


INTRODUCTION

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To the READER of commentary No.7

Dear friend,

PRESENTATION STYLE

I never believed I would find such profit through studying the book of Judges as I developed this commentary during January-February of 2010. I imagined it would be just a book of intrigue and Israel's wars with few spiritual "highs" affording little for the 21st century believer. My mind altered quickly the longer I worked on the Hebrew text.


First please note that as ever my comments are italicised and integrated with the translation. This presentation weaves the story as it runs together with what I trust are useful observations.

SCRIBAL SUMMARY

The book summarises well under the scribal footnote which is entitled HAZAK which means ""healing" or ""strengthening".

The note is the briefest of summaries - a sort of postage stamp synopsis. The commentary has two strands - translation and commentary and these are inter-stitched. To appreciate the book's purpose is to *capture and treat with affection* obedience to our faithful God as the Benjamites valued the wives they apprehended at Jabesh and Gilgal. The HAZAK scribe state that the nation divided, struggled and received hurt. *He reassures that the power of God quietly crept back into national life when Israel sought God and the leaders displayed compassion.*

HIGHLIGHTS TO LOOK OUT FOR IN THE BOOK

(1) In Chapter 2 we read of **the last great theophany** to Israel as a Nation. The curious little circle  of the Hebrew Midrash appears in the margin of the Hebrew text of the first sentence in Chapter 2 recognising the "small verbal message" of the LORD. At the voice of the "Angel of the LORD" (the pre-existent Saviour) the people weep.

NINE APOSTASIES

(2) The book records a series of **nine apostasies** seven of which attract enemy retribution through defeat of or dominion over Israel. The eighth (8) is idolatrous syncretism that separates Dan from Bethel and Shiloh with its image and shrine worship. The ninth (9) is a moral stand-off of Benjamin on account of the Sodomite rapists of Gibeah which they condoned.

BAD ROADS EMPTY HOUSES

(3) Deborah's Song in Chapter 5 stands as testimony to eroded **highways and denuded villages** in the valleys and the success of counter measures by the former inhabitants who were progressively reclaiming their land. Over against this the effective careers of Gideon (Chapters 6-8) and Jephthah (Chapter 11) and especially Samson (Chapters 13-16) which the Hebrew writer mentions with approval (Hebrews 11) mount a strong defence of the nation and present a number of lessons in faith and courage.

BAD LEADERSHIP PARODIED

(4) Jotham's famous "**parable of the trees**" serves to show how evil triumphs when the good are negligent. Chapter 12 is of course famous for the invention of the *Shibboleth password which probably meant "flood"* and would refer to the state of the Jordan where the Ephraimites assayed to cross. The rank growth of idolatry from a family base to its being espoused by the tribe of Dan is recorded in chapters 17-18. There are lessons to be learnt as to how easily false religion and views percolate through the population.

THE STORY OF THE WAYFARER CROWNS IT ALL

(5) The chapters 19-21 are absolutely fascinating. Follow the life story of the young "wayfaring man" bound for Bethlehem Judah with a present for his beloved concubine. See how her father appreciates his affection and how the girl has hurt him. Read of his mortal danger in Gibeah and how in extremity he yields her to the killers and how she almost makes it to safety but dies with her hand on the knocker of the Farmer's door. Read how her husband takes her home and in love hugs every part of her as he divides her in twelve pieces and gives her to the nation in a

heroic attempt to abate evil and cause revulsion to the evil conduct of the nation. The desperate struggle that ensues between Israel and Benjamin leads to national unity and central worship and ends defection. Israel is as one man and no-one will go off to their tents until they see the challenge to righteousness overturned. Their seeking of God is a tremendous lesson on revival. This act of the wayfaring man mirrors that of God who "so loved" His Son yet "gave Him" as willingly as the Son yielded Him to the sickening death of crucifixion to achieve a high eternal purpose – *redemption*.

(6) Thus the book ends almost in a *gospel allegory* - the second of the book - because the life of the devoted Samson heralded by the *Angel of the Lord who went up in the burnt offering or death* is an allegory of Samson freeing himself from bondage and in the end doing more in his death than by his life to defeat the enemies of Israel. Christ by His death defeated sin and death and hell and brought in everlasting *redemption*.

ISRAEL DESIRES A RIGHTEOUS KING

So read this book in the light of these amazing stories from centuries before the time of David. The writer reminds us that with older leadership in place compassion returned to the life of Israel but good decisions were hard to achieve.

(7) The hope of a king who shall rule with equity is in the air in Judges and ultimately the kingship of Yeshua "The Angel of the Lord" presents the only lasting Shalom or peace.

Ironically Israel's first king arose from Benjamin but the king she sought from the days of David was to spring from Judah. Let the book foster obedience to Christ and appreciation of the cross and the costliness of *redemption* – the drawing men and women *back* to God.

I commend Commentary No.7 to the reader

Bob Coffey

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JUDGES

*The “judges” were appointed or “set up” by God with two duties (a) to punish the offender and (b) to defend the just; however in this text their primary role would seem to be that of “the nation’s defenders”. The judges were also supreme magistrates. (Judges 4.5). As Edersheim quite rightly observes “From Gilgal to Bochim” might sum up the period of the Judges. The “Angel” or the LORD in His pre-incarnate theophanic manifestation showed Himself to the leaders **at Gilgal** and then **at Shiloh** which became just prior to Samuel’s day and in the time of Eli the religious centre of the nation. Bethel some 10 miles south of Shiloh appears to be the centre of Israel’s camp and worship at the time of the Benjamite War.*

CALEB OTHNIEL & JUDAH TAKE THE LEAD 1-6

And it happened by providence after the death of Joshua but the sons of Israel sought the LORD [*lav*] saying “Who will go up for us against the Canaanites in the “open” situation or “beginning” to war for him? *This opening verse is asking God who replaces Joshua or carries on God’s work and his in subduing the Canaanites? Israel wants a name and a man. The procedure is perfect and in keeping with the NT which found the church at prayer on the home-call of Christ after the Ascension. The Church knew the men who were to carry on the spiritual battle for souls but the Holy Spirit as the new² leader had not yet been given.*

And the LORD said “Judah shall go up - behold I have given the land into his hand. *This answer stood adequate for over 1000 years until Christ who as prince of the house of Judah provided Headship and sovereignty over Israel for ever after - though the consent of the people to Christ as Messiah still awaits ratification.*

And Judah said to his brother Simeon “Come up with me through my assigned inheritance and fight the Canaanite and I will also come up with you into your inheritance –and Simeon went with him. So Judah went up and the LORD gave the Canaanite and Perizzite into their hand and they smote twenty thousand men in Bezek. [*“lightning”*] *The place was called “lightning” and the summary speed of this disposal of opposition to Judah is suited to the name of the battlefield. When God’s people unite they may accomplish great exploits.* And they discovered Adoni-Bezek in Bezek and fought with him and slew the Canaanites and Perizzites. But Adoni-Bezek fled but they hunted him down and captured him and cut off the thumbs (and) great toes [*nhb*] of his hands and feet.

ADONI - LORD OF LIGHTNING & SEVENTY KINGS NEVER FIGHT AGAIN 7-8

And Adoni-Bezek said “Seventy kings with their thumbs and toes amputated were assembled under my table for what I have done - so God has sent for me” and they brought him to Jerusalem and there he died. And the sons of Judah made war with Jerusalem and captured it and smote it with the edge of the sword and they set fire to the city.

JERUSALEM & HEBRON TAKEN 9-13

And after that the sons of Israel went down to make war with the Canaanites who lived in the mountains and the south and Shephelah. And Judah went out against the Canaanite that lived in Hebron (and the name of Hebron before that was Kiriath Arba) and they slew Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmi. And from there they went against those who lived in Debir. The name of Debir before that was Kiriath Sepher. And Caleb said “Whoever attacks Kiriath Sepher and captured it I will in addition give my

daughter Achsah to be his wife". And Othniel Ben Kenaz, the brother of Caleb next youngest to himself took it and he gave him Achsah his daughter as his wife.

ACHSAH ASKS FOR POOLS OF WATER 14-15

And it happened when she came to him that she urged or induced him [*tws*] to ask her father for ground and she came down from her ass and Caleb her father said to her "What can I do for you? And she said to him "Give me a blessing for you have already given me the Negeb land so give me fountains or round pools of water and Caleb provided for her the higher and lower pools or reservoirs.

THE VITAL NATURE OF WITNESS 16

And the sons of the Kenite (Moses father-in-law) from the *city of Tamarisk palms* went up with the sons of Judah through or into the south of Arad [*10 miles west of Madasa in the southern mountains of Judea 15 miles east of Beersheba*] so they went and lived with the people of Israel. *The witness of Moses has not been wasted. An entire people who had been the religious caste of Midian moved lock stock and barrel to join God's people. This was not a small matter; it was nothing short of religious conversion. Let us praise the witness of this good and meek saint of God whose witness virtually added a thirteenth tribe to Israel from his wife's nation. These people had lived near the Mount of God - a journey as the crow flies of about 300 miles. This migration was most significant and parallels the journey of the Queen of Sheba-which of course was over twice as long. Except for one reference of Saul to some Kenites who had gravitated amongst the Amalekites the residue appear to have fully integrated with Israel of been lost among the Midianites..*

JUDAH POSSESSED HER POSSESSIONS 17-21

And Judah went with Simeon his brother and they struck the Caananites that lived in Zephath ["*the look-out watchtower*"] and they caused it to be devoted to destruction and they named it Hormah. ["*Desolation*" - *a former city ten miles west of Ziklag and 15 north west of Beersheba*] And Judah captured Gaza with its seacoast and hinterland and Askalon with its seacoast and hinterland and Ekron with its hinterland and coast. *This coastal stretch of conquests ran for about 40 miles. In the campaign which is uncannily like the sweep of Joshua Judah under Caleb and Othniel brought into submission a triangular arc of country resembling a right-angled triangle covering Judah's most southerly flank and stretching westward close to today's airport at LOD.*

And the LORD was with Judah and he took possession of the high ground but he was not caused or enabled to dispossess or dislodge those who lived in the valley or the "inscrutable depths" because they had chariots of iron. So they gave Hebron to Caleb as Moses said and he drove out from there the three sons of Anak. *This ensconced military power of the Canaanite held against Judah and remained unassessed.*

BENJAMIN SHARED JERUSALEM FOR PERHAPS HUNDREDS OF YEARS 21-22

But the sons of Benjamin did not dispossess the Jebusites that lived in Jerusalem but the Jebusites live with the sons of Benjamin in Jerusalem **UNTIL THIS DAY**. *This notice of the time of the writer is hard to gauge. J.B.Payne of Wheaton, Illinois in an article on Judges in the 1962 IVF Bible Dictionary observes that "from the first oppression to Samuel's inauguration 319 years elapsed." I have opined for some time that the perspective is Samuel's and we are to assume the lapse of perhaps 3*

centuries. Samuel it has to be said had a good deal to do with Saul and the Benjamites in his time.

JOSEPH TOOK THE PRIZE OF BETHEL - WHERE JACOB MET GOD 23-26

And the house of Joseph also went up to Bethel (the house of God) and the LORD was with them. And the house of Joseph sent spies to explore in Bethel for that city before was called Luz. The town of Luz in Genesis 27.17 was of great historical import for Israel. So the spies saw a man coming from the entrance to the city and said to him "Please show us the entrance to the city and we will act in mercy toward you". And when they were shown the entrance they struck the city with the sword and sent the man and his family away swiftly. And that man went off to Hittite country and built a city that he called Luz and that is its name UNTIL TODAY.

MANASSEH LEAVES FIVE BIG CANAANITE SETTLEMENTS BUT GAINS EASY ACCESS TO FOOD THEREBY 27-28

Nor did Manasseh dispossess Bethshan with her daughter settlements; Taannach with her daughter settlements; those of Dor with her towns and of Ibleam with her towns and those who lived in Megiddo with her towns so the Canaanites were able to dwell in these lands. And it was so when Israel was strong that they placed the Canaanite under tribute [*Hebrew ssk literally "corn" - they paid in sort being settled in the granary valleys*] and did not dispossess them.

EPHRAIM WERE SHORT ON NUMBERS SO THEY SIMPLY CO-DWELT IN GEZER 29

Nor did Ephraim dispossess the Canaanites that lived in Gezer but the Canaanites lived right in their midst in Gezer.

ZEBULON LEFT TWO SANCTUARIES FOR CANAANITES BUT GAINED FOOD SUPPLIES ALSO 30

Nor did Zebulun dispossess those who lived in Kitron and Nahalol but the Canaanites lived right in their midst and were subject to tribute.

ASHER LEFT 7 SANCTUARIES – PERHAPS GAINING TRADE BENEFIT AND EXPERTISE 32

Nor did Asher dispossess those who lived in Accho and those of Zidon and Ahlah and Achzib and Helban and Aphik and Rehob. But those of Asher lived in the land among the Canaanites because they did not dispossess him.

NAPHTALI LEFT 2 SANTUARIES BUT GAINED FOOD SUPPLY 33

Nor did Naphtali dispossess those who dwelt in Beth Shemesh and in Beth Anath so he lived among the Canaanites who had settled in the land but those who lived in Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath were made subject to tribute.

DAN GOT SQUEEZED BUT JOSEPH'S TRIBES PUT THE AMORITES UNDER TRIBUTE 34-36

And the Amorites squeezed the sons of Dan to the mountains for they gave them no room to flow down to the valley. And the Amorites were content and able to

remain at rest in Mount Heres in Aijalon and in Shaalbim but the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed and put them under tribute. And the border limits of the Amorites was from Maalaeh Akrabim from Sela and upwards. *This pressure has serious implications for Dan and led to emigration and the seeking of guidance at Mount Ephraim which led in turn to idolatry as recorded in Chapter 18*

CHAPTER 2

THE AWESOME VISIT OF CHRIST 1

And the angel of the LORD came up **from Gilgal to Bochim.** [*"Weeping"*] *In the text there is a space between this first sentence of Chapter two and the rest of the book. There is also a three word comment and in the space between this verse and the next there is a circle which is the rabbinic sign for a "comment". The choice of the circle is of interest because the Phoenician letter is equivalent to [(a Hebrew letter that is attached to the manner in which the Angel spoke in the three word commentary). So how did the Angel speak? The commentator says He spoke with "strength and vigour" But to the word "strength" is added the Hebrew [relating to the "circle." (The Phoenician Ayin or equivalent letter) The Phoenician letter generally signifies a small or gentle oral comment. Put another way it signifies a stern warning delivered quietly in a smooth gentle voice but vigorous deep and commanding tone. Its best equivalent is the reprimand given firmly but gently to a child.*

THE STERN WARNING OF CHRIST AND THE PEOPLE'S RESPONSE: THE LAST APPEARANCE OF THE LORD TO THE O.T. PEOPLE AS A WHOLE 2-5

And He said "I brought you up from Egypt and I caused you to come to the land which I swore to your fathers and I said "I will not violate or void my covenant with you for ever-or for "my lifetime." *In the case of God's oath this is based on his life and so it becomes an everlasting covenant with Israel. This statement is of cardinal importance and stands at the head of all the vicissitudes of many apostasies during the time of the judges. "And you shall not cut a covenant with those who dwell in this land; you shall tear down their altars but you have not listened to my voice. Why have you done this? And I also said "I will not drive them out and spoil them [vrg] before your face and they shall be alongside you and their gods shall be a fowler's snare for you. **And IT HAPPENED when the Angel of the LORD spoke these words to the children of Israel that the people lifted up their voice and wept.** *This sorrow for their sin and failure was visited upon them not by severe judgment or by a breach of covenant but by an appearance of Christ. This at the outset of a turbulent period of disobedience was at once a severe caution and wonderful assurance. God would remain faithful through it all. This is the Christian's strong assurance. "If we are faithless He will remain faithful for He cannot deny Himself. So they called the name of that place Bochim and offered a burnt offering to the LORD. The people not only lamented. They sought the means of grace available in the typical offering that presaged the cross.**

JOSHUA'S LAST ACT AND HIS DEATH AND BURIAL 6-10

But when Joshua had sent the people away Israel went every man to his inheritance to possess the land. *Israel had been keen to gain its heritage but clearly not willing to break down the native shrines.* And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who lived long after Joshua, who saw all the

great things that the LORD had done for Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun the servant of the LORD died: a man of one hundred and ten years of age. And they buried him at the border of his inheritance at Timnath Heres in the hill of Ephraim on the north of the hill of Gaash. [*shaking*] All that generation also died and **there rose up a generation after that which had no intimate knowledge of the LORD** or even of the works which He had done for Israel.

