

Website archive location for audio files & PDFs:

<https://www.ucg.org/congregations/san-francisco-bay-area-ca/posts/audio-links-re-three-year-chronological-deep-dive-reading-program-circa-2022-2025-903711>

3-YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 40

Read the following passages & the Daily Deep Dive on the daily reading.

Day 253 - SUNDAY: September 10th

Judges 15

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading program states: "The shenanigans at Samson's marriage, and the giving of his wife to another, provoked him into taking vengeance on the Philistine oppressors. He wrought havoc on their harvest. To do this, he trapped foxes—or jackals, as the Hebrew

can also be translated (which seems more likely as jackals, unlike the more solitary foxes, traveled in packs, making it easier to catch them in greater numbers). He then tied torches—"firebrands" as the King James Version has it—between the tails of pairs of these jackals or foxes before releasing them into fields of grain, vineyards and olive groves. One can imagine the panic-stricken animals, unable to run in a straight line, zigzagging all over the fields, setting them on fire wherever they ran, thus burning whole crops. Samson became a wanted man, and it was his own people who turned him over to the Philistines.

Another element in the Christlike symbolism of Samson's life: Samson is turned over to the Philistine oppressors by Israelites of the tribe of Judah; Christ is turned over to the Roman oppressors by Israelites of the tribe of Judah.

Samson then slew a thousand Philistine men with the jawbone of a donkey. His utterance in verse 16 after slaying the Philistines is poetic, as the New King James Version indicates. However, the translation into English does not do justice to the Hebrew play on words. The Moffatt Translation is perhaps better: "With the jawbone of an ass I have piled them in a mass." At least Samson realizes that the strength and power he had to perform this incredible feat came from God. "You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant," he acknowledges (verse 18). He even calls on God to further deliver Him from thirst, which God does.

All this is building to a grand climax as God continues to seek an occasion to deal with the Philistines." [END]

Verse 1 – The time of the wheat harvest was at Pentecost, as the barley harvest began at Passover.

Verse 2 – It was against God’s law to take a sister as a wife (compare Leviticus 18:18).

Verse 8 – Adam Clarke’s commentary states: “This also is variously understood; but the general meaning seems plain; he appears to have had no kind of defensive weapon, therefore he was obliged to grapple with them, and, according to the custom of wrestlers, trip up their feet, and then bruise them to death. Some translate heaps upon heaps; others, he smote horsemen and footmen; others, he wounded them from their legs to their thighs, etc., etc. See the different versions. Some think in their running away from him he kicked them down, and then trod them to death: thus his leg or thigh was against their hip; hence the expression.” [END]

Verse 9 – Lehi means “jaw”. It likely was named this after Samson kills these men with a “jaw bone”.

Verse 15 – The word translated “new” in the NKJV is only used two times in the Bible and means “moist” or “dripping”. It’s interesting that we are told this is the jawbone of a freshly killed animal. This tells us that it was not dry and brittle but still tough and strong.

Verse 19 – After God causes water to spring forth, Samson names the place a name meaning “spring (fountain) of One calling”.

Day 254 - MONDAY: September 11th

Judges 16

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading program states: “God had been seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines (Judges 14:4). In itself, that is an interesting turn of phrase, for it implies that God works out His plans within the willing activities of men. God could have directly caused a thing to come to pass, but the Scripture says he *sought* an occasion. God often

works in human events in this manner, interweaving His plans with those of men, bringing His will to pass by using the circumstances and individuals at hand. Thus, God works within the flow of history to accomplish certain ends without violating man's free will and often without producing an obvious trail of "miraculous" happenings. This does not, of course, mean that there is *no* evidence of miracles in history. The incredible strength of Samson alone would have been clearly miraculous to the people of his day—he carried massive city gates uphill for 40 miles! (Judges 16:3)

The free will God allowed the Philistines is extended to all men—even those God specially uses. To break the Philistine tyranny over Israel, God would use a man, Samson, who had remarkable strengths coupled with regrettable weaknesses. God would accomplish His purpose and Samson would be the tool, whether he acted according to his better attributes or allowed his weaknesses to triumph. Regrettably, Samson would allow his weaknesses to get the better of him.