GENERAL COMMENT ON THE SUBSEQUENT AGE 11-15

AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL DID EVIL IN FULL VIEW OF THE LORD (1) and served the Baal gods. And they deserted the LORD God of their fathers that brought them from the land of Egypt and went after other gods from the gods of the people that were around them and worshipped them and grieved and provoked the LORD. *To “provoke” the LORD is to “grieve” His Spirit. We must avoid thinking of God as beyond hurt. Christ was deeply moved - the Spirit of God is grieved and the Father is angry with the wicked daily. If we must say God is without passions we must not introduce this notion into morality where God is most keenly sensitive. He is indeed not subject to rude and maverick passion. His is not an intelligence altered by hormone and chemical imbalance.*

And they departed from the LORD and became servants belonging to Baal and Ashtaroth. And the LORD was caused to be angry with Israel and He gave them into the hand of the plunderers and they plundered them and He betrothed them for a dowry into the power of the nations round about and they were no more capable of withstanding their enemies. In every place where they went the hand of the LORD was against them for calamity inline with the word of the LORD and what God swore to them and they were deeply distressed. *The “distress” [rxj] is compared to the forming of a pot - so they were put in a certain mould by their evil doings. They had to break the mould every time by appealing to the Potter to remake them.*

THE LORD KEEPS HIS SAVING GRACE BEFORE THE NATION 16

But the LORD raised up judges and they caused them to be **“SAVED WITH A JOSHUA LIKE SALVATION”** from the hand of the spoilers. But they would not even listen to their delivering judges because they went like whores after very different gods and worshipped them. They neglected and soon turned [*rhm “the next day” “as soon as ever possible”*] from the way that their fathers had walked in obedience to the commandments of the LORD – which they failed to do.

SOVEREIGNTY AND THE CONQUEST 18-19

So because the LORD raised up judges the LORD was with the judge and saved them from their enemies with a “Joshua like salvation” all the days of the judge for it grieved the LORD or he “groaned in himself” [*mj*] *We are not to think of the LORD as having done a wrong He desired to right. He loved his “bride” and was saddened to have to part her technically because she loved Him so little and then went whoring after other gods. Nevertheless his covenant love never ceased and He groaned to have her back*] because of their “groaning” [*q[n] – “a cry from anguish or sorrow”*] from the face of those who afflicted and squeezed them by asking more and more from them and who hunted them like a swarm of locusts. [*qj d*] And it happened when the judge died that they turned back and perverted themselves [*tj v”to be rotten” or putrid”*] beyond their fathers to go after other gods to serve and worship them and

they did not terminate their strenuous acts and their ways of hard-heartedness or wilfulness [hvq]

THE END OF ADVANCE - PREDICTABLE FOR 200 AND MORE YEARS TO COME-DUE TO APOSTASY 20-23

So the anger of the LORD was provoked against Israel and He said “Because this people has passed over my covenant which I commanded their fathers and have not obeyed my voice I will not continue to dispossess **A SINGLE MAN** from before them of all the nations left when Joshua died in order that through them I may prove Israel and them to be keepers of the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers kept it or not to be such. **So the LORD let those nations have rest not dispossessing them at an early time nor giving them into the hand of Joshua.** *This earlier leadership of Christ as captain accounted for divine omniscience because in the sovereignty of God it would not be good for later generations that would turn from the LORD to think blessings came without spiritual preparation and warfare; in a word for them to be rude and idolatrous like the original Canaanite.*

CHAPTER 3

SIX NATIONS REMAIN AS A REMINDER OF YAHWEH SABAOTH 1-7

So these are *the Gentiles which the LORD caused to remain to test* Israel by them – to examine all who had not known by personal experience all the wars of Canaan. The provision was only [qr] in order that the generations of the sons of Israel *to be born* accustom themselves to warfare and the provision was only in respect of the experience of those who did not experience those wars. *The writer understood the heart of God-because the wars of Israel to overcome the Amorites and Canaanites were “wars of the LORD.” The matter spoken of is spiritual warfare-which goes on from generation to generation wrought under our Captain of salvation. The historic struggle of Satan is exceedingly fierce in respect of the Jewish people and at the heart of the Second World War that became palpably evident. Paul is emphatic that we are involved in a struggle with the prince of darkness and that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. [2 Cor10.4 & Eph.6 10-17]* These are five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and those of Sidon and the Hivites that lived on Mount Lebanon from the Mount of Baal Hermon until the approach to Hamath. And they were there as a means to test Israel to turn the mind to causing them to obey the commands of the LORD which He commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses. So the sons of Israel settled in the midst of the Canaanites Hittites Amorites Perizzites Hivites and Jebusites. And they took their daughters for wives and gave their daughters to their sons and served their gods. **AND THE SONS OF ISRAEL DID EVIL IN FULL VIEW OF THE LORD (2)** and forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and Asherahs.

CUSHAN RISTHATHAIM & THE FIRST CRY TO THE LORD - THE YESHUA LIKE OTHNIEL IS GOD’S ANSWER 8-11

Israel were given into the hands of a man of “double evil” for their twin evils of forsaking the LORD and worshipping idols

And the anger of the LORD was provoked against Israel and He sold them [His bride} into the hands of Cushan Rishathaim of Aram Naharim [*Syrian province of Mesopotamia “Aram of the two rivers”*] and the sons of Israel served Cushan Rishathaim [*double wickedness*] eight years. When the sons of Israel cried out in

sorrow to the LORD for help [q/z] then the LORD raised up **A YESHUA OR JOSHUA-LIKE SAVIOUR** for the sons of Israel and he delivered them-Othniel the son of Kenaz the brother next youngest to Caleb. **And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him** and he judged Israel and went out to war and the LORD gave Cushan Risthathaim king of Aram into his hand and his power waxed strong beyond that of Cushan Rishathaim. So the land was undisturbed and quiet [fqv] for forty years but Othniel son of Kenaz died.

A SECOND APOSTASY 12-30

Israel were given into the hands of a carnal man on account of their growing carnality

AND THE SONS OF ISRAEL DID EVIL IN FULL VIEW OF THE LORD (3) so the Lord made Eglon king of Moab strong against Israel because of that evil they had done in the LORD'S sight. And he amassed the sons of Ammon and Amalek and went and struck Israel and took possession of the city of palm trees. And the sons of Israel served Eglon King of Moab 18 years. But the sons of Israel cried to the LORD and He raised up for them Ehud son of Gera - a left-handed man whose right hand was impotent [rf/] and by his hand the sons of Israel sent a present [or "100 shekels"] to Eglon King of Moab. And Ehud made a knife for himself which was double-edged and 18 inches long and strapped it under his ample measured garment on the right side. *Ehud was a man whose weakness or "left-handedness" became an asset to the kingdom. He could present the gift with his right hand without Eglon suspecting a blow from the left. Often the LORD uses our weaknesses – as he used Amy Carmichael despite the fact that her eyes were not blue.* And he came near Eglon King of Moab with the present and Eglon was a much "fattened" man [Eglon means "calf"]. *Clearly once Eglon had been less rotund but he was undisciplined.* And it was so that when he finished bringing the present hear the king he sent away the people who carried the present. But he turned back from the carved images that were at Gilgal and said "I have a private word for you O King. And he (the king) said "Silence" and they that were standing ministering over him went out. And Ehud came to him and he was sitting in an elevated refreshingly airy upper room [rrq hl/] which was his retreat. And Ehud said "I have a message or oracle from God for you" and he arose from his throne. And Ehud thrust in his left hand like a flash and took his knife from his right side and drove it [qt] into his belly and the handle of the knife went after the blade and the fat shut or confined the iron head of the sword so that he did not pull out the sword and the faeces came out. And Ehud left the suite of chambers and shut the doors behind him and locked them.

So he went out and the servants came and saw from inspection that the chamber doors were locked and they said "Definitely he is covering his feet [toileting] in the inner apartment of his airy chamber. *Perhaps the smell resultant from the nature of the assassination confirmed this faulty conclusion.* And they waited till they were embarrassed and still the doors of the upper chamber were not opened. So they took the key [htpm "key" Isaiah 22.22 "he had on his shoulder the key of David": in those days keys were large wooden openers often 18 inches long not unlike a child's beach spade in size.] and behold their lord had fallen dead on the ground. But Ehud made his escape while they tarried and passed the carved stones and escaped to Seirath.

EHUD PROCLAIMS HIMSELF JUDGE 27-30

And it was so when he came that he blew on the trumpet in Mount Ephraim and the sons of Israel went down with him from the Mountain and he became their leader. And he said “Follow behind me for the LORD has delivered your enemies Moab into your hands and they went down after him and captured the crossings of Jordan toward Moab and gave none permission to cross. And they smote about 10,000 men of Moab at that time - all stout and strong and not one escaped. And Moab was humbled that day under the hand of Israel and the land was quiet eighty years.

SHAMGAR AND HIS OX-GOAD 31

And after him there was Shamgar son of Anath and he smote 600 men of the Philistines with the ox goad of a ploughing bullock. He also was a Joshua-like saviour to Israel.

CHAPTER 4

THIRD APOSTASY- THE CRY THAT ENDED 20 YEARS OF DISTRESS 1-3

Israel continues in sin and forgets her brothers as many of the tribes live in careless self-confident ease. Yet her villages and roads fell into decline and her dependence on the LORD likewise. The LORD sells her to Jabin –a king who personified self-confidence and sought to foster idolatry by power and the might of iron. Ironically an iron nail ends this servitude

BUT THE SONS OF ISRAEL ADDED TO DO EVIL IN FULL VIEW OF THE LORD (4)

and Ehud was dead. So the LORD sold them [*as a man parts with his daughter for a bridal price*] into the hand of Jabin [*“The LORD will understand him”*] King of Canaan who reigned in Hazor. And the captain of his army was Sisera [*“battle array”-speaking of a man ready for war*] and he lived in Harosheth [*“working in wood or stone”-a place where idols were crafted and generally an industrial centre*] of the nations. But the sons of **Israel cried to the LORD** for he [*Jabin*] had 900 chariots of iron and **SQUEEZED AND DISTRESSED** the sons of Israel with a solid grip for twenty years.

DEBORAH (BEE) THE PROPHETESS JUDGE IS USED OF GOD TO INSPIRE BARAK AND PROMOTE THE DEFEAT OF CANAAN 4-9

But Deborah a lady prophetess, wife of Laphidoth [*“torches”*] was “Judge” of Israel at that time. *Jabin had the infrastructure to firm up his rule and halt Israel’s development. He had industrial might and he was producing idols for the land. His military stood at the ready and he himself had a name that suggests his parents prayed to the LORD for their son to become great. His name was “May the LORD consider...” He appears indeed to have become part of God’s plan to bring his people again to their knees. We see here how God uses people of many types.*

And she was living under the Tamarisk palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in Mount Ephraim [*The location was near Beeroth in Benjamin and on that mountain setting south of Joshua’s heritage by Timnath Serah where the boundary of Benjamin protruded into the very same mountainous area-so Deborah’s roots were close to the home and settlement of Joshua*] and the sons of Israel came up to her for defensive and executive judgment. So she sent with expedition and called for Barak son of Abinoam [*“Father of pleasantness”*] **from Kedesh Naphtali** and said to him “Surely [*al h* “has not?”] the LORD God of Israel has commanded you “Draw toward [*Jvm* “to take” or “acquire” the hill] the hill of Tabor and take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and the sons of Zebulun?” *This question of Deborah’s*

submitted something of a prophecy to Barak and delivered to him the divine charge of centring himself in the midst of the Canaanite plain and thus challenging the central power base of Jabin. “So I will draw Sisera the prince of the army of Jabin and his chariots and turbulent hordes to you at the river Kishon and I will deliver him into your hand” And Barak said to her “If you will go up with me I will go up but if you will not go with me I will not go!” And she said “I will certainly go up with you in extremity but it will not be for your perpetual glory and honour because of the way you go up for the LORD will deliver Sisera into the hand of a woman”. But Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kadesh.

BARAK’S CALL TO THE MEN OF NAPHTALI (WRESTLING) AND ZEBULUN (RESIDING STILL) SUCCEEDS 10-17

The initial diffidence of Barak is not to be taken for weakness. The task was formidable. But Deborah had the faith that lit up this great man’s fuse and inspired the zeal of his faith. His capability to gather such a force showed his real leadership capacity. Napoleon characterised leadership as the capacity to get others to follow you. Barak also shines in his “follow up” - he was “faint yet pursuing” and finished the task well. He was not bothered about reputation - and gave the credit to Deborah that she rightly deserved. His name means “lightning” and his battle (of which we are told more in the subsequent chapter) succeeded.

And Barak called for the help of Zebulun and Naphtali and went up with 10,000 men marching at his feet and Deborah went up with him. But Heber the Kenite from the sons of Hobab father-in-law of Moses who had separated from the Kenites [*allied to Israel*] expanded his tent near the oak at Zaanim [*“removals” - a name probably deriving from Heber’s act*] which is Kedesh. And they explained to Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor. So Sisera called for the help of all his 900 chariots of iron and all the people that stood with him from Harosheth of the nations to the River Kishon [*This long valley stretched from the Sea to Harosheth and onwards to the source of the Kishon in the mountains south of Jezreel. Tabor lay north of the hill of Moreh overlooking the eastern sector of the Jezreel valley - the valley area was well populated and advanced in military prowess.*] So Deborah said to Barak **“Rise** for this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand for has the LORD not gone before your face so Barak ran down like Jordan in spate and ten thousand men after him. So **the LORD routed** Sisera and all his chariots and all his host at the edge of the sword in face to face combat with Barak **and Sisera got down from his chariot and made his escape on foot. But Barak chased after the chariot** and the army host to Harosheth of the nations and the whole host of Sisera fell before the face of the sword until there was not one man remaining. But Sisera fled to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite for there was a peace pact between Jabin King of Hazor and the House of Heber the Kenite. *We learn that Heber’s withdrawal from Israel was a sign of his compact with her enemies. Kedesh was 5 miles south east of Megiddo whereas his home was 10 miles north east. He could not safely run that far and sought sanctuary with an old ally. It appears that Jael (Jehovah is God) was of Jewish extraction and clearly wanted no part with Sisera.*

JAEL DISPOSES OF SISERA 18-21

And Jael went out to call Sisera and she said to him “come lodge my Lord, lodge with me, don’t be distressed with fear”. And he went aside into her tent and she hid him with a mattress [*JMS*] “Let me have a little drink of water please for I am thirsty.” So she opened a skin-bottle of milk and gave him drink and covered him up. And he said

to her “Stand at the opening of the tent and should it happen that a man comes and asks and says “Is there a man here?” you will say “None.” But Jael the wife of Heber took the pointed tent nail and lifted up the hammer [*tbqm*-the word from which we get “Maccabees”] in her hand and came to him with muffled tread and drove the nail into his temples and penetrated into the earth when he was sleeping deeply and fatigued from running fast [*p[y]*] and he died. *It was “iron” by which the Canaanite regime maintained its ascendancy which ironically despatched its supreme monarch.*

BARAK WAS STILL PURSUING 22-24

And behold Barak was running after Sisera and Jael went out to call him and said to him “Come and I will show you the man you are looking for” And he came to her and behold Sisera fallen dead and the nail in his temples. So God brought low [literally “Canaaned”] that day Jabin king of Canaan before the sons of Israel. And the hand and power of the sons of Israel went onward and onward and was strong and unyielding against Jabin King of Canaan until they had cut off Jabin as King of Canaan. *With the overthrow of these 900 chariots and clearly their capture in large part together with the death of Jabin the power of the Canaanite was for ever diminishing and the centre of Canaanite worship and craft with it. The secret of this great victory was the utter defeat of Jabin’s host-and Barak would have caught Sisera had he attempted the mileage that he faced to arrive at Harosheth. In the earlier battle and pursuit Jabin himself must have fallen. In this great battle of the Megiddo plain vastly superior forces and chariots were utterly destroyed. This battle is a foreshadowing of the latter day battle of Armageddon whose outcome will be of a similar nature.(cf Ezekiel 38-39)Incidentally Barak did not stop at Kedesh-he went on to Harosheth. His determination to end the power of the Canaanite was now absolute and his faith in God puts him in the annals of NT scripture alongside Gideon and Samson and David and Samuel. Hebrews 11.32*

CHAPTER 5

This song is set out in sections of short rhythmic statements where often batches of statements run in a 4, 3, 2 or suchlike series. A triple emphasis with added detail can be seen for instance in v.27. The poetry depends often on verbal repetition as in verse 30 where the word “prey” is repeated. Verse 26 is rendered dramatic by the repetitive use of h. The poem still sounds good in Hebrew

THE SONG OF DEBORAH

Then Deborah and Barak sang a celebratory song in that day that said:-
 “Bless the LORD for leading the leaders in Israel... [*The Hebrew verb [rp is as in the term “Pharaoh” a word for “leader” and also a word for “free rein”. It is as if God gave these judges “free rein” whilst guiding them gently all the while. The LXX (Greek Septuagint version of the O.T.) has it “An apocalypse was opened up to Israel’s eyes-the Hebrew could read in concert “for the revealing of revelations”. This is very apt because the whole episode began with the prophetic word to Deborah-great events depend on the oracles of God.]*
 ...through the people having been willing The term “nadab”(willing) tells us that the people were spontaneous and offered themselves as volunteers spontaneously. When God’s people are responsive to His will great things may be looked for even today.