Contrary to scriptural principles, Samson had married a Philistine woman who was eventually given to another man. He could have chosen any Israelite woman, but Samson allowed his impulsive desire rather than his faith-guided intellect to control his behavior. He was lustful and arrogant. A little leaven leavens the whole lump, and so Samson descended even further into sin because he was unwilling to control his desire and submit to God—he went in to a Philistine harlot. Samson was now fully set to follow his lust, and this God would use to finally free Israel.

When Samson fell for another Philistine woman, Delilah, the Philistine lords persuaded her to discover the secret of his strength. After several failed attempts to capture him—attempts that Samson *knew* involved Delilah—he was finally captured. It is remarkable that in spite of knowing what Delilah was up to, Samson actually told her the truth.

Maybe he did not really believe the truth himself, which might be hinted at in verse 20. Perhaps he had grown a bit cocky as to the source of his strength. If so, that was about to end. Overpowered and blinded by the Philistines, he was afterward forced to grind wheat. Some commentators suggest that he ground wheat as the women did, using a grinding stone and plate. Others suggest that he was harnessed to a grinding stone as a beast of burden, although this was apparently not typical until centuries later. In either case, the point was the same: to humiliate Israel's strongman.

When Samson was brought before the Philistine lords in their temple of Dagon some time later, his call to God was sincere. However, his stated motive—revenge for the blindness inflicted upon him (Judges 16:28)—was surely not the only motivation he had for seeking God. There is evidence to support Samson's repentance in that the New Testament lists him as a hero of faith who, out of weakness, was made strong (Hebrews 11:32-34). Indeed, is it not directly stated that he, along with the others mentioned, died assured of the promises of God's Kingdom and will be "made perfect" with Christians of this age? (compare verses 39-40) Moreover, Judges 16:22 is quite telling in relating what happened during Samson's servitude. It states, "However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven." Just what significance does this have? After all, we know that Samson's hair was not "magical." It was *God* who gave him his miraculous strength—the hair simply representing the Nazirite vow of consecration to God, which, in Samson's case, was supposed to be lifelong. Perhaps verse 22, then, is telling us that while blind and humiliated in servitude to pagans, Samson finally "saw the light" and reconsecrated himself to God. Viewed this way, the final scene in his life is but the culmination of that rededication.

This final scene is well known—Samson brings down the temple by toppling two pillars, which killed him and all the Philistine lords within.

Until recently critics had thought this unlikely, a dramatic myth. How could a whole temple be destroyed by toppling two huge stone pillars? Just this past decade, however, a Philistine temple was fully excavated, revealing that the structure of the temple rested entirely upon two central pillars barely six feet apart. Given the weight distribution on those pillars, it would have been entirely possible for the biblical story to have ended precisely as recorded.

Why is not more made of Samson's repentance if it happened at this time? Because that is not the point of the narrative. The entire book of Judges concerns God's repeated deliverance of His people, regardless of the inclinations of those to whom He gave the task. *The Nelson Study Bible* notes: "Samson's life is ultimately a story about God's faithfulness in spite of human weakness. God's hand can be seen throughout the story—in Samson's empowerment by God's Spirit and in God's professed desire to subdue the Philistines (Judges 14:4). It also can be seen in this last contest between the true God and the Philistine god Dagon. When the Philistines captured Samson, they attributed this to their god and celebrated his victory (Judges 16:23, 24). We know, however, that it was God who had allowed it (v. 20), and that it was God who gained the ultimate triumph against Dagon and the Philistine rulers (vv. 27, 30)" (note on Judges 16:23-31)." [END]

Verse 7 – Regarding the meaning of “bowstrings” (NKJV), Adam Clarke’s commentary states: “That is, any kind of pliant, tough wood, twisted in the form of a cord or rope.”

Verse 21 – Many commentaries bring out that they may have blinded him so that if his strength returned, he would be limited in his ability to hurt them. It may have been also to show their dominance over their once strong enemy and to warn others of the punishment of fighting against them. As I thought about this, I also thought it was interesting

that Samson never learned to rule over his lust for the flesh. Now it's impossible for him to gaze upon a woman's beauty and lust.

Verse 23 – Dagon means “a fish”. He was their “fish god”. Dagon seems to be their chief deity and they had a temple to him at Ashdod (one of the five principalities of the Philistines).

Verse 25 – The NKJV says they called for Samson that “he may perform for us”. This Hebrew word means “to laugh”. The people wanted to mock him and laugh at him. John Gill's commentary states: “he was the object of their sport and scorn, and he bore it patiently, their cruel mockings, buffetings, and spittings; in which he was a type of Christ. It was a diversion to them to see him in his rattling chains, groping, and blundering along from post to pillar, one perhaps giving him a box of the ear, or a slap of the face, another plucking him by his nose or beard, and another spitting in his face, and others taunting at him, and reproaching him:” [END]

Verse 27 – Their five lords were there from their five principalities (the lords of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron)

Day 255 - TUESDAY: September 12th

Judges 17

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading program states: “The last five chapters of Judges are interesting as a group for, in addition to making no mention of particular judges, they appear to be incidental notices of Israelite history that do not follow the general theme or time line of the rest of the book of Judges. Indeed, *The Nelson Study Bible* notes: “The book of Judges closes with two appendixes, the first in chs. 17-18 and the second in chs. 19-21. They seem to be unrelated to the material preceding them and to each other. For instance, these chapters do not describe the cyclical pattern of sin, servitude, [supplication] and

salvation seen in the earlier chapters of Judges. While chs. 2-16 describe foreign threats to Israel, these last chapters show an internal breakdown of Israel's worship and unity. Furthermore, the events in these chapters appear to have taken place early in the period of the judges" (note on 17:1-21:25). That these chapters are out of chronological sequence with the rest of the book is attested to by several facts.

First, Judges 18:1-3 inform us that the Danites had not received their inheritance in the land—"the tribe of the Danites was seeking for itself an inheritance to dwell in; for until that day their inheritance among the tribes of Israel had not fallen to them." This could be interpreted in two ways: either it had not "fallen to them" by lot, or it had not "fallen to them" by conquest. Joshua 19:47 informs us that when Dan received its territorial allotment the Danites found the land too small for their numbers, and hence they undertook the conquest of Laish. The settlement of Dan's territory must have taken some time, and so the conquest of Laish must be put either late in Joshua's time or very early in the period of Judges.

Second, 18:30 identifies the priest who officiated at the shrine in Dan (formerly, Laish) as "Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh." The Hebrew text of this phrase is remarkable for the fact that the name Manasseh is spelled with a small superscripted nun (letter N), as M^NSH. The Masoretes—scribes who compiled the Hebrew text into its present form—were scrupulous not to disturb the position of the individual letters of the text, even to the point of developing a vowel system of "points" which fitted above and below the letters, but never between the letters. Thus, this small superscripted nun is a clue that it was not part of the original text. If the nun is removed the name becomes MSH or *Moshe*, i.e., Moses. Now we know that Moses had a son named Gershom (Exodus 2:22). Therefore, many scholars believe that the nun was a scribal insert into the text to direct the reader of the

text to read "Manasseh" rather than "Moses," thereby sparing Moses the dishonor of having Israel's first apostate and idolatrous priest in his lineage. Jonathan would be the *grandson* of Moses. If this is correct, then the transactions mentioned in connection with Micah and the Danite conquest of Laish must have occurred late in the period of Joshua, or early in the period of Judges, the likely lifespan of Jonathan.