(A) THE SEPARATION OF SPIRITUAL MEN WHO HAZARD ALL 1-4A

Hear O kings: sharpen your attention O august princes.

(1) I, yes I will sing to the LORD. *We get the impression that Barak may not have been accomplished but he was thrilled and desired God to have the praise.*

(2) I will sing with music and dance to Yahweh the God of Israel

(3) O LORD it is like Your going out from or **separating from Seir**:

(4) It is as your slow step motion from the field of Edom.

(B) THE STORM THAT TIPPED THE BALANCE OF BATTLE IN FAVOUR OF BARAK 4B-5

(5) The earth quaked [*v[r]*], also the heavens dropped rain like prophetic myrrh. [*pfñ*] *The song is telling us that the rain that fell in large droplets spelt nemesis for chariot warfare. 900 iron chariots stuck in the field with prancing horse would totally discomfit an army.*

(6) The clouds also dropped water like myrrh. *Myrrh is used in burial. The rain was the signal of the “burial” of those chariot wheels. Many bodies were also buried on that battlefield. When Barak attacked he is said to have gone down from Tabor like the Jordan. It would seem that water flowed with him and that the valley was soon a quagmire for heavy armour.*

(7) The mountains “flowed” before the LORD: This Sinai at the presence of the LORD God of Israel. *The singers feel they are standing again before the terrible awesome God of the nation. They saw Him break out upon His enemies. This Tabor and the plain around it was **the new Sinai**.*

(C) THE DETERIORATION OF ROADS AND VILLAGES - FAITH AND FIGHTING POWER 6-9

(8) In the days of Shamgar son of Anath-in the days of Jael the chariot paths came to an end or were unused or unusable.

(9) Those that travelled the raised by-ways went by bent diversions.

(10) Scattered un-walled villages [*zrp*] ceased or disappeared – they were given up – *let go to ruin* in Israel until I Deborah arose... *No-one did anything about the decline: the road failure, the village decline-until Deborah began to take action to restore Jewish settlements...until I arose a mothering Israel.*

(11) They were choosing new gods; from that time war was at their gates.

(12) Suppose (or) it is a question if there was not a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel.

(13) My heart went out to the commanders of Israel.

(D) VOLUNTEERS WHO GIVE ALL DIVIDE THE SPOIL AMONG THE POOR AND NEW LEADERSHIP CAME ABOUT 10-15

(14) O men that volunteered among the people, let us bless the LORD.

(15) You who ride on white asses; you who sit on the judges bench; you **who travel upon the way** –meditate spiritually, think purposefully [*jjv*]

(16) Think since or on account of the division of the spoil between the places where they draw water. *The judges had a new problem after this battle. There was so much spoil-it was being divided up at every parish pump, at every village well. What provision-what a change of fortune!*

(17) There they continually celebrate [*hnt*] the righteous acts of the LORD... *The word hnt also means “keep distributing gifts”. Thus the local villages which were previously forsaken had a bonanza of benefits and a social change immediately*

transformed the whole rural community of Israel. Leaders were to take note...the righteous acts of His scattered villages (or) of his warriors. There are again two not mutually exclusive renderings possible. The leaders are asked to meditate on the kind distribution of wealth among the poor rural villagers which was brought home as trophy by the returning warriors.

(18) Then, or from that time, the people of the LORD were running down to the gates. *The judges had a new task - to oversee the giving away of chariots and armour and garments and so very much that came into the treasury of Israel from this wholesale upset of the Canaanite thralldom. Israel was in celebratory mood.*

(19) Wake up wake up O Deborah; wake up wake up I must keep setting in order a prophetic oracle in song.

(20) Rise up, O Barak, and take captive your captive people O son of Abinoam! *Deborah's first call is upon the great military leader to take the lead in celebration and bring his armies and followers closer to God in praise. She sees the sweetness that could be born of such spiritual leadership.*

(21) Then he had to let **collapse or fall down the remnant of the glorious nobles** of the people. The LORD had to come down to me because of the nobles. *Deborah is telling us that the leaders did not lead. Things were chaotic. Roads were impassable; highways like bent sticks; villages in decline, people poor. Someone had to do something.*

(E) TRIBES THAT CAME TO THE RESCUE 14-16A

(22) (i) From Ephraim came their root or source against Amalek. Burney has it "From Ephraim they spread out into the vale"

(ii) After you Benjamin was among your people

(iii) From Machir of Manasseh the legislators came down

(iv) From Zebulun early arrivals with the pen of the writer or sceptre of the writer. The war poetry and celebratory hymns might have been written by Israel's laureates, but these men of the pen became men of the sword first.

(v) And the princes of Issachar were alongside Deborah. In the same way Issachar was with Barak

(23) He (Barak) was sent simply on foot into the valley (of Megiddo)

(E) TRIBES THAT STOOD ALOOF – THOUGH REUBEN SEARCHED HIS HEART 16B-19

(24) In the half or divisions of Reuben there were **great imaginations** (or) *forebodings* of heart. Why did you rest among the cattle folds of Gilead? Was it to listen to the piping for the flocks? *While Reuben opted out he prioritised tending cattle and heard the shepherds piping to the sheep but failed the Shepherd who was calling for those who would defend the flock. In the divisions or streams of Reuben's Gilead there were great heart searchings.* Gilead [the hard one] lay down to rest over Jordan.

(24) But why was Dan a stranger of ships? *Why did Dan stand off and sail on the Mediterranean when his fellow countrymen were fighting for their lives and wives and volunteering their lives in war at Megiddo?*

(25) Asher abode along the *pleasant* coast of the sea and lay resting on the sea havens.

(26) Zabulun was a people that exposed their souls to death.

(27) And Naphtali exposed their lives on the high places of the field.

(28) The kings came –they fought. At that time the kings of Canaan fought in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo.

(29) They captured no spoil of silver

(30) From heaven they fought.

(F) HEAVEN AND EARTH ALLIED AGAINST SISERA 20-21

(31) The stars from their prepared elevation fought against Sisera.

(32) The river Kishon caught and washed them away - the river of the ancients or from the beginning [of time] *The Kishon rises North of Samaria and drains into the sea east of Mount Carmel; it is known as the "waters of Megiddo". Megiddo itself according to Albright had been laid in ruins before this time - his dating is circa 1125B.C. Morrish puts the conquest at 1451; Garstang dated the burning of Hazor and fall of Jericho at 1400B.C. Jewish sources Tsemach David [Judge 1454-47] and Seder Olam [Judge 1455-1427] put the death of Joshua respectively at 1447 or 1427 B.C. The Holman Bible Dictionary comes down in favour of 1250B.C. but recognises the date two centuries earlier is still in vogue. T.C. Mitchell writing in the New Bible Dictionary tells us that the people who resettled Megiddo after its destruction under Joshua "do not seem to have been Israelite". I am fairly confident that the findings of E.W. Maunder of the Greenwich Observatory that the sun was at midday and the moon on the horizon (Aijalon) on 21 July 1400B.C. (Joshua 10.12) is our best guide to date and favours the earlier dates. Clive Anderson puts the conquest at 1400-1390 B.C. The Judges between them judged for 299 years according to scripture until the end of Samson's life.*

O my soul you were travelling in prevailing strength or treading down enemies as you were made strong [zz[]]

At that time the hooves of the horses were beaten to bits [mlh] from the circular fast stamping of their mighties. *The charioteers or "mighties" were forcing the horses to try to pull the chariots out by twisting them in circles and demanding torque at different angles. This made them very vulnerable to attack by Barak's expeditionary troops.*

THE VILLAGE THAT FAILED TO WRESTLE IN WAR 23

Curse Meroz says the angel or messenger of the LORD. *Meroz was a town about 7 miles south of Kadesh in Naphtali - the former on the south west of Lake Merom-the latter on the scarp to the North West of the lake. Curse in execration her inhabitants for they did not come to the help of the LORD... It is notable that God required the tribe of Naphtali to "wrestle" with evil but they reneged...to help the LORD against the mighty ones. Even a little town could have made all the difference in battle. There is no excuse for some of the people of God to take ease amid the spiritual warfare of our time any more than in those days Meroz could shirk responsibility in war.*

THE BLESSING OF Jael 24-27

Blessed from among women is Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite; blessed among women in the tent. **He (Sisera) asked water; she gave him milk. She caused to come near to him a special lordly bowl of buttermilk.** ("Water he asked; milk she gave; buttermilk she brought nigh"-beautiful poetry) She stretched out her hand for the nail and her right hand to the labourer's hammer and she hammered Sisera hacking off his head. [hqj] and she divided in half and glided through [plj] his temples. [tqr] Between her feet he was on his knees, he fell dead, he lay down. Between her legs he got on his knees, he fell down dead. *The last effort of Sisera to stand up failed-a scary involuntary action-yet Jael proceeded to ensure his death. In the place where he was on his knees there he fell down violently destroyed. [ddv]*

SISERA'S MOTHER'S EXPECTATION DASHED 28-30

The mother of Sisera is at *the shutting* of the latticed window. "Why this disgraceful *delay* of his chariot arrival? Why are the pounding sounds of his chariots behind time? Her wise noble ladies answered her *with the same question!* Indeed she repeated her own words to herself. Perhaps they have not arrived yet. They have been dividing the spoil - a tender maiden, two maidens per head for a warrior, the spoil of purple dyed garments for Sisera. There will be spoil of woven embroidery of varied colours. There will be spoil of coloured garments worked on both sides for the necks.

FINAL CURSE AND BLESSING 31

So may all the enemies of the LORD perish. May those who love Him be as the sun rising in his warrior strength."

So the land was quiet for forty years.

CHAPTER 6

FOURTH APOSTASY- THE REGULAR DEVASTATION MIDIAN INFLICTED 1-6

Israel I seen "contending" with the LORD as a strife breaks out between the Ephraimites and Gideon over idolatrous practice. This contention had been going on for years as Israel drew away from the LORD and the LORD gave them into the hands of a nation whose name means "contention" or "strife".

But the sons of Israel did evil in full view of the LORD and the LORD gave them into the hand of Midian for 7 years. So the power of Midian strengthened against Israel and secretly the sons of Israel made them cave hideouts that were in the mountains and dug-out caverns and strong places or forts. And it was so when Israel had sown seed Midian came up and Amalek and the sons of the east also came up against them.

And they pitched camp against them and **DESTROYED THE INCREASE OF THE EARTH** as far as Gaza and they did not leave remainder from what was there throughout Israel-neither sheep or ox or ass. For they came up with their possessions and their tents; they came as the grasshopper in a huge horde; they and their camels were without number and they came into the country to destroy it. But Israel was terribly reduced before Midian and they cried out for help to the LORD. *This caravan horde appears not to have made war, but simply practiced rapine and ruin and carried off food and livestock.*

THE UNNAMED PROPHETS BRING ENCOURAGEMENT 7-10

And it happened when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD **above** because of Midian that **the LORD sent a prophetic man** to the sons of Israel and he said "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from the land of Egypt and I caused you to spring up out of the house of slavery. I also held off from you from all the power of the Egyptians and from all who squeezed you and I drove them out [*vrg*] before you and gave you their land". And I told you "I am the LORD your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites in the land where you dwell; but you did not obey my voice." *It is of interest that God first sent a prophet, but then the LORD himself came to Gideon. God did not consider it enough to give the people an early word of hope. He set Yeshua. Yeshua commissioned Gideon who acted obediently.*

THE COMMISSION OF GIDEON 11-14

But the Angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak which is at Ophrah, that belongs to Joash the father of my help, and Gideon his son was beating out grains of wheat in the winepress to hide from the presence of Midian. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him...

FIRST WORD...and said to him “The LORD is with you **O warrior of the military valour**”. *The nature of this greeting was prophetic. God was casting Gideon in the role he would soon fill out precisely.* But Gideon said to Him “With me My Lord and if the LORD is with us why is all this reached us or befallen us and where are all His miracles which our fathers reckoned by number to us? They are saying “Did the LORD not bring us up out of Egypt and now the LORD has left us to ourselves and given us over into the palm of the Midianite?” But the LORD **turned His face to him** and said-

SECOND WORD- “Go in this strength of yours and cause Israel to be saved from the palm of the Midianite; **have I not given you the commission?** *Gideon had the high privilege of seeing the LORD face to face. This absolutely clear case of Yeshua in the O.T. is further evidence that our LORD in accordance with John 3.13 and the teaching of Irenaeus and the early church frequently visited upon the earth in the O.T. period. Yeshua made emphatic that His very first word was not just a greeting but a commission. The direct gaze of the LORD was a most wonderful experience for Gideon. He saw reality and determination and assurance in the face of Yeshua.*

THE PROMISE THAT WITH GOD HE COULD EVEN GO ALONE 15-16

But he (Gideon) said to Him “By me My LORD? With what shall I save Israel? Behold my division of the family is small in Manasseh and I am the youngest or most despised in the house of my father”.

THIRD WORD But the LORD said to him “**Because I will be with you, you can cause Midian to be smitten as a single man!**” *This is a most remarkable reply. The entire Midianite host is likened to one single adversary and because of the LORD’S support he need not concern himself about numbers or the huge problems he foresaw. Later he was to narrow his fighting force to 300 - Gideon gains the faith to believe it is not numbers that matter. This is the crux of his leadership.*

GIDEON WANTS TO KNOW THE MESSENGER IS THE LORD 17-21

But he said to him “Please if I have found grace in your sight create a sign for me that it is You Shaddai [v] that is talking to me. Please do not go or depart from this place until I come to You and cause my meat offering to be brought and cause it to rest before your face.”

FOURTH WORD And he said “I will settle till you return” So Gideon went and sacrificed a kid of the goats and made an Ephah [*a considerable sacrifice-22 litres of flour*] of ground flour into unleavened cakes and the flesh he put in a basket [*l s*] and the broth [*qrm*] he put in a pottery jar [*rwrp*] and he brought them to Him under the oak tree and presented an approach sacrifice.[*vgn*] And the Angel of God said to him “Take the flesh and unleavened cakes and place it upon this **high rock** [*l s*] and pour out the broth” and he did this. And the Angel of the LORD stretched out the extremity of the support staff that was in His hand **and laboured to touch** the flesh and unleavened cakes and fire went up from the sharp rock and ate up the flesh and the unleavened cakes. But the Angel of the LORD was gone from his sight. *The sacrifice was prepared by one who was not a priest but offered by Yeshua who has an eternal*

priesthood. The “labour and pain” that is implicit in the term [*gy*] is most significant. The staff we might associate with the N.T. spear which showed the sacrifice of Christ was complete. It is also the sign of the Shepherd of Israel.

THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD IS OFTEN KNOWN BUT UNSEEN 22-24

And Gideon saw by prophetic insight that He was the Angel of the LORD and Gideon said, “Ah LORD YAHWEH on account of this, I have thus seen the Angel of the LORD face-to-face.” *Gideon means “I am ruined” “I shall die”. To Moses God had said “No man shall see my face and live.” Gideon was in an even greater predicament than his forefather Jacob. Jacob wrestled with the Angel before dawn - Gideon saw Him full face.*

FIFTH WORD But the LORD said to him “Shalom to you; do not fear; you will not die.” *This too is remarkable. The LORD was conditioning Gideon to talk to Him though unseen. He still spoke as immediately present. This underscores the view of the early church that God’s Angel accompanied His people right through O.T. time.* So Gideon built an altar there and called it “Jehovah Shalom”. To this day it is testifying in Ophrah of the Father’s help.

GIDEON CASTS DOWN THE ALTAR OF BAAL 25-29

SIXTH WORD And it came to pass in that night the LORD also said to him “Take **the young bull** of the oxen that is your father’s and the second bull. **The seven year old bull and break down the altar of Baal** which belongs to your father and cut down the Asherah *pole* that is over it.” Also build an altar to the LORD your God **on the top of this prevailing place in or through an order of battle** [*Jr*] and take the second bull and offer it up as a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you have cut down.

Then Gideon took ten men of his servants and did in line with what the LORD had spoken to him. But it was so that he feared doing it during the day because of his father’s house and the strong men of the city he did it at night.

JOASH DEFENDS GIDEON 30-31

Thus when the men of the city rose early in the morning behold the altar of Baal was torn down and the Asherah above it was cut down and the second bull was offered as a burnt sacrifice on the altar that was built. And each man said to his neighbour “Who has done this deed? And the men of the city said to Joash – cause your son to come out and die because he has torn down the altar of Baal and because he has cut down the Asherah which is over it. But Joash said to all the men who stood against him “Will you take up the strife for Baal or will you rescue him? Whoever strives on his behalf let him die during the morning. If he is god let him take up his own quarrel because *someone* has cast down his altar. *There is no subject associated with the verb “thrown down” but it is safe to understand that Joash is aware of the truth. The Lord had opened the heart of the Father and his defence was perfect - full of sarcasm and evidently oozing disbelief in Baal on his own part besides.* So on that day he called him (Gideon) Jerubabaal declaring “Baal should plead his own cause because his altar is torn down”.

GIDEON CLOTHED WITH THE SPIRIT 33-35

Then all the Midian and Amalek and the sons of the east combined themselves as one and crossed over [*Jordan*] and pitched their tents in the valley of Jezreel. **AND THE**

RUACH OR SPIRIT OF THE LORD CLOTHED [*hvbl* the inner clothing of “fullness” carried the power and authority that set this man apart for God’s purpose in his day. He might get a sword anywhere-but this enabling could come only from the LORD] Gideon and he blew with the trumpet and Abiezer called one another to follow him. And he sent messengers through the entirety of Manasseh and they were calling from among themselves to follow him and he sent messengers into Asher and Zebulun and Naphtali and they came up to meet him. *Gideon was swift to act and he cast his net widely for troops. He desired widespread involvement even though he had understood the omnipotence of the LORD. The “clothing” changed him much as it did the apostles and he turned outwards to the wider constituency of his people.*

GIDEON’S FLEECE TEST 36-40

Then Gideon said to God “If you will save Israel **AS A YESHUA OR JOSHUA-SAVIOUR** by my hand in accordance with Your oracle behold I will let a shorn fleece of wool remain on the threshing floor –if there will be dew on the fleece only and on all the earth or land it is dry I will know personally that You will save Israel by my hand according to your oracle.” And it was exactly so. So he rose early next day and pressed the fleece and found or obtained one full dish of water from the fleece. But Gideon said to God “Do not be hot with anger against me and I will take the matter only one final step. I will urge *You* please for only one more step; on the fleece let it be dry-on the fleece only and upon all the ground let there be dew.” And God did thus on that night. So it was dry on the fleece only and upon the earth there was dew. *As a double assurance to Gideon the LORD allowed these miracles to bolster faith so that a man emerging from the era of “contention” in respect of who was the true God might become effective and totally convinced of his theology and faith as he led the nation out of infidelity.*

CHAPTER 7

So Jerubabbel or Gideon and all the people that were with him awoke early and set up camp at the well of Harod and the army of Midian were to their north from the Hill of Moreh and into the valley *between*.

SEVENTH WORD And the LORD said to Gideon “The people that are with you are so many so quite apart from my giving Midian into your hand Israel would have boasted against me saying “My own hand has saved me”. So now please call out in the hearing of the people saying “Who is afraid and terrified let such return and circle away from mount Gilead like the chirping sparrow.” And twenty two thousand of the people turned back and a remnant of ten thousand remained. *Gideon recognised that a whole flight was imminent - he must have known that fear was running high in the ranks.*

EIGHTH WORD But the LORD said to Gideon “The people are still large; cause them to go down to the water and I will refine [*prx* “test” to separate dross from pure soldiers] them for you there and all that I say shall not go with you shall not go. So the people went down to the water and the LORD said to Gideon “Everyone who laps water like a dog with his tongue you shall leave him on his own and each who bends on his knees to drink” - **but the number of those who lapped water with their hands to their mouths** were three hundred men and every remaining man of the people bent on his knees to drink water.

NINTH WORD So the LORD said to Gideon “With the three hundred men that lapped I will give you a Joshua-like salvation and give Midian into your hand. *The vigilance*

of those who knelt but kept their eyes keen while they drew water in handfuls from the stream is self-evidently the mark of soldiers keeping watch. And all the people went each to his familiar place of stay. So the people ate food by hand and took their shophars and he sent every man of Israel smartly to his tent but with 300 men he was strong and the camp of Midian was there for him in the valley. The implication of this process is in the text. Now Gideon was “strong” not “weak”. Midian was like a “sitting duck”. This is how the LORD saw it and how it really was in hindsight.

GIDEON RECONNOITRES –THE HOST ASLEEP - A PRELUDE TO DEATH 9-14

TENTH WORD And it happened in the night that the LORD said to him “Arise, go down into the camp for I have given it into your hand. But if you are afraid to go down you and Phurah your young servant go down to the camp. So you will hear what they are saying and after that your hands will be strong and you will go down into the camp” he and Phurah his servant went down to the extremity of the five in a tent camp set-up. And **MIDIAN AND AMALEK AND ALL THE CHILDREN OF THE EAST HAD FALLEN** *asleep* in the valley as grasshoppers for greatness and their camels had no number, like a shoreline of sand by the sea for bulk. *The sacred writer simply says “the host had fallen in the valley” as if Gideon saw them as if already vanquished in battle. This visit enabled the future to cast its shadow before it. The LORD wanted Gideon to see the unprepared state of the host.*

THE DREAM THAT STRENGTHENED GIDEON 15-18

So Gideon came and behold a man was recounting his dream to his companion and he said “Behold I have dreamed a dream and you should see the husband of a rolling cake of barley bread turning over [*jph*] into the camp of Midian and it came to the tent and it struck it and it fell and it turned it over and the tent fell from above. His companion answered saying “This is nothing else except the sword of Gideon son of Joash the warrior of Israel. God who is strong has given Midian and the entire host into his hand”. *In Genesis 41 and Daniel 2 God gave Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar significant dreams. Doubtless Gideon knew that God was encouraging him and disquieting Midian in the night.*

And it happened as Gideon heard the recounting of the dream and the interpretation [*literally “breaking” of the bread dream*] that he worshipped and returned to the camp of Israel and said “Arise for the LORD has given the camp of Midian into your hands.” And he divided the 300 men into three leaderships and provided shophars in the hand of them all and empty water pitchers and lighted torches in the middle of the pitchers. And he said to them “You will watch according to what I do –thus you shall do.” When I blast with the trumpet and every man with me you shall also blast with the trumpets all around the camp and you shall bring to light in speech ‘for the LORD and for Gideon.’ *Gideon taught his army to use the trumpet the torch and the sword and in the process to count the pitcher as potsherds. Jesus and His apostles taught us to use the alarm of judgment, the light of the message and the sword of the Spirit counting not our lives dear to ourselves.*

THE BATTLE THAT NEVER WAS 19-22

So Gideon and the hundred men that were with him came to the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch [*12 mid-night*] only now or certainly they blew their trumpets and broke to pieces the pitchers that were in their hands. The three separately led sections blew with their trumpets and broke the pitchers for they held

the torches in their left hands and the shophars in their right for blowing and they proclaimed “The sword of the LORD and of Gideon.” *Maximum surprise was achieved and a huge tremor must have vibrated through the enemy camp. The sudden lighted areas encircling the camp wrought intense fear. The soldiers were not afraid to pronounce the great name of the LORD who sent them. He was the living God and His will was absolute. But they stood every man in his low position* around the camp and the whole army host ran with haste and shouted and fled. And the 300 blew their shophars and the Lord set the sword of each man against his companion amid the entire army camp and the armed host fled to Beth Shittah in Zererath [*“house of acacia” & “coolings”*] and to the border of Abel-Meholah to Tabbath [*“meadow of dancing” & “famous” - half way between Galilee and the Dead Sea*]

CUT OFF AT THE FORDS 23-25

And the men of Israel were called together from Naphtali and from Asher and from the whole of Manasseh and they went in pursuit after Midian. Gideon also sent messengers into all the mountain terrain of **Ephraim** saying “Come down to encounter Midian and to intercept them at the water-at Beth Barah and Jordan. So all the men of Ephraim massed and captured the water *crossing* at Beth Barah and Jordan and they captured the two princes of Midian Oreb [*“raven”*] and Zeeb [*“wolf”*] and they slaughtered Oreb on the rock Oreb and Zeeb at the grape treading winepress of Zeeb and they pursued Midian and caused the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to be brought to Gideon from the other side of Jordan. *Thus these two princes or leaders that annually confounded and frightened the flock of God- “the raven” and “the wolf” were killed and the security of God’s people was ensured. Gideon faced Satanic opposition to the welfare of God’s people and “stood still” and saw the salvation of God in this great encounter. This is the second time God used the very same principle to discomfit a host-cf Exodus 14.13 and then later in the days of Jehoshaphat when he fought against Moab and Ammon. Jehaziel recommended to him the self-same counsel - 2Chronicles 20.17 when he said “You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. In our encounter with Satan we too are to entrust all to Jesus who alone is sufficient for so great a conflict and has defeated our adversary at the cross.*

CHAPTER 8

EPHRAIM’S CONTENTIOUS MIND 1-3

And the men of Ephraim said to him (Gideon) “What is this thing that you have done to us? Why did you not call for us as well when you went to war with Midian?” So they contested the matter with him strongly. But he said to them “What have I done even yet that compares with what you have done? Is not the painful work of gleaning the grapes of Ephraim’s fruitfulness not better than the pruning of the vine of Abiezer? *Gideon is saying that his stand for the LORD in his own household is that for which he is known but the toppling of the two kings of Midian was the prize of Ephraim. However, had Gideon not obeyed the LORD the victory over Midian would never have happened, but Gideon gave credit to the soldiers who actually assaulted and struck the enemy above the significance of his own command. Into your hand God has given the princes of Midian Oreb and Zeeb. And what would I be able to do in comparison with this that you did? So their spirit of rivalry declined and relaxed towards him through this word on the affair.*

GIDEON SEEKS THE BIG PRIZE 4-5

But Gideon came to Jordan and he crossed over with the 300 men who accompanied him exhausted and weary yet still in pursuit. *The sacred text upholds the persistence of Gideon who might well have captured the princes had other fresh troops from Ephraim not preceded him. After all they ran 15 miles to Jordan after the midnight attack where they expended much strength blowing trumpets, nor had they any food but the little they took in their hand before midnight.* And he said to the well nourished men of Succoth “Please give the men who follow at my command some bread cakes for they are exhausted and I am chasing Zebah and Zalmunna the kings of Midian.” *This incident is a fitting sequel to the rival spirit of Ephraim. The last phase of this war declares the tenacity and thoroughness of Gideon whose 300 pursued the kings of Midian over the steep mountain passes of Gilead and into the eastern plain below - taking on and putting to flight an army of 15,000 men in the self-same night as that of the battle in Megiddo. Gideon is an eloquent example of the Christian who having entered the field of struggle continues to stand until the enemy is routed.*

SUCCOTH REFUSES FOOD 6-7

But the princes of Succoth said “Is the humbling of Zeba and Zalmunna now in your hands that we should give you bread for your army host? But Gideon said “As the LORD in just this way gives Zeba and Zalmunna into my hands I will also thresh your flesh with thorns of the wilderness and with briars. *This rather novel punishment for unfeeling men was one way of giving them a taste of how the flesh felt when cut by the sword and torn by briars and thorns through running in the night.*

PENUEL REFUSES FOOD 8-9

And he went up from there to Penuel and spoke to them in the way he did to Succoth and the men of Penuel answered him in the same manner that the men of Succoth replied to him. So he spoke to the well-nourished **men of Penuel** saying “When I return in peace I will tear down this watch-tower. *This ancient scene where God met Jacob had become the residence of faithlessness and uncaring people who were oblivious to the relationship of their forefather Israel to Yahweh. **We are supplied with a demonstration of how easily we forget the source of our blessing is Christ. Penuel is pivotal to Israel’s religion.** It is the place where Jacob “saw the face of God” in the Angel of the Lord. Seeking His face is still the key to spiritual compassion and brotherly kindness.*

THE RETREAT THAT TURNED INTO ROUT 10

But Zeba and Zalmunna were in Karkor and their army with them - something like fifteen thousand men that drew the sword. *Karkor is set in a mountainous plain over the top of the mountain range and to the east of Gilead. Gideon’s 300 had the scaling of these heights ahead of them.* That was from all the host of the sons of the east - one hundred and twenty thousand men who drew the sword had fallen. *It is just now that we come to a sense of the scale of Gideon’s defeat of Midian.*

THE KINGS TAKEN AND LESSONS GIVEN TO THE UNCARING 11-17

And Gideon went up along the route of those who lived in tents east of Nobah [*“barking”*] and Yogbehah. [*“high”*] and struck the armed host for the host was tranquil and secure. But Zeba and Zalmunna fled and he gave chase **AND CAPTURED BOTH KINGS OF MIDIAN ZEBAH AND ZALMUNNA** and terrified their entire army host. So Gideon the son of Joash returned from the battle before sunrise. And he

captured a youth of the well fed men of Succoth and asked him and he wrote down the princes of Succoth and the elders - seventy seven men in all. And he came to the men of Succoth and said “Behold Zeba and Zalmunna over whom you scornfully reproached me saying “Are the open hands of Zeba and Zalmunna now in your hand that we should give bread to your weary men?” So he took the elders of the city and the thorns and briars of the wilderness and made the fat men of Succoth know *what war scars are like. I take the liberty of drawing the unspoken comparison, but he may have simply sought to teach them to be more caring and supportive of those in need.* He also broke down the watch-tower of Penuel and slew the men of the city.

THE MEMORABLE WORDS OF DYING KINGS 18-21

Then he said to Zeba and Zalmunna “What were the men you slew at Tabor like?” And they said “Every one was like you!” “They had the look of the sons of a king.” And he said “They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As the LORD lives O that they had been alive, I would not have slain you!” *For a second time Gideon shows that compassion dwelt in his heart alongside utter righteous anger. He would have rewarded Succoth has they been kind and spared the kings had they shown mercy.* So he said to his firstborn-“Rise and slay them” but the young man did not draw his sword for he was afraid because he was still a young man. And Zeba and Zalmunna said “You rise and strike us through for as the commander or man of valour is his heroic warrior.*[wtrwbj vjak]*This principle of discipleship holds in military prowess and it answers in discipleship too; as the master so the scholar. A teacher can take the student as far as his abilities reach. And Gideon arose and slew Zeba and Zalmunna and captured the “little moon” ornaments that were on the necks of their camels.

THE SHORT-LIVED POPULARITY OF GIDEON 22-23

So the soldiers of Israel said to Gideon “You and also your sons and your grandsons rule over and teach us for you have caused us to be delivered from the power of Midian.” But Gideon said to them “I will not rule over and teach you and my sons shall not rule over and teach you but the LORD shall be your ruler-teacher *[/ vm]*

THE ORIGIN OF THE GOLDEN EPHOD - THE NEW NEHUSHTAN 24-27

But Gideon said “I would make a request from you that each soldier would give me the earring or nose ring of his booty” for their rings were golden on account of their being Ishmaelite *traders*. So they said “We will give them and they spread an outer garment and each soldier cast the gold rings of their prey in there. And it transpired that the Shekel weight of the gold rings he asked for was 1700 shekels apart little moons *[rhs]* and the pendants *[pfn]* and the purple robes that were on the kings of Midian and the neck-chains that were on their camel necks. **AND GIDEON MADE THEM INTO AN EPHOD and placed it in his city** and all Israel went as whores *to see* it there and it was a fowler’s snare to Gideon and to his house. *As in 2 Kings 18.4 this golden apron became a total embarrassment to the Jewish faith and drew men from god to idolatry. It was never so intended; indeed it spoke of the divine guidance and of the high priesthood but it was emblem of nothing and had no divine warrant, just a useless war spoil holding out the memory of the moon goddess of the Ismaelites.*

THE END OF MIDIANITE POWER 28

But Midian was brought low before the faces of the sons of Israel and they did not add to raise their heads any more and the country was quiet and undisturbed for forty years in Gideon's days.