Third, Joshua 20:1 and verses 27-28 inform us that when Israel was roused to action against the Benjamites they assembled before the Lord where Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, was still serving. Phinehas was thus the *grandson* of Aaron, and hence of the same generation of Jonathan, who seems to have been the *grandson* of Aaron's brother Moses. Phinehas was old enough to slay the fornicating Israelite (Numbers 25) and would have survived into the period of Joshua and perhaps the early part of the period of Judges, and hence would put the war against the Benjamites in the period of Joshua or early in the period of Judges.

Fourth, the war against the Benjamites was so devastating to Benjamin that it was feared the tribe would vanish in Israel (Judges 21:1-3). Only 600 Benjamite men are said to have survived (Judges 20:47), all the other Benjamites—men and women—being put to death (Judges 20:48) so that these 600 men could find no Benjamite wives. Yet at the division of the kingdom under Rehoboam, the Benjamites were considered a full tribe (although the smallest, see 1 Samuel 9:21) and contributed in some significant way to the fighting force of 180,000 men at Rehoboam's command. If the story of the war against Benjamin is correctly placed in the chronology of the book of Judges, that would mean that in a period of 120 years (the time from Saul to Rehoboam) the Benjamites recovered their numbers. This is extremely unlikely. It is far more reasonable to believe that these events happened late in the period of Joshua or, more reasonable still, early in the period of Judges,

in conjunction with the evidence above, and that Benjamin therefore had about 400 years to recover their position and numbers.

The same is true for the story of the Danite conquest of Laish, as it probably happened within a short time of the war against Benjamin. That would mean that the history of these transactions has not been placed in chronological sequence within the book of Judges.

This, however, should not be viewed as a mistake. Much of the Bible is not in chronological sequence. Likewise, these accounts were appended to Judges intentionally and purposefully, and it is instructive to search out why. As the study Bible note quoted earlier goes on to state: "There is a certain logic to placing them at the end of the book. For one, the structure highlights the theme of the disintegration of Israel. The last chapters emphasize that 'every one did what was right in his own eyes' (Judges 17:6; Judges 21:25). The general tone of these last chapters is satirical and understated. The many violations of Mosaic law receive only minimal comments. However, a muted note of disdain for Israel's wanton behavior is evident in places."

"Micah was an Ephraimite. This man built what appears to have been a personal shrine to God in his house. The context leads us to believe that neither Micah nor his mother *intended* open rebellion against God. Micah's mother invoked the name of God in blessing her son ("May you be blessed by the Lord, my son," verse 2) and she had originally dedicated the silver to God (verse 3). Also, the name Micah itself meant "Who Is Like the Eternal?"

As for Micah, notice the "shrine" he had in his house. The Hebrew phrase that the New King James Version renders as "shrine" (verse 5) is *beth Elohim*. While the original King James translates this "house of gods," it should perhaps more properly be rendered "house of God." Thus, it may have been some kind of miniature representation of God's

tabernacle. Micah also had, as is mentioned in verse 5, an ephod, a garment worn during worship and probably in imitation of the ephods of the tabernacle priests. And then, mentioned in the same verse, were his *teraphim* (translated "household idols"), small figures either representing gods or some devices associated with a god—in this case perhaps even a miniature Ark of the Covenant. He was pleased to hire the Levite as his priest, at least showing he had some sort of respect for the God who had appointed the Levites to certain religious service. Furthermore, he sought instruction from the priest ("father" being a term for one who teaches and provides counsel). And Micah believed that the Lord (the same Lord invoked by his mother) would bless him for these measures (verse 13).

While certainly not wholly in line with God's instructions, neither was this *meant* to be wholesale apostasy. It was the worship of God united to idolatry—the sin of *syncretism*, blending pagan practices into their own religion, which the Almighty had expressly forbidden (see Deuteronomy 12:29-32) but which the Israelites often fell into. Moreover, it was doing what *seemed* right rather than following God's explicit commands—a recipe for disaster as this is the path that leads to death (see Proverbs 14:12; Proverbs 16:25). Though not *intended* to be apostasy and rebellion against God, it was apostasy and rebellion nevertheless. Sincerely attempting to please God is no excuse for breaking His direct commands. We must all remember this in our own worship of God." [END]