GIDEON BUILDS HIS OWN HOME 29-31

So Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and lived in his own house. *Right until the onset of war Gideon had lived with his father. He now established his own home and there his wives and family lived and the young son who went to war with him.* And Gideon had 70 sons who came of his own loins for he had many wives. And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son and the name he set on him was Abimelech. [*“my father is king”*] And Gideon the son of Joash died in grey-haired in good old age and he was buried in the tomb of his father in Ophrah of Abi Ezeri [*“my father of my help”*]-for that decisive brave and fatherly act of Joash [*“the LORD has given”*] spared his son and went for the renewal of Israel. *Great man that he became he owed something quite precious to his father as so many do, and it is but little known or recognised. If I might elaborate by testimony “My father, (blessed be his memory) Bob Coffey made me his constant companion, he brought me under the joyful sound of the gospel and through a friend of my father I was first given a Greek Dictionary from which time my interest in biblical studies commenced.”*

FIFTH APOSTASY 32-35

And it came to pass even as Gideon died that the sons of Israel went as whores after the Baals and made Baal of the covenant their strong god and the sons of Israel did not remember the LORD their God who caused them to be delivered from their encircling enemies. And they did no kindness to the house of Jerubbaal-Gideon for all the goodness which he did for Israel. *Once they would have crowned him but now they thoroughly forget him. Such is the perilous and evanescent acclaim of leaders.*

CHAPTER 9

ABIMELECH'S EVIL SCHEME TO OBTAIN RULE 1-6

And Abimelech son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem to the brothers of his mother and spoke on a matter to them and with all the family of the house of the father of his mother saying “Talk this matter over Please in the audience of all the family men of Shechem what is best for you - that the seventy men of all the sons of Jerubbaal rule over you or that one man alone rule over you - and remember that I am your flesh and bone. So the brothers of his mother raised all these matters in the audience of all the family men of Shechem and the inclination of their hearts was to follow Abimelech for they said “He is our brother”. So they gave him seventy silver pieces from the religious house of Baal Berith [*“covenant of Baal”*] and with them Abimelech took into his pay men of empty rash vainglorious sort - the type that boils over easily [*zj p*] and they went after him. So he came to the house of his father in Ophrah and slaughtered seventy men of the sons of Israel (his brothers) over one stone but Jotham was left-the smallest son of Jerubbaal, because he hid himself. And all the family men of Shechem massed together and all the house of Millo [*“rampart”*] and they went and declared Abimelech to be king by the oak of the garrison or idol which is in Shechem. *The confirmation of Abimelech's rule by wanton fellows and a self-serving Shechem family at a fortress established upon idolatry is a far cry from the unassuming but effective leadership godly of Gideon. It is obvious how easily*

subordinates can rise when a new generation fails to sense the need for vigilance and does not understand spiritual warfare.

THE PARABLE OF JOTHAM 7-21

So they explained it to Jotham and he went and stood on the top of the hill of Gerazim and lifted up his voice and proclaimed and this is what he said to them “Listen to me you family men of Shechem that God may listen to you.

The trees were determined to go to set a king over them and they said to **the Olive Tree** ‘You reign over us’. But it said to them ‘Should I decline in my fertility [*or “anointing”*] that is in me by which they glorify God and honour men and go to agitate to and fro or wander over the trees? So the trees spoke to **the fig** ‘You come and be king over us’. But the fig said to the trees ‘Should I leave my delicious taste and fruit production to move to and fro over the trees? Then the trees said to **the vine** ‘You come and be king over us’. But the vine said to them ‘Should I leave my new wine that causes God and man to be radiantly cheerful and go to wave over the trees?’”

Then all the trees together said to **the bramble** or *the blackthorn* [*cf Psalm 58.9*] ‘Come and be our king’ Then the bramble said to the trees ‘If or when in truth and good faith you anoint me [literally “Messiah” me] as king over you come and take sure refuge [*hsj*] in my shadow and if there is nothing in it or it is false let fire arise from the establishment thorn or bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon. *The idea of the bramble climbing over fallen trees and kindling in the undergrowth tends to affirm its power which derives from its “ establishment” through firm rooting.*

Now that you have in truth and complete awareness finally made Abimelech king and when have you acted well with Jerubbaal and his house and done him recompense for his hands. This my father fought for you and threw his life and soul into jeopardy as leader and delivered you from Midian. But now you have revolted against the house of my father today and slaughtered his sons-seventy men in all-on the self-same stone and you have made Abimelech the son of his maid servant [*read “concubine”*] king over the Baal family men of Shechem because he is your brother. If in truth and by putting a finish *to him* you have done with Jerubbaal and his house this day be glad in Abimelech and let him be glad over you. But if not let fire arise from Abimelech and swallow up the Baals or Baalite leaders of Shechem and the house of Millo and Abimelech himself. But Jotham plucked up root and fled as a fugitive and went to Beerah and lived there for fear of his brother Abimelech.

RETRIBUTION FOR ABIMELECH 22-29

Abimelech was prince over Israel for three years. But God sent a spirit of evil or calamity between Abimelech and the Baal leaders of Shechem and the Baal leaders worked covert violence [*dgb*] against Abimelech. That the evil violence [*smj*] “*hamas*”] done to the seventy sons of Israel and their blood should be placed upon Abimelech their brother who slaughtered them and upon the Baalite leaders of Shechem who strengthened his hand to slay his brothers. So the Baalite leaders of Shechem placed men in ambush on the tops of the mountains and they robbed and stripped all that passed them on that route so it was made known to Abimelech. But Gaal son of Ebed [*“a slave”*] and his brothers crossed over to Shechem and the Baalite men of Shechem put their trust in him. And they went out into the field and gathered vintage and trod the winepress and created a song festival and came into the house of their gods and ate and drank and swore an oath against Abimelech. And Gaal the son of Ebed said “Who is Abimelech and who is Shechem that we should be his servants? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal and Zebul [*“the fly”*] his overseer? Why

should we serve the well-fed men of Hamor father of Shechem – do you know any reason why we should keep serving him? O that this people were given into my hand. I would take Abimelech prisoner. And he said concerning Abimelech – **‘build your army and come out to battle!’** *This challenge from the slave was to trigger the downfall of Abimelech*

ZEBUL SUGGESTS A MANOEUVRE TO ABIMELECH 30-33

But when Zebul the city governor heard the matter Gaal declared his anger was aroused and he sent messengers to Abimelech craftily saying “Behold Gaal son of Ebed [*a slave*] and his brothers have come to Shechem and are shutting up the city against you so now arise at night and those with you and lie in wait in the field. And it shall be early in the morning as the sun rises get up and spread troops around against the city and behold him and the people with him will go out to you and you can do with them as your hand finds to do.

THE FLIGHT OF GAAL & RECONQUEST OF SHECHEM 34-40

So Abimelech arose and the people with him and set ambushes against Shechem under four commands. And Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood at the open gate of the city and Abimelech arose and the people with him from the ambushes. And Gaal saw the people and said to Zebul “Behold the people coming down from the top of the mountains - and he said “You are seeing mountain shadow that looks like men!” And Gaal spoke again adding further “Behold people are coming down from alongside the high ground and another combat group from the direction of the oak of Maonenim”. But Zebul said to him “Come on then where is your mouth when you said “Where is Abimelech that we should make ourselves his slaves?” Is not this the people that you ridiculed? Now go out if you will and fight with him. But Gaal arose in front of the Baalite leaders of Shechem and went to fight Abimelech. But Abimelech chased him before his face and many fell and were wounded right to the open gate. So Abimelech lived in Arumah and Zebul dispossessed Gaal and his brothers from their short rest in Shechem. And it happened the following day that the people went out and made Abimelech aware so he took the people and divided them into three commands and laid ambushes in the cultivated field and watched and behold the people came out of the city and he rose against them and smote them and Abimelech and his command with him invaded and stood at the open gate of the city and the other two commands spread out against the people in the cultivated field and slew them. So Abimelech fought against the city that entire day and captured the city and slaughtered all the people within and tore down the city and sowed salt upon it. *This action could not have been so thorough as to prevent the ground being re-cultivated-but it spelt the end to this period of settlement - after which presumably the new city of Samaria emerged.*

A LAST STAND AT THE TOWER OF SHECHEM 46-49

And all the Baal-men of the tower of Shechem heard and they went to the “watch-tower” [*jrx*] of the temple of El Berith. And Abimelech was given information that all the Baal-leadership [*a term of both religious and social significance-these would possibly be wealthy merchants*] had gathered at the watch-tower [*ldgm*] of Shechem. So Abimelech went up Mount Salmon, he and all the people with him, and he took an axe in his hand and cut down a bough of the trees and lifted it upon his shoulder and said to the people with him “What you have watched me doing do the same and hurry. So all the people cut-each man cut a bough and they went after Abimelech and they

kindled them with fire against the tower so all the well fed soldiers also died, about 1000 men and women also.

ABIMELECH DIES AT THEBEZ ACCORDING TO JOTHAM'S PARABLE 50-57

Then Abimelech went to Thebez [*ten miles north east of Shechem in the territory of Manasseh*] and massed his troops around Thebez and captured it. But there was a strong watchtower in the centre of the city. So all the men and their wives fled there and the entire Baal leadership of the city shut it up behind them and went up to the roof or altar of the tower. So Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it and approached close to the door [*vgn*] of the tower to burn it with fire. But a certain woman threw down a piece of an upper millstone on the head of Abimelech purposing to break his skull. But he called quickly to the youth that carried the armour he used and said to him "Draw your sword and kill me lest it is said about me that 'a woman slew him'". And His young servant stabbed him and he died. And when the soldiers of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead they went off each man to his own familiar place.

NEMESIS - LITTLE JOTHAM'S WORDS COME TRUE UNDER GOD 56-57

So God returned the evil of Abimelech which he did to his father by slaughtering his seventy brothers and God returned upon their heads all the evil of the well fed men of Shechem so there came upon them the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal. *This long period of Baalite whoredom of Israel continued*

CHAPTER 10

JUDGES TOLA AND JAIR 1-5

And after Abimelech **Tola** (*worm*) son Puah (*mouth*) son of Do-do a man of **Issachar** arose to save Israel with a Yeshua-salvation and he lived in Shamir ("*diamond*" or "*sharp point*") in mount Ephraim. So he judged Israel 23 years and died and was buried in Shamir. And following him **Jair** the **Gileadite** arose and judged Israel for 22 years. He had 30 sons who rode on 30 colts or full grown asses and they had 30 cities which are called the "villages of Jair" to this day; they are in the land of Gilead. *After the life-long leadership of Gideon and the divisive imposed 3 year rule of Abimelech a further 45 years passed without Israel having to face any major external threat. The decisive victories of Gideon brought peace to the land for well nigh a century. Good times meant that Jair's sons could build cities and travel widely. This felicitous time, however, was soon to come to an end.* So Jair died and was buried in Cadmon (*an "eastern" place*)

SIXTH APOSTACY - SIXFOLD IDOLATRY 6-9

And the children of Israel added to do further evil in full view of the LORD and they served Baalim and Ashtoreth and the gods of Aram and Sidon and Moab besides the gods of the sons of Ammon and the gods of the Philistine. *Israel adopted six forms of idolatry.* But Israel forsook the LORD and did not serve Him. So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the sons of Ammon. And during that year they struck and broke a trembling Israel [*x[r]*] and oppressed and fragmented [*xxr*] Israel- *separating* for 18 years all the sons of Israel that were on the other side of Jordan in the land of the Amorite that is Gilead. *Their first onslaught led to 18 years of oppression on the east of Jordan.* The children of Ammon even crossed over Jordan to war with Judah and Benjamin and the house

of Ephraim with the result that Israel was very anxious and distressed. *The central core of Israel's strength and even the stronghold of Gideon was fair prey for these successful Ammonite incursions. The unprecedented idolatry had landed them in deadly danger of national disintegration.*

THE LORD DEMURS ON HELPING THEM 10-14

So the sons of Israel cried to the LORD saying “We have sinned in our relationship to You both because we have forsaken our God and we have served the Baalim. But the LORD said to the sons of Israel “Is it not the case that from the Egyptians and from the Amorites and from the sons of Ammon and from the Philistines and Sidonians and Amalek and Maon in relation to their oppression against you that you cried to me and I saved you with a Yeshua-salvation from their power? But you forsook me and served other gods - for this true reason I should not add to afford you a Yeshua-salvation. *The LORD did not truly prejudice Himself against saving Israel this sixth time but he reminded them of grace despised. He insisted that He could well have refused their prayer, but being a God of all grace He rather preferred to solemnly warn them.* Go and cry for help to the gods you have chosen – they should save you at this time of your straits of pain [ררX “the tribulation or distress” of a prurient woman] *Israel is characterised in the A.V. as in an Old Testament strangle-hold of “tribulation.” When in the time of Jacob’s trouble in the near future when Israel is in the political end-game of the ages she will find the LORD ready to reach out in a glorious salvation for her heart will soften and she will look toward her Messiah.*

ISRAEL FACES THE REDOUBTABLE AMMONITE ENEMY 15-18

But the sons of Israel said to the LORD “We have sinned - You do to us according to all that seems good in your eyes but deliver us we plead with You this day.” So they caused the foreign gods to be removed from their midst and ***His soul was impatient and passionate and grieved over the travail of Israel.*** Then the sons of Ammon were called together and set up army camp at Gilead [*heap of witness*] and the sons of Israel ***added together*** and set up camp at Mizpeh. [*watch-tower*] And the princes of Gilead said each to his friend “Who is the warrior who is able to fight with the sons of Ammon? He shall be head over all that live in Gilead! *Notice in this section how zealous the LORD is for His people. Notice too how the voluntary growing numbers of Israel’s army reflect her new unity under God. Notice thirdly the proud challenge of Ammon-looking for a champion through whom the prize of rule over an area Israel had conquered and lost was retrievable.*

CHAPTER 11

JEPHTHAH BORN OF A HARLOT FLEES FROM HIS HOME 1-4

And Jephthah [*“May he set free”*] the Gileadite was a powerful warrior and he was the son of a foreign or loose woman and Gilead himself was progenitor of Jephthah. And Gilead’s wife produced sons for him and the sons of his wife grew into big fellows and dispossessed Jephthah and said to him “You have no inheritance in the house of our father for you are the son of a different woman”. So Jephthah bolted off as a fugitive from the confrontation with his brothers and dwelt in the land of Tob [*“goodness”*] *Hippos and Al Tabiya –in ancient Aramean country, just north of Gilead has been suggested as the modern equivalent.* And indigent evil men had been collected around Jephthah and they went out with him.

THE AMMONITE THREAT EMERGES - JEPHTHAH NEEDED 5-13

And it happened that the sons of Ammon beginning in those days made war with Israel. So it happened just when the sons of Ammon fought with Israel that the elders of Gilead went to take Jephthah back from the land of Tob and they said “Come and be our commander and we will fight against the sons of Ammon”. But Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead “Did you not hate me and disentitle me from the house of my Father so why come to me now just when you have an adversary?” But the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah “For that very reason we have come back to you so come with us and let us fight together against the sons of Ammon and you will be head over all who live in Gilead”. And Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead “If you bring me back with you to fight with the sons of Ammon and the LORD delivers them before me will I really be one of you and your leader?” Then the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah “The LORD listen to what passes between us when we do not act according to our words.” So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead and the people made him their leader and commander and Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD in Mizpeh.

We learn from this story that poor men who are ill-dealt with by those better placed are often endowed by God with gifts indispensable to the wealthy. In war the man in the street takes on vital significance. We also learn that people ill-spoken of may be very “God-conscious” and fair-minded and indeed bear no grudges. Jephthah was God’s freedom-fighter to secure Israel at this time. He made his undertakings like every couple who marry in the presence of God before the LORD. In Mizpeh the LORD was watching. His watch-care is ceaseless and curiously Jephthah was located just there in Mizpeh.

PUTTING ISSUES STRAIGHT - THE SECOND MESSAGE 14-28

And Jephthah added to send messengers to the king of the sons of Ammon saying “What business have you to come and do battle in my country?” *Immediately Jephthah acted as leader of his people in Gilead.* And the king of the sons of Ammon said to the messengers of Jephthah “because Israel took my land from the Arnon to the Jabbok when they came up out of Egypt so now you restore those lands by peaceful means. But Jephthah continued negotiation and sent messengers to the king of the sons of Ammon and he said to him “Thus says Japheth

(1) ‘Israel did not take the land of Moab and the land of the sons of Ammon for in coming up from Egypt Israel came through the desert and to the Red sea and went on to Kadesh.

(2) So Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom saying “please let us pass through your land” but the king of Edom wouldn’t hear of it and they sent also to the king of Moab but he was not so inclined and Israel lived at Kadesh.

(3) Then they went into the desert and circled round the land of Edom and the land of Moab and approached the land of Moab from the sunrise but pitched on the other side of the River Arnon and did not come into the border of land of Moab for the Arnon is the border of Moab.

(4) So Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, king of Heshbon saying to him “Please let Israel pass through your land to my place” but Sihon did not believe Israel would simply cross through his border so Sihon gathered all his people and took up position at Jahaz and fought Israel. But the LORD God of Israel gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel and Israel struck them victoriously so Israel came to possess all the land of the Amorites settling in that land. They also possessed all the borders of the Amorites from Arnon to Jabbok and from the desert to the Jordan. So

now the LORD God of Israel has dispossessed the Amorites in confrontation with His people Israel so how do you own it? Surely that which Chemosh your God gives you as a possession you will possess and all that the LORD our God has given before our face - that we have cause to possess.

(5) And now as to right are you better than Balak son of Zippor king of Moab? Did he develop a contest with Israel? Did he set out to fight with them while Israel lived in Heshbon and in her daughter towns and in Aroer and her daughter towns and in all the cities along the banks of the Arnon 300 years? Do you know why you did not deliver them during that period of time? So I have not done wrong against you but you have done evil against me to go to war with me. The LORD will be the judge today between the sons of Israel and the sons of Ammon. But the king of the sons of Ammon would not hear the words of Jephthah that he sent to him.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD GUIDED JEPHTHAH 29-31

Then **the Spirit [jwr] of the LORD** was upon Jephthah and he crossed Gilead and Manasseh and passed Mizpeh of Gilead and from Mizpeh of Gilead he crossed to the sons of Ammon. And Jephthah vowed a vow to the LORD and said “If you surely give the Sons of Ammon into my hand whoever comes out to meet me from the door of my house when I return in peace I will offer as a burnt offering.” *The LORD did not demand any such offering. Jephthah was anxious not to make a vow that would cost him nothing, but he acted for the jeopardy of his own family with incredible folly. Had the LORD asked such a sacrifice then this man might have stood alongside Abraham in the gallery of the faithful but his spiritual weakness sadly is plain for all to see.* So Jephthah passed over to the Sons of Ammon to engage them in battle and the LORD gave them into his hand. And He struck them successfully from Aroer until you come to Minith-striking 20 cities and onwards to the vineyards of Abel-with massive casualties. So the sons of Ammon were humbled before the Sons of Israel.

THE SAD AFTERMATH OF VICTORY 34-40

Then Jephthah came to Mizpeh to his house and behold his daughter was coming to meet him with timbrels and dancing. And she certainly was his one and only; other than she, he had neither son nor daughter belonging to him. And it happened when he saw her that he rend his cloak and said “Ah my daughter you have caused me to sink down absolutely to my knees and you are become my trouble [rk[“”my grief”] for I have delivered my spoken (vow) to the LORD and I cannot take it back. *Jephthah had come home in victory but the remainder of his life was deeply sad - only the festival of young ladies and the high principle it gave rise to among the women of Israel made it in any degree bearable.* But she said to him “Father, if you have opened your mouth to the LORD do to me in accordance with what has proceeded from your mouth after that which the LORD has done for you avenging your enemies the Sons of Ammon. But she said to her father “desert and leave me for two months and I will go and I will come down over the mountains and mourn my virginity - I and my friends. And he said “Go” and he sent her away for two months and she went along with her friends and wept over her virginity upon the mountains.

And it was so at the end of two months that she came back to her father and he did to her in line with the vow he had vowed – and she had no intimate relations with a man –and that became an ordinance throughout Israel from year to year the daughters of Israel went to celebrate over and over again for the daughter of Japheth the Gileadite four days in a year.

CHAPTER 12

EPHRAIM PICKS A QUARREL AND SUFFERS DEFEAT 1-4

And the men of Ephraim were called together and passed to the north and said to Jephthah “Why did you pass over to fight against the sons of Ammon and did not call us to go with you? We will set your house ablaze over you. But Jephthah said to them “I was a man in serious dispute both with my own people and the sons of Ammon *at the time* but when I called you, you did not deliver me from their hands. I saw that you were not going to be a deliverer so I placed my life in my hands and passed over against the sons of Ammon and the LORD gave them into my hand so why have you come up against me this day to fight with me? But Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead together and fought with Ephraim and the men of Gilead struck Ephraim because the Ephraimites said “You are escapees to Gilead in the midst of Ephraim and Manasseh.

THE SHIBBOLETH DISTINCTIVE 5-6

And Gilead captured the fords of Jordan that Ephraim had and it happened by *reverse* providence when the escapees of Ephraim said “let me pass over” the men of Gilead said to him “please say Shibboleth” and they said “Sibboleth” for he could not construct or form the word so they held him at the passages of Jordan and there fell at that time forty two thousand of Ephraim.

THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF JEPHTHAH IN GILEAD CITY 7

So Jephthah judged Israel **six** years and Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in the city of Gilead. *In all the disputes of Jephthah there is a sturdy righteousness of argument. He was a steadfast man and from the fugitive people that he re-introduced to the tribe of Gad after his expulsion. It may be that Elijah himself came from among these so-called “settlers”.*

RULE PASSES TO JUDAH AND IBZAN 8-10

So after him Ibzan [*“great labour”*] from Bethlehem judged Israel... *The baton of leadership was now handed over from Gad to Judah ...and he had thirty sons and thirty daughters and he sent outside the camp and brought thirty daughters for his sons from outside or the surrounding country and he judged Israel **seven** years. The action of Ibzan was to draw in new blood to his tribe and it is to be presumed that these women subscribed to the customs and laws of the people. So Ibzan died and was buried in Bethlehem. The name of Ibzan has been associated with “tin” but I believe it has closer links with *מִן* which means “flocks”. This man probably was from a great sheep-farming family in Bethlehem-Judah. He can be presumed to be like David whom the LORD took from following the flock to lead the people. He would be well versed in defending the sheep from the prowling bears and lions which were indigenous to the land.*

ELON THE MAN OF ZEBULUN WHO RULED 10 YEARS 11-13

And after him Elon a man of Zebulun judged Israel and he judged Israel **ten** years. And Elon the man of Zebulun died and was buried in Aijalon in the land of Zebulun. *This leader was buried on the North-Western frontier of Zebulun which borders Asher. His name means “little stag” and he was buried in a town by the same name.*

ABDON OF EPHRAIM RULED FOR EIGHT YEARS

After him Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirethonite judged Israel and he was buried in Pirathon. *We know little of Abdon save that he was named “servant” and his father was called “Hillel” or “praise” and like his predecessor Ibzan he had a big family connection.* He had forty sons and 30 grandsons that rode on seventy colts and he judged Israel **eight** years. But Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirethonite died and was buried in Pirethon in the land of Ephraim in the mountain of the Amalekites.

Thus for 31 years Israel had peace after the subjection of Ammon. The next judge is Samson and four chapters of scripture are devoted to him. He is mentioned in Hebrews 11 along with Jephthah. These men were great in faith though very different by background. Jephthah probably had to find his self-worth in the approval of his fellow-countrymen whereas Samson was naturally confident on account of his great strength.

CHAPTER 13

SEVENTH APOSTASY 1-7

But the sons of Israel did evil in full view of the LORD and the LORD gave them into the hand of the Philistines forty years. And it happened or **“THERE LIVED”**... [*hyh- this Hebrew verb has been investigated and its roots are “to fall out in such a way” or “to “become alive” or “dynamically happen.” Since in scripture nothing just occurs we understand that bible history as **His story** includes events God promotes or allows.] ...one man from **Zorah** from the family of the Danites by name Manoah and his wife was barren and bore no child. But the Angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her “Please note that now you are barren and you do not conceive but you will become pregnant and bear a son. How therefore please be watchful and do not drink wine or intoxicating drink and do not eat that which is unclean. For behold you will conceive and bear a son and no razor will come upon over his head for the youth shall be a Nazarite of the LORD his God from the womb and he shall deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines.” And the woman went and spoke to her husband saying “A man of God came to me and his appearance was as the sight of an Angel of God (very fearful) but I did not ask Him from where this man came and He did not make His name known to me.” And he said “Behold you will conceive and you will bear a son and now do not drink wine or intoxicating drink or eat that which is unclean for from the womb the youth will be a Nazarite of God until the LORD will the day of his death. *This statement to an intuitive mother would have projected her thoughts to the vow which was life-long and the fact that he would die under a vow but her joy that she would have a son was exhilarating. Samson would be remarkably preserved and a death that scattered the enemies of the LORD lay ahead.**

MANOAH DESIRES TO MEET THE ANGEL OF THE LORD 8-21

Then Manoah supplicated the LORD in prayer and said “O Adonai for me let the man of God which you sent please come again to us and point out what we should do for the child that will be born. And God heard the voice of Manoah and the Angel of the LORD came again to the woman as she sat in the field but Manoah her husband was not with her. And the woman went quickly and ran and informed her husband and said to him “Behold the Man who came to me in the day caused himself to appear to me.” And Manoah arose and went after his wife and came to the Man and said to him “Are you the Man that spoke to my wife” and He said “I am”. And he said to Him “Now your words will come to be what is to be the right way for the child and how shall we do for him? Then the Angel of the LORD spoke and said to Manoah “Let

the woman watch according to all I have spoken to her. From all that grows from the fermentation of the vine she may not eat. Also she must not drink wine or strong drink or anything unclean - all that concerning which I have given her command she must watch. And Manoah said to the Angel of the LORD "Please may we cause You to be detained [*the term rx[also means "to be imprisoned"*] and we will prepared a kid of the goats to set before you". So the Angel of the LORD said to Manoah "When you detain me I shall not eat for the need [*b*]of your bread and if you make a burnt offering you must offer it to the LORD for Manoah did not know that he was the Angel of the LORD.

MANOAH PERCEIVES HE WAS SPEAKING WITH THE LORD 17-22

And Manoah said to the Angel of the LORD "What is Your name for when your words come about we will continue to honour You". And the Angel of the LORD said to him "And what reason is this that you should ask my name but it is "wonderful" or "distinguished". *The Hebrew word alp in general contexts marks "wonderful love" or "wonderful counsel" or "wonderful creative miracles."* And Manoah took a kid of the goats and offered it high on the rock to belong to the LORD and The Distinguished One to offer or make an offering while Manoah and his wife were watching. And it happened through the flame going up towards heaven from over the offering that the Angel of the LORD went up in the flame of the offering and Manoah and his wife were watching and they fell on their faces to the earth. But the Angel of the LORD did not add further to appear to Manoah and his wife. Then and because of that Manoah knew that the Angel is the LORD. *Among the fourteen references to the person of Christ in this passage He is called "a Man" "a Man of God" "the Angel of God" and finally "God the messenger". The text is clear when it says "Then Manoah knew the answer to his question - "the angel" (wonderful) was the LORD in very person.*

MANOAH'S WIFE PERCEIVES THEIR SPECIAL PRIVILEGE 22-23

So Manoah said to his wife "We will surely die for we have seen the LORD". *Not since Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden had any couple seen the LORD in such a fashion.* But his wife said to him "If the LORD were inclined to or desired to kill us He would not have taken a burnt offering and meat offering from our hands and He would not have showed us all these things and **at this time** he would not have caused us to hear such things as these."

SAMSON A SPIRITUAL GIANT AND A STRONG MAN 24-25

And the woman conceived the son and called his name "Samson" ("sun-like") and the youth continued to grow great and the LORD prospered him and made him happy and gave him gifts. *This exceptional statement about the youth of Samson showed the remarkable revelation of God was communicated by his parents and he was under God's gaze and the result was prosperity and good of every kind.* And the Spirit [*jwr*] of the LORD "set him free" or "began to open him" or "use him as an instrument" [*llj*]. The Spirit began to "strike" him or "urge" him or "disturb" him or "tread his footsteps" or "strike" him *like a hammer on an anvil-like iron meeting iron* in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol. The places where he trod were "the hornet's town" and "petition that had been made". *We learn that he was attached to the military in the "camp" and can but assume that each tribe had some standing force of men to which he became attached. We learn that he was used as God's instrument in his local area. We learn that as the hornet went before Israel so God would go before*

Samson and ultimately conquer the Philistines. We learn that the prayer of his mother and probably their daily prayers for this unique son lead to him being deeply moved by God.

CHAPTER 14

And Samson went down to Timnath and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines. And he came up and informed his father and mother saying “I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines and now take her for me for my wife. And his father and mother said to him “Is there no woman among the daughters of your brethren and in all my people that you are going up to take a wife from the Philistines? But Samson said to his father - take her for me for she is “right” or “sincere” or “has integrity” in my view. But his father and his mother did not know that it was from the LORD for he was the seeker she the occasion against the Philistines for at that time the Philistines had mastery over Israel.

SAMSON’S UNPUBLICISED FEAT – HE KILLS A LION 5-7

Then Samson went down with his father and mother and came to the vineyards of Timnath and behold a young lion of the lionesses roared to meet and fight him *From this it appears that we should read the story as Samson’s epic beginning by intruding among the Philistines as a fifth columnist through one he esteemed who would be true to him. He was embarked on a highly dangerous strategy and one which his parents were not at the time aware of at all. The immediate opposition of the devil can be fairly read into the incident in the Timnath vineyards.* And the Spirit of the LORD descended or was promoted or prospered over him and he tore him apart as he would tear a kid and what...? What had he ...? He had nothing in his hand and he did not even acquaint his father and mother concerning what he had done. *Presumably his father and mother followed behind but had he not gone first they would have encountered this danger. This is a sign running before his ministry showing that he would spare Israel much hardship.* So he went down and spoke to the woman and she was right or sincere in Samson’s view.

SAMSON AND THE BEES 8-9

We come now to a second mention of the “bee” or “hornet.” The bee might signify that God would drive the Philistine before him as he drove the nations before Joshua. So he returned after some days to take her as his wife and he was **chastened** and instructed to see as a prophet the fallen remains of the lion and behold a swarm of bees assembled in the corpse of the lion-and also honey. *The “chastening” might speak of the sweetness of his own death to his enemies.*

And he got down and took it on his hands and travelled on eating and came to his father and mother and gave them some and they ate and he did not let them know that he had broken the honey (comb) from the carcass of the lion. *As a Nazarite he could not touch anything unclean and it is to be presumed that he never touched the actual carcass but extracted the honey with his hand. In this matter he was not over-particular although it is not to be imagined that he had broken his vow. He was a man willing to live near the edge.*

SAMSON AND HIS PARENTS GO TO THE CELEBRATION IN TIMNATH 10-11

And his father went down to the woman and Samson made a banquet there-for that was the custom for young men to do. And it was a **LIVE OCCASION** when they saw him so they got hold of thirty young men from the relatives and they were with him.

THE RIDDLE 12-18

And Samson said to them “May I please riddle an enigma or parable for you. If you can really explain it to me during the seven days of the banquet I will give you thirty under-garments and thirty changes of outer garment. But if you are not able to explain the riddle to me you will give me thirty undergarments and thirty outer. And they said to him - go on - riddle the riddle and we will listen to you. And he said to them “Out of the eater came forth that which was edible and eaten and from the strong came forth something pleasant and sweet” but they were not able to explain the riddle in three days. And there was live action on the seventh day and they said to Samson’s wife “Persuade your husband to open up and tell us the riddle lest we set you and the house of your father alight with fire. Have you invited us to dispossess us - isn’t that so?” And Samson’s wife wept over him and she said “You only hate me and you do not love me - you have riddled a riddle to the sons of my people and you have not made it known to me” and he said to her “Behold I have not even told my father and mother and should I tell you.” But she wept over him during the days that were still theirs of the *wedding* banquet and it transpired that on the seventh he told her for she urged him strongly and she explained the riddle to the sons of her people. So the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before sunset “What is sweeter than honey and what is stronger than a lion” and he said to them “If in this matter you had not ploughed or devised evil with my heifer you would not have discovered the riddle”.

SAMSON FULFILS HIS PLEDGE WITH GRIEVOUS LOSS TO ASKELON 19-20

And the Spirit of the LORD descended upon him [*j/x* or “*prospered over him*”] and he went down to Askelon and slew thirty of their men and took their costly dress [*x/j*] and gave the changes of garment to those who made known the riddle but his anger was aroused and he went up to his father’s house. *The nature of the clothing which became his spoil in slaying 30 men was such that he must have taken out some of the top men of the Philistine coastal city.* But the wife of Samson became the wife of one that broke with his companionship who had been his friend. *Samson had returned from Askelon to sense an utterly different dynamic in personal relationships. His best friend in Timnath had stepped in to have relationship with his wife and his animosity against the Philistines was ablaze with indignation.*

CHAPTER 15

SAMSON’S FATHER-IN-LAW ACTED UNWISELY 1-2

And there was a lively event spaced by some days - in the days of the wheat harvest *this harvest was in May-June a month after the Barley Harvest. Ploughing is in October-November when it is likely the marriage took place because of the seasonal illustration that Samson uses - so it may be we are speaking of about 8 months since the marriage and on his return visit Samson found his wife married to another.* Samson visited his wife with a little present - a kid of the goats. *From the previous reference to how he killed kids it appears he was a goat farmer and a soldier besides.* And he said “I will go in to my wife to the bridal chamber”. *Samson had not consummated his marriage and he was now hoping for offspring. However his father-in-law had trusted his wife to another Philistine with whom he had previously been friendly.* But her father would not permit him to go in to her for her father said “I kept on saying (to her) that you absolutely hate her and I gave her to your friend. Is her young sister not prettier than she - please take her let her be yours instead”.