Verse 2 – From Adam Clarke's commentary: "It is likely that when the mother of Micah missed the money, she poured imprecations on the thief; and that Micah, who had secreted it, hearing this, was alarmed, and restored the money lest the curses should fall on him." [END]

Verse 6 – Many people do what they believe is right. Many people want to be good people and to lead lives that please God. They may

actually spend considerable effort trying to live a right life. It's important to remember there can be a big difference between what we might sincerely believe is right and what is in fact right in the sight of God. The Bible clearly tells us that our own nature is not capable of going in the right direction on our own (compare Jeremiah 17:9 and Jeremiah 10:23). We must all constantly study God's Word to ensure our lives are aligned with His way.

Day 256 - WEDNESDAY: September 13th

Judges 18

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading program states: "When the Danite force moved north from Judah through Ephraim on their way to conquer Laish, they moved through the highlands of Ephraim, probably because the lowlands were still occupied by Canaanites. To aid them in their battle, the Danites decided to take the shrine of Micah and the Levite with them, probably in imitation of the Israelite practice of having a priest head their fighting forces (compare Deuteronomy 20). We are told that Laish was "far from the Zidonians, and they had no ties with anyone" (Judges 18:7). Thus, they appear to have lived an isolated life, having neither trading nor diplomatic relations with outsiders. In such a condition, without allies, Laish fell to Dan.

After the conquest of Laish, the men of Dan set up Micah's idolatrous figures and consecrated Jonathan, who may very well have been the grandson of Moses (see earlier highlight on Judges 17, "[History Out of Sequence](#)"), as their priest, and his sons as their priesthood. The northern Danites retained this idolatrous worship until the time of the captivity of northern Israel around 722 B.C. Moreover, all Israel knew about it, but did nothing to stop it, as required by the law God had given (see Deuteronomy 13:12)." [END]

Verse 7 – The Adam Clarke’s commentary states: “Probably the people of Laish or Leshem were originally a colony of the Sidonians, who, it appears, were an opulent people; and, being in possession of a strong city, lived in a state of security, not being afraid of their neighbors. In this the Leshemites imitated them, though the sequel proves they had not the same reason for their confidence.” The commentary continues: “Being, as above supposed, a Sidonian colony, they might naturally expect help from their countrymen; but, as they dwelt a considerable distance from Sidon, the Danites saw that they could strike the blow before the news of invasion could reach Sidon; and, consequently, before the people of Laish could receive any succours from that city.” [END]

Day 257 - THURSDAY: September 14th

Judges 19

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading program states: “The disastrous war against the Benjamites began with a single incident, the brutal gang rape of a Levite's concubine. As horrible as this incident was, we still might wonder how it was able to spark such a major war.

There are two major relevant factors involved in what happened, one cultural and the other historical. The cultural factor involves proper treatment of a guest. Life in the Middle East has always been difficult, and to cope with the arduous conditions of nomadic life an elaborate system of social customs was developed. One social custom required every person to kindly entertain a guest, to provide comfort, lodging and food for a brief period to any stranger who happened upon one's camp, even if that stranger was a member of an enemy tribe in a time of peace. If the due benevolence was not shown, it was deemed an act of hostility and impiety before God. If the offense was serious enough, clan or tribal wars could be ignited.

A second factor was the persistent memory of what God had done to Sodom and Gomorrah—not only from the Pentateuch but even, no doubt, from regional stories passed down through generations. The filthy, abominable behavior of the inhabitants of these cities and others around them was a major factor in the cry that went up to God against them. The destruction against Sodom and her neighbors was so complete that even today their exact whereabouts remain unknown. By comparing the behavior of the Gibeahite "sons of Belial" (Judges 19:22) and the old man (Judges 19:23) with the conduct of the men of Sodom (Genesis 19:4-5) and Lot (verses 6-8), one should be able to see a very clear parallel.

Factoring the understanding of these elements into the story, one can see why an incident of this nature could ignite such a war. The Levite was a representative of God, to whom the Gibeahites were extremely inhospitable and showed open and flagrant impiety. Knowing the social requirements to care for the traveler, the natural conclusion was that such an affront would be repaid with vengeance by the One the Levite served—God. Therefore action needed to be taken.

Of course, the Levite does not appear very God-oriented, surrendering his concubine to be abused as he did and being so cold and uncaring toward her the next morning before he knew she was actually dead. The Ephraimite's offer to surrender up his own daughter does not paint him any better. We see here the low status that women had in that society. Truly, this story is utterly horrendous all the way around. It illustrates how low things had sunk—to the depravity of Sodom and Gomorrah. The prophet Hosea later cited this episode as one of the most corrupt events in Israel's history (Hosea 9:9; Hosea 10:9)." [END]

I don't have anything additional to add to this terrible event.

Day 258 - FRIDAY: September 15th

Judges 20

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading program states: "The grisly evidence of the crime of the Gibeahites produced shock in the nation of Israel. A council was held at Mizpah, the Levite giving his testimony as to what had happened. All Israel resolved to take action against the Gibeahites.

A delegation was sent to the Gibeahites demanding the surrender of the "sons of Belial" (a term denoting wicked, worthless, perverse individuals). But when the Gibeahite elders showed themselves to be implacable, the situation became ominous. Indeed, all Benjamin rallied to the aid of Gibeah. The Benjamites fielded an army of 26,000 men against 400,000 soldiers out of the remaining tribes.

That the men of Benjamin would determine to fight the other 11 tribes appears remarkably senseless, even though they were known for their courage and military prowess. Genesis 49:27 hints at this and 1 Chronicles 8:40 and 12:2 provide examples. Judges 20:16 states that their army included 700 men who possessed devastating power by use of the sling (the same weapon with which David later slew Goliath). It was an effective weapon: "The sling, which was employed with a left-handed motion, must not be confused with a modern schoolboy's catapult; it was a formidable weapon of war used in the Assyrian, Egyptian and Babylonian armies as well as in Israel.... It has been estimated that stones weighing up to one pound could be projected with uncanny accuracy at speeds up to 90 m.p.h.!" (*Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, note on verses 15-16).

With the clash between the two armies looming, the Israelites obtained counsel from God on the matter and, after initial reverses, completely routed the Benjamites.

We do not really know the reason that God initially allowed the Israelites to suffer 40,000 casualties with virtually no Benjamite casualties before giving the Israelites any help. There may have been tactical reasons for the lopsided nature of the first engagement. The *Tyndale* commentary on Judges offers this observation: "The hilly terrain in the vicinity of Gibeah favored a defensive force rather than an attacking force, especially if the former was in a strong position, as was likely in this case, since the Benjamites were familiar with their tribal portion. In such a situation superior numbers were of limited value, since they could not be effectively deployed, and a determined group of men armed with slings could inflict heavy casualties on an attacking force... [And] in the battle which ensued the psychological advantage lay with the Benjamites. They would fight desperately because they were fighting for their lives, whereas the opposing force, while convinced of the rightness of their cause, may have had little heart to engage in a civil war" (note on verses 19-25). If this analysis is correct, it is an interesting parallel to the American Civil War, in cases where southern armies overwhelmed numerically superior armies of the north.

Perhaps more importantly, God may not have been especially happy with the other tribes (that their hearts were not really right is evident in what happened in the aftermath of the war). We do see that they were driven to fasting and sacrificing before God, something quite rare in this period. Perhaps God wanted them to see the need for this. In any case, the Israelites finally succeeded using a tactic similar to that used at Ai. All but 600 Benjamite men were slaughtered in the fighting. The 600 men fled to a stronghold and maintained themselves there for four months.