SAMSON SPOILS THE CROPS USING FOXES & TORCHES 3-5

But Samson said about them “I will perpetually be free from guilt or obligation [*hqñ*] to the Philistines this one time when I prepare a calamity against them. So Samson went and captured 300 foxes [*l*] [*W*-“burrower” - a name derived from this term and the word *lav* “to dig” “fox-holes” - Gesenius suggests “Jackals” which hunt in groups and are found around dead prey] and took flaming torches and turned them to face one way tail to tail and placed one firebrand torch between each pair of foxes. So when he fed fire to the torches he sent them shooting off into the rising corn of the Philistines and he burned the heaps of sheaves and mature standing corn even into the vineyards and olive groves. *Foxes found food among the vines and had their burrows there. They also moved among the olive plantations. This caused much devastation.*

THE PHILISTINES FIND THE CULPRIT - SAMSON FURTHER DISCOMFITS THEM - THEY BURN HIS WIFE AND HER FATHER 6B-8

So the Philistines said “Who has done this” and they said “Samson the son-in-law of the man of Timnath for he took his wife and gave her to his friend and the Philistines came up and burnt her and her father with fire. But Samson said to them “If you act like this then I will defend my rights against you and after that I will have leisure”. And he struck them leg over thigh - a massive smiting - and he went down and lived in the fissure of the rock Etam [*“a place of ravenous beasts”*]. *Samson gained for himself the protection of the wild animals after his vendetta.*

THE PHILISTINES CAMP AT LEHI SEEKING SAMSON.-JUDAH HANDS HIM OVER-HE SLAYS 1000 OF THEM 9-17

Then the Philistines went up and set up camp against Judah and spread out throughout **Lehi** [*known as the “place of casting away of jawbones”* *yj l tnr* from the Hebrew word **ramah** “to cast away”] *Reversing the attack of Samson the enemy took control of the “jawbone resources” so that Samson could not repeat that assault tactic.* So the men of Judah said “Why have you come up against us?” And they said “We have come up to take Samson prisoner and to do to him as he did to us.” Then 3000 men of Judah went down to the ravine or cleft of the rock of Etam and said to Samson “Are you not aware that the sons of the Philistines are our masters and why have you done this to us?” But he said “In the same sort as they have done to me so I have done to them” But they said “We have come down to take you a bound prisoner and give you into the hands of the Philistines. And Samson said to them “Give me an oath that you lest you strike me”. And they said most definitely “No... (*i.e. we will not strike you!*)...for we have come to take you captive and hand you over; we ourselves will not cause your death” so they tied him up with two new twisted robes and brought him up from the rock.

SAMSON’S ESCAPE ENABLED BY THE SPIRIT & HIS GREAT VICTORY 14-17

Then when he came to Lehi the Philistines shouted in a warlike manner for him and the Spirit of Yahweh fitted him for it and prospered him [*j l x*] and the twisted ropes that were on his forearms became like the wick of lamps burnt away by the blaze and his bindings dissolved from his hands. *The picture is dynamic - describing how like a wick burning down the ropes of flax broke from the wrist and burned away along the forearms.* The Spirit of God came upon him fitting him to a task above his own doing. So he found a moist jawbone of a donkey and thrust out his arm and grasped it and with it he struck a thousand men. So Samson said “With the jawbone of an ass the

heap is two heaps - with the jawbone of the ass I have struck a thousand warriors. And IT WAS A LIVING REALITY when he finished the affair he fired the jawbone away out of his hand and called that place "Ramath Lehi" [*"the throw of the jawbone"*]

This was the splendid Olympic throw with which he finished-sending the Philistines packing and the bone flying in the air over them. The battle against this inveterate foe was enabled by the Spirit of God-it is a type of our victories. If any man could have put confidence in the flesh it was Samson but scripture is clear - his greatest victories were the result of being clothed with the Spirit of God who came down upon him.

SAMSON'S DESPERATE PRAYER MIRACULOUSLY ANSWERED 18-20

But he was very thirsty and he called on Yahweh and said "You have given into the hand of your servant this great Yeshua salvation and now will I die through thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised? But God rent open a hole in the shape of a mortar or wooden pounding pole at Lehi and living water came out from it and he drank deeply and his spirit revived. On account of this he called its name Ein Hakkora which is in Lehi to this day. So he judged Israel **in the days of the Philistines** for ten years. *Clearly this signal victory covered Samson with honour in the eyes of his people and wholesomely he gave glory to God and a quite unique miracle was wrought by the LORD on his behalf. The "Strong One" of Israel punched a little hole in the ground and it produced water for many years thereafter. This was living testimony like the prayers of Elijah thereafter to the Living God who answers prayer and it was testimony to a man who was physically one of the strongest men who ever lived but also a man with a strong spiritual relationship with God. He was a man whose prayers God answered to the very end.*

CHAPTER 16

SAMSON'S PASSION AND SIN WITH A WHORE 1

But Samson went to Gaza and saw there a woman who was a harlot and went in to her. *What a reversal after a decade of leadership. Samson had survived as a man whose wife had been burned and so far as we know remained unmarried, but now the mighty urgency of unsubdued passion overwhelmed his better judgment and in foreign territory he spent a whole evening with her and had intimate relations with her. This very wrong deed may have left him posterity in Gaza - it certainly further soiled his reputation though scripture says he was to be a Nazarite until his death. He is an example of the "wretched man" mentioned by the apostle Paul in Romans 7.24. The NIV is rather loose in translating "He went in to spend the night with her." Samson was not given to "one night stands" in the way we understand but after a long period of abstinence he ministered to his desire in a sinful way that left more misery behind him.*

SAMSON'S SIN AND HIS THEFT OF THE GATES - TENDING TO SHOW THE WEAKNESS OF THE CITY 2-3

The Hebrew text further reads: It belonged to the Gazites to say "Behold Samson has come" It was in other words 'the talk of the town.' So they surrounded him and lay in ambush for him all night long at the gate of the city but they were silent or deaf all night. *The textual idiom means "they ploughed" all night, that is, they devised evil - and in a sense Samson ploughed also. They were saying "At the light of day we will also slaughter him" Their "also" seems to entail the death of the woman besides the death of Samson, in the manner in which they despatched his wife. But Samson lay*

ravishing until the night was half through and rose in the middle of the night and took mighty hold of the doors of the city gate and the two posts *on which they hinged* and removed them with the bars and put them on his shoulders and went up to the summit of the hill which is over against Hebron. *This is a journey of over 30 miles. The gates would be quite difficult to find not to speak of their recovery. He was not trailing them - he was carrying them aloft on his shoulders so where they went would be a mystery.*

SAMSON AND DELILAH 4-5

But **IT WAS LIVE REALITY** that after this he also loved a woman in the River valley of Sorek [*“tendril”*] and her name was Delilah [*“longing” “languishing” “exhausted”*]

So the Princes of the Philistines went up and said to her - open him up *in conversation* and get to the bottom of where his great power lies and by what means we will be able to tie him up and humiliate him and every man among us will give you 1100 silver coins.

TRIAL OF SAMSON’S STRENGTH BY FLAX CORDS AND BY WEAVING HIS SEVEN LOCKS TO A BEAM 6-14

So Delilah said to Samson “Explain to me please through what means your great strength exists and by what means you may be bound that would really humble you?” So Samson said to her “If they tie me up with seven moist or fresh strings which have not been dried I will also be weak and like a different man. So the princes of the Philistines brought her seven new cords which had not been dried out and she bound him with them. The ambush was also settled with her in the inner chamber - then she said to him “The Philistines are come against you so Samson drew out and broke the cords as a piece of broken flax is shattered when it gets the hot smell or wind of fire and his strength did not make itself known. *The portrayal of the text gives hint of the source of his strength in the “wind of the fire”-the RUACH of God was its true source.* But Delilah said to Samson “Behold you have ruined me-or deluded and mocked me [*l t*], and you have spoken to me with a false oracle. Please explain to me how you may be bound. So he said to her-“If they bind me with fresh ropes that have never been used in work I shall be weakened and be like another man.” So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him “Samson, the Philistines are right upon you” for the ambush was lying in the inner chamber but he broke them from his arms like a thread. And Delilah said to Samson “Here and hitherto you have deluded me, you have given me a deceptive word; tell me how you can be bound!” And he said to her ‘If you weave [*gr*] the seven braided locks of my head with a web.” So she held it with a peg and she said to him “The Philistines are on you Samson” and he awoke from sleep and walked away plucking out the peg and the shuttle and the whole web.

SAMSON TELLS OF HIS DEVOTION TO YAHWEH –HIS CAPTURE 15-20

Then she said to him “How can you say you love me and your heart is not mine? This is the third of the blows to me in your mocking and you have not yet let me know in what your great strength lies. And it was a live issue for she made it hard for him with words every day for she pressurised him and his soul was cut down [*rxq*] to death. *Samson under the “drip-drip” of his wife’s criticism was disabled and “cut down to size” as we would say.* So he let her know his whole heart and he said to her-“A razor has not been over my head for I am a Nazarite of “**Elohim the “Strong”** from the womb of my mother. If I am shorn bare my power will apostatize or turn away from

me and I will become weak and as all of mankind.” *This statement reveals that Samson is aware that it is not just the hair that matters but the hair as an emblem of relationship with God. Without it he would be allowing himself to be an apostate. He would be like the common run of humanity.*

Then Delilah saw that he had explained his whole heart to her and she called the princes of the Philistines saying to them “Come up-the vital strike is he has told me all his heart and the Philistine princes came and brought the silver in their hands. And she made him sleep over her knees and called for a man and he shaved the seven locks of his head and she profaned or loosed him or violated his covenant to humble him and his strength departed or apostatized from him. Then she said “Samson-the Philistines are on you” so he awoke from sleep and said “I will go like a hammer blow with the hammer blows and I will rouse myself [*r[ʔ] as that which is driven by the wind*] but he did not know that the LORD had apostatized from upon him. *He had grieved the Spirit of God, he was possibly drunken, he never moved, he just talked about delivering a “big blow” but he could no longer do it.*

SAMSON BLINDED - WORKS A MILL - PULLS DOWN THE HOUSE OF DAGON 21-27

But the Philistines took hold of him and dug out [*r[ʔ]*] his eyes and bound him in brass and his life was grinding corn with a hand mill in the prison house. But the hair of his head began to grow as that which had been shaven off. So the princes of the Philistines gathered themselves together to make a great sacrifice to Dagon their strong god and to exult and they were saying “Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand.” So when the people saw him they gave praise to their god for they said “Our god has given our enemy and the one who wasted our land and had caused us great casualties into our hands.” And there was a vivid moment as they were in very good heart so they called for Samson and saying “He will give us laughter” and they called Samson from the prison house and he made them laugh for one another and they caused him to stand between the pillars. So Samson said to the young man who held him by his hand - let me rest and let me feel and hold the pillars on which the house is built and I will so I may support myself upon them. And the house was full of soldiers and their wives and there were all the princes of the Philistines and on the roof or tiered high seating about three thousand - each soldier and his wife looking at the sport of Samson.

SAMSON’S FINAL PRAYER AND DISMISSAL OF HIS SOUL 28-30

But Samson **shouted out** to Yahweh and said:

(1) “**Adonai Yehwih Zakereni Na Wehazekeni Na** Ach Hapaam Hazeh Haelohim Weanakemah Neqam **Ahath Mishethi Aynaw MePhilistim**” “***My Lord Yahweh please remember me and please strengthen me definitely in this one hammer blow O God and I will be avenged in one act of retribution for my two eyes against the Philistines.***”

So Samson embraced the two pillars at the centre over which the house was established and upon them it was supported - he embraced one with his right hand and one with his left. So Samson said:

(2) “***My soul will die with the Philistines***” And he stretched out and bowed low with power and the house fell upon the princes and upon all the people that were in it and it lives on as fact that the dead who died through his death were greater than those who died through his lifetime.

SAMSON –THE POSTHUMOUS HERO 31

Then his brothers and cousins and all the house of his father came down and lifted him up and exalted him and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the grave of Manoah his father and he judged Israel twenty years. *Samson was buried high in the mountains on the south western margins of the tribe of Dan. His tomb lay between the “town of the hornet” and a place named “petition”. Manoah had a privileged meeting with the Angel of God and Samson had risen to be a Nazarite whose vow was renewed following his sinful dalliance with Delilah. What we should observe is that he was terribly humbled in dying and dealt a death blow to Dagon’s house and the Philistine leadership and army. Figuratively he was raised up and taken shoulder high home to his own country as a hero. His humiliation and his exaltation foreshadow the end of our LORD’S life - but whereas Samson accounted for carnage in his death Christ brought life and immortality to light by dying and rising again. There is much to compare with Christ’s life in this enigmatic and mighty O.T. figure.*

- (1) *He was devoted to the LORD from birth.*
- (2) *The Spirit fell upon him.*
- (3) *All his great prayers were answered - instantly answered!*
- (4) *His fondness for enigmatic teaching parallels Christ’s parabolic style.*
- (5) *His determination to confront Israel’s enemy is like that of Christ who engaged Satan our inveterate adversary.*
- (6) *He is one of four judges administered justice, stopped the mouth of a lion who routed armies and out of weakness was made strong. This latter factor relates to Paul and to every believer.*
- (7) *He took the cup of suffering and prayed - he faced jeers and flogging and bondage of chains. He wandered to the Etam cave - his last real home on earth. Like our Saviour he had at last nowhere to lay his head.*
- (8) *He came low on the knees of Delilah, lower in grinding flour and very low in death-but he was lifted up high by his brothers - so Christ has been lifted these two millennia.*

There is one essential difference - Samson was full of craft and schemes and was overwhelmed with passion. Jesus Christ was full of truth and loving purpose and his zeal was to do the Father’s will.

CHAPTER 17

This chapter describes the simple beginnings of idolatrous religion in the very heart-land of Israel. This religion was not Baalite nor sensuous but would tend to spread through the family. However, as the sequel shows, it became like tinder to the whole tribe of Dan when accompanied by a prophecy that fired 5 men. The lesson is that false religion often thrives by prophecy. This young Levite was using the Ephod much like the High-priest of Israel and seemed genuine.

MICAH-THE SPOILED SON WHO WAS STEEPED IN IDOLATRY 1-6

Then there lived a man from Mount Ephraim by the name of Micayehu. (Micah) [*“who is like the LORD”-ironically Micah’s life belied his name*] This mountain we associate with Joshua. Decadence had befallen the area since the death of the great leader who was Moses’ aide. The name means “Who is like Yahweh?” but it was given to a man who set up idolatry among the people of Dan, the tribe from which sprang the zealous family of Samson. Could it be that the Spirit of God and the writer are telling us something-something about the need to internalise truth and something of the delight of being brought up in a godly family as opposed to one that knows not the living God? This is the story of quite a different family from that in which Samson

was brought up. Then the man said to his mother **“the eleven hundred pieces of your silver that has been taken – the silver you covenanted under oath and spoke of in my hearing – behold the silver is with me; I took it”** And his mother said “O blessed of the LORD, my son. When he returned the 1,100 pieces of silver to his mother his mother said “I had completely set apart that silver for the LORD out of my hand for my son to use to make a carved image and a booth covering so now I will cause it to be returned to you. But he returned the silver to his mother and his mother took two hundred pieces of silver and gave them to the silversmith and he made it into a graven image and a small booth to house it and it was a feature in the house of Micah. But that man Micah had a house of gods and **he also made an ephod** and household Teraphim gods and filled the hands of one of his sons [*with offerings and utensils*] and he became his priest. **IN THOSE DAYS THERE WAS NO KING IN ISRAEL-A MAN DID WHAT WAS STRAIGHT IN HIS OWN EYES.** *What is all this strange stuff about? It is the generous but utterly mistaken consecration of silver by a woman whose son was an idol worshipper and syncretistic idolater. He for his part would have preferred the silver to his mother’s well known design to make yet another image. When he restored the money he got a cheap idol made for 200 of the 1100 shekels and decided to add a little spice to his new religion by hiring a Levite for 10 pieces per annum - the equivalent of 300-400 for a lifetime of ministry until the youth reached 50 besides an equivalent outlay in clothing and food.*

THE YOUNG LEVITE IS HIRED TO START A FALSE PRIVATE CULT 7-13

And there lived a **young man** from Bethlehem Judah from the family line of Judah but he was a Levite and lodging there. And **the man** went up from the city of Bethlehem Judah to settle wherever he could find himself lodging and he came to Mount Ephraim to the house of Micah to make his way *in life*. Then Micah said to him “Where have you come from?” so he said to him “I am a Levite from Bethlehem Judah and I am going to settle wherever I can find a home. So Micah said to him “Live with me and live your life attached to me as my Father and priest and I will give you ten silver pieces annually and two suits or priestly habits and your livelihood so the Levite went in.” So the Levite undertook willingly [*lay*] to abide with the man and the young man was living with him as one of his own sons. So Micah filled the Levite’s hands *with all he needed* and the youth became his priest and lived there with Micah. And Micah said “Now I know that the LORD will be good to me for I have a Levite for a priest.

CHAPTER 18

In those days there was no king in Israel. Also in those days the tribe of Danites had been looking out a domain to live in for until that day nothing had fallen to it for a possession in the midst of the tribes of Israel. So the sons of Dan sent five military men of their families from their boundaries, valiant men from Zorah and Eshtaol to walk in the land and search it out. And they said to them “Go search the land” so they came to the hill of Ephraim to the house of Micah and lodged there. *It would appear that Micah had some accommodation to offer - perhaps he ran an inn.*

But when they were beside the house of Micah they recognised [*rkt-they could discriminate*] *the voice or accent as foreign to the place*] the voice of the young Levite and they deviated there *in their journey* and said to him “How did you come to be as far away as this? What are you doing with this man and what do you hope to do from here on? *The Danites knew very well that Levites operated out of Shiloh and this youth in priestly garb was well out of context. Besides they thought it strange that he*

was running a private religious set-up - really a false idolatrous practice. [hp J1] So he said to them "Micah give me work like this and this!" Evidently the Levite discussed further or demonstrated something but neither the Spirit of God nor the writer wish to convey more on that topic. He has given me a wage and I am his private priest. So they said to him "Would you please ask when with God and get to know if our journey upon which we are going has been made prosperous? They were opportunists but in this venture for their tribe they had deep concerns and sought confirmation of their hopes. This "prophecy" was to be the turning point in establishing false religion in Dan. To this day the shrine at Dan stands testimony to the pervading idolatry established from this root - I have witnessed the shrine for myself. The priest said to them "Your journey that you are taking will be recompensed and prosperous - right before the LORD.

THE GOOD REPORT OF THE FIVE SPIES & IMMEDIATE ACTION 7-10

Then the five stout fellows went on to Laish and saw the people there that lived securely in it in accordance with the legal institutions of the Sidonians free and secure but there was none who reproached or addressed a shameful affair in the land. They lived as a dominion [rx/] and far from the Zidonians and they had no business *more widely* with mankind. So they came to their brothers at Zorah and Eshtaol and their brothers said to them "what about you?" And they said "Arise and lets go up against them for we have seen the land and look-it is very good-but you are gone all quiet - don't be sluggish [lx/] to act. Come and let us possess the land. As you approach it you will come to a secure people and a broad spacious land for God has given into your hands a place where there is no deficiency or lack of any thing promised[rbd] on earth. *This is a huge commendation of the territory that Dan acquired. The author walked with his wife from Caesarea to Dan and can confirm the fruitfulness of this area-where glorious flowers - tall trees and fruit, even pomegranates grow in profusion. LAISH was located just above the "Sultan's pool", the area is most beautiful and the country below and to East and West spreads in lovely folds of terrain hither and thither.*

THREE HUNDRED WARRIORS OF DAN MOVE NORTH 11-13

So there remove from their home or camp from the families of the Danites from their land from Eshtaol six hundred men armed with the weapons of war and they went up and set up camp at Kirjath Jearim for which reason they call that place MAHANEH DAN until this very day. You can see it behind the city of Kirjath-Jearim. From there they passed to Mount Ephraim and came to the house of Micah.

THE ARMED THEFT AT MICAH'S HOUSE 14-21

Then the five valiant men who went to spy the land of Laish witnessed and said to their brothers "Have you been made aware that there actually exists in these houses an ephod and teraphim and a graven image and a shrine so now think **what you must do?**" So they deviated there and came to the house of the young man who was a Levite - the house of Micah at which they asked him concerning their wellbeing or prosperity. And the six hundred men armed with their weapons of war **stood as a garrison** or still as a monument at the open gate that does not belong to Dan. *We are being told that the men should not have been there.* But the five men who went to spy out the land **went there to capture the idol and the ephod** and teraphim and shrine but the priest stood guard at the open gate and the 600 men armed to the teeth with weapons of war. So these (the five) came to the house of Micah and took the image,

the ephod, the teraphim and the shrine and the priest said to them “What are you doing?” But they said “Be quiet! Put your hand over your mouth and come with us and you will be our father and our priest. Is it better for you to be a priest of one man or that you become priest for a tribe and belong to the family of Israel? And the mind of the priest was heartened and he took the ephod and the teraphim and the image and came into the midst of the people. So they faced the journey and went on and set the little children and the livestock they possessed and the heavy yoked oxen *carts* in front of them.

MICAH CONTESTS THE TAKING OF HIS IDOL AND PRIEST 22-26

But when these were a long way from the house of Micah the stout men who were in the houses that were near the house of Micah assembled together by convocation and overtook and stuck by the sons of Dan. They called out to the sons of Dan and they for their part turned about and said to Micah “What is up with you that you called a gathering?” So he said “You have taken away the gods that I made and the priest and are gone. What have I left? And what is this that you are saying to me “What is up with you?” But the sons of Dan said to him “Don’t let your voice be heard by us lest embittered men attack you and you take your own soul and the life of your house away. So the sons of Dan went on their journey and Micah saw that they were stronger than him so he faced away and returned to his house. *We understand “fair warning” was given by the Danites who were a redoubtable force. Micah could muster force and must himself have been a small-time leader - landlord of an inn, a silversmith and a regional leader in Ephraim with distinctly syncretistic and idolatrous religious views.*

THE BURLY SOLDIERS OF DAN TAKE MICAH’S IMAGE 27-29

So the Danites took the things that Micah made and his priest and came to Laish to a quiet secure people and smote them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. And there was none to save for it was distant from the Zidonians and they had no legal tie with any man and it was in a valley which belongs to Beth-Rehob-“a place of streets” so they constructed a city and dwelt in it. Around the *road network – all that was left after the burning of the city- the Danites soon constructed homes and the whole valley began to buzz with new life. Beth-Rehob itself Frank Charles Thompson in maps attached to his chain reference bible locates ten miles NNW of Lake Merom and some 5 miles or so deep within the territory Joshua gave to Naphtali. Thus Rehob would be within the territory to the west of Laish and in Naphtali. Caesarea Philippi stands at the head of one of the two most northerly sources of the Jordan and Dan at the other, just a little way south west. I have walked between the two locations. Thus the Danites who proved incapable of securing the land in the southern plains allocated by Joshua under this emigration obtained a new land base. So they called the name of the city Dan for the name of their father who was born to Israel but the age-long name of the city was Laish from the first. The reference to Israel is not accidental; it speaks of a relationship with the true God to which serious prejudice was done by the sons of Dan.*

EIGHTH APOSTASY

IDOLATRY INSTITUTED AT DAN 30-31

But the sons of Dan caused the graven image to be raised up and Jonathan son of Gershom son of Manasseh - he and his sons became priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the carrying away of naked captives from the land. And they

established for themselves the graven image of Micah which he made all the days that the house of God was a living witness in Shiloh. *This hitherto unknown “young Levite” appears to be a man of Manasseh and his name is Jonathan. He established an alternative priesthood with an ephod of guidance - in conflict with the house of God.*

The area of Ophrah near Shiloh - about 8 miles north - actually was the centre where the Ark rested and worship in Israel centred. There the appearance of the LORD at Bochim to all the people and in that vicinity the visitation of the LORD to Manoah in connection with “Offering” and devotion and a Son highlights why that place was chosen as the centre of worship in the land. The contrast between Dan and Shiloh is the contrast between idolatry and godly worship: the story in short of Israel’s downgrade in religion and the main lesson of the book of Judges itself.

CHAPTER 19

A SYMPATHETIC FATHER-IN-LAW OF BETHLEHEM HEALS A MARRIAGE 1-4

And it was live reality in those days that Israel was without a king and also a fact of interest that a man who was a Levite should come to sojourn on the side of Mt Ephraim and take himself a concubine to wife from Bethlehem Judah. But his concubine made sexual relationships against him and went from him to the house of her father in Bethlehem Judah and lived out four full months there. So her husband arose and went after her to speak to her heart - to bring her back and his servant was with him and a pair of asses. So she would have him come into her father’s house so the father of the young woman saw him and was pleased to meet him. And the Father-in-law and father of the young woman held onto him and he lived with him for three days and ate and drank and lodged there.

THE MAN BREAKS HIS JOURNEY AT GIBEAH 5-15

So it was a lively scene on the fourth day when they arose early in the morning and he rose up to get on his way but the father-in-law of the young woman said “Refresh and support your heart with a morsel of bread and afterward you may leave. So they sat down and the two of them ate and drank in one bond and the father of the young woman said to the man “Please be willing to stay overnight and give your heart time to get better.” But the man arose to go yet his father-in-law pressed him and he turned and lodged there. So he awoke and rose early on the morning of the fifth day to be on his way and the father of the young woman said “Please take time for your heart to heal and you must have more time till the day stretches out” and they both had a meal. So the man arose to go - he and his young concubine - but the father of the young woman said to him “Please look the day is declining toward evening, please stay over - behold the day is one of grace [mj] –*the father-in-law is speaking of a beautiful day but also of the great favour the young man has obtained in his eyes*] lodge here and your heart will be much better and you can both rise early tomorrow to take your journey and go to your tent. But the man was not desirous to sojourn and he arose and went and came close in front of Jebus, **that is now Jerusalem** [*Jerusalem where the Jebusites retained control fell into the hands of David, so this temporal note indicates that the firsthand written documentation of the history of the judges would appear to have emerged during the early monarchy - about the time of Samuel*] and there were with him a pair of asses saddled for riding and his concubine. So they were by Jebus and the day was far spent so the young servant said to his master “Come please and we will turn aside to this city of the Jebusites and lodge in it.” But

his master said to him “We will not go aside to lodge at a city of a stranger who is not from the sons of Israel - look, we will go on over to Gibeah. *Gibeah was a strong city of the Benjamites where indeed at this time Saul’s parents would have been living.* Then he said to his servant “Come and let us get close to one of the well-known places and lodge in Gibeah or in Ramah. So they passed on and made the journey and sunlight came for them till they were alongside Gibeah of Benjamin. And they drew aside there to go to get lodging in Gibeah and they went and sat in the city street and no man received them to his house to lodge. *The custom has to be appreciated. Such a Jewish stranger would normally be offered at least overnight hospitality and indeed those keeping inns would normally pick up business in the street. My wife and I were once standing towards nightfall in Kusadasi and were approached by a hotelier’s representative and found good lodgings as a result.*

AN AGED FARMER SHOWS HOSPITALITY 16-21

But behold an old man came from his work out of the field in the evening but the man was from Mount Ephraim and he was a stranger in Gibeah and the men of the place were Benjamites. But he lifted up his eyes and saw the man who had journeyed in the street of the city and the old man said “What has befallen your journey and where have you come from? So he said to him “We went to Bethlehem Judah and I have come to the house of the LORD but there is no man who has welcomed me into his house.” *The sense is that the traveller is awaiting some fellow Jew to offer hospitality so that he can enter the “house of the LORD” - a Jewish way of saying “a home where the LORD is worshipped”.* But there is both straw and fodder for our asses and I have both bread and wine of my own and for your handmaid and the young man who is with your servant. There is no lack of any thing. But the old man said “Peace be with you - except all that you need is upon me except you are not to stay overnight in the street and he brought him to his house and he provided [/ b] for the asses and they washed their feet and ate and drank.

THE NIGHT TIME ORGY OF EVIL THAT SHOCKED ISRAEL 22-28

Now these people were recovering heart well and behold men of the city - men who were sons of Belial surrounded the house beating strongly on the door and spoke to the old man who owned the house saying “Bring out the man who came to your house and we will have sex with him”. But the man who was the owner of the house went out to them and said to them “No, my brothers, do not do this evil when this man has just arrived at my house. Do not do this great folly. Behold my daughter the virgin and his concubine-may I please bring them out to you and you can exercise yourselves with them and do to them as seems good to you but do not enact this great affair of folly to this man. But the men were not willing to listen to him so **the man** took hold of his concubine and brought her outside and they had sexual relations with her and they repeatedly abused her painfully [/ / /] all night till the morning and then thrust her away as dawn broke. So the woman came within the gaze of the morning and fell at the door of the house of the man where her Lord was until it was clear. And here Lord rose in the morning and opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way but behold the woman, his concubine, fallen at the door of the house and her hands were on the knocker. So he said to her “Arise and let us go.” But there was no answer and he took her on the ass and the man arose and went to his place. *This must have brought shame and sorrow to his heart. The girl’s father had been so kind to him. The matter was most vexatious. He would have been very wise to have heeded his lad and stopped at Jebus. The lesson is that moral and spiritual matters were in a*

fearfully bad state in Israel. When men did what they liked it means that their relationships were very seriously wrong and wicked. Gibeah, the city of Israel's first king, if we have regard to this narrative, was amongst the worst places to be brought up.

THE GRUESOME PARCELS OF FLESH THAT MOVED ISRAEL TO ACTION 29-30

Then he came to his own place and took a knife and grasped hold of his concubine and cut her up into gift pieces as her bones allowed for the twelve tribes and sent her throughout all the borders of Israel. And it was something, and all who saw it said "There has not taken place or been seen such as this from the days the sons of Israel came up from the land of Egypt to this day. Make it your own - consult over it [xw/] and speak out." *There was a total want of sensitivity in those callous days-actions were brutal but this man can at least be credited with bringing to the nation's attention the depths to which evil had descended. The whole nation*

(a) Took it to heart; moral evil had gained the ascendant.

(b) Every tribe had to meet and converse on what needed to be done

(c) People could no longer allow evil to go unnoticed and unpunished.

CHAPTER 20

NINTH APOSTASY

ISRAEL MASSES AT MIZPEH 1-7

Then all the sons of Israel went out and the congregation gathered itself together as one man to the LORD at Mizpeh coming from those belonging to Dan and unto Beersheba and also the land of Gilead. *This Mizpeh has many candidates archaeologically. The central Tel En Nasbeh about ten miles north of Jerusalem is the best candidate. It is central. It was the assembling point of the Maccabees and it has strong pottery ostraca evidence to confirm its historicity. Besides it lies not far from Bethel where Israel's first father met with God. And the chiefs of all the people of all the tribes of Israel set themselves firmly as conquerors [bxy] with the assembly of the people of God –four hundred thousand infantry that drew sword. But the sons of Benjamin heard report that the sons of Israel were going up to Mizpeh so the sons of Israel said "Ah, its terrible how did you let this evil exist or go on?" And the Levite husband of the woman who died by manslaughter answered and said "I and my concubine came to Gibeah of Benjamin to lodge overnight and the men of Gibeah rose up and surrounded me at the house during the night - they continued to look like they would kill me and they gang-raped my concubine and she died. But **I held fast with my concubine and I kept giving her and I kept sending her** into all the field of the inheritance allotment of Israel for they have committed planned evil [h mz] and great folly in Israel. This man indicated that even in cutting up his concubine he held her close and all his life with her he cared for her-and his father-in-law knew that so well. The Piel repetitive emphasises this again and again. This was a relationship of true love. This act was not callous and it changed the life of a nation. As a commentator I cannot emphasise too strongly how this single act of a man that really loved his sinning wife changed for good and all the moral landslide of his times and brought Israel back to the law of God.*

Behold **you are the totality of the sons of Israel** - give your oracle [rbd "act word] of advice and counsel to this. *Benjamin was missing, but the statement remains valid for Benjamin was living apostate and for the moment was deemed not to be acting in concert with the nation's theocratic witness as "princes with God" or "Israelites"*

THE DIE IS CAST TO CONFRONT BENJAMIN IN BATTLE 8-11

And all the people rose as one man to say “We will not one man of us take himself to his tent and not a man will leave or depart for his house. But right now this is the action we will effect concerning Gibeah. We will go up by lot against it and we will take ten stalwart men from a hundred and a hundred from a thousand and a thousand from 10,000 to take provisions [*hdx from hdjx*] for the people in order to act when they come to Geba of Benjamin according to all the folly which they have done in Israel. So all the men of Israel massed at the city joined like a roof beam as one man in association [*myrbj*]

BENJAMIN COMPLICIT WITH THE SIN OF GIBEAH 12-17

And the tribes