But during that four months, the Israelites did something just as unthinkable as the crime that sparked the war in the first place—they went through Benjamin's territory and slaughtered the entire tribe,

women and children, young and old. This was an unjustified atrocity, though the Israelites may have considered it just retribution because the Benjamite cities they butchered had sent forces to aid the wicked men of Gibeah. In any case, it was an instance of anger and revenge taking precedence over self-control. When the slaughter was complete, only the 600 men in the stronghold survived.” [END]

Verse 47 – Rimmon means “pomegranate” (BDB)

Day 259 - SATURDAY: September 16th

Judges 21

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading program states: “The slaughter of all the Benjamites except the 600 men holed up in Rimmon only worsened the situation—now an Israelite tribe was about to become extinct. The 600 men had no wives, for they had all been slain in the carnage that followed the war, and all Israel had bound themselves with an oath that they would not give their daughters to any Benjamite man. What could be done?

While searching for an answer, the men of Israel determined that no men had come up to the war from Jabesh Gilead. Recalling that they had sworn to slaughter any who did not come up to the war against Benjamin (verse 5), the answer seemed obvious—send a company of soldiers down to Jabesh Gilead, slaughter all the men there, and their wives, but preserve alive the virgins for the 600 men of Benjamin. And so one rash action followed another and the trail of blood continued. With the slaughter of the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead, 400 virgins were procured. But that was not enough.

In the strange twists of logic common in that day, again the answer seemed obvious: since all Israel was bound with an oath not to *give* their daughters to the Benjamite men, let the Benjamite men *take* the daughters! And so the Benjamite men were allowed to

raid a group of women dancing in religious celebration and to carry away whomever they chose as wives. The fathers of the women were prevailed upon not to attempt to retrieve their daughters. And in this way, all oaths were kept and a tribe in Israel was preserved.

This kind of bizarre, torturous logic with regard to oaths might seem foolish to many of us today. Indeed, it all seems rather disingenuous, as they sought out loopholes to skirt the clear intent of their oaths. But the keeping of one oath, even if it was at the cost of some strange behavior, was another one of those social customs and expected morality that was common to all Middle Eastern society. Indeed, the keeping of oaths is commanded by God. But God expects those who give their word to follow through on the *intent*—not just the letter. Often a considerable degree of wordplay and shades of meaning were employed to extract one from a difficult circumstance (as the story of Hushai, 2 Samuel 15-17, will show), but in the end everyone was deemed to have kept his word. Of course, none of this is to say that strange reasoning of this sort never happens today. Similar "logic" is often applied in our day when people try to avoid blatant lies while nevertheless attempting to completely mislead people.

So what should the Israelites have done instead? Following through on the intent of their oaths would have put them in an untenable position from their vantage point. Of course, that was the problem. They were looking at things from their own vantage point. What they should have been more concerned about was God's will. Thus, they should first have repented for making foolish vows to begin with. Then they should have returned to Phinehas and inquired of God about what to do. If they were truly seeking the Lord, He would have given them an answer. And God's direct commands always override any vow. Indeed, if a father could void his daughter's vows and a husband could void his wife's vows, God could certainly void the vows of Israel, who was His daughter by creation and wife by covenant. Furthermore, no vow is binding if it

obligates one to violate commands God has already given. The real solution in such situations is, as already stated, humble repentance—something sorely lacking in the period of the judges, when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes."" [END]

Verse 19 – John Gill’s commentary states: “where the tabernacle then was, and before which the males of Israel were obliged to appear three times of the year; and this was one of them, as is clear by its being called a feast of the Lord; and therefore cannot design any civil festival or fair kept for trade and commerce. Some have thought of the feast of the passover, but it is most likely to be the feast of tabernacles, as Abarbinel takes it to be; which in Jewish writings is emphatically called "the feast"; and the time of year when that was kept was a time of great rejoicing, on account of the fruits of the earth being gathered in, and the reading of the law and especially at the tithe of drawing of water at this feast;” [END]

Verse 25 – We come now to the last words of the book, which again solidifies the point that these chapters are clearly demonstrating. When mankind follows its own path, terrible results occur. Mankind is not capable of ruling themselves correctly. Mankind will never solve the problems of this world. The whole world desperately needs the Kingdom of God and the return of Jesus Christ. May God speed that day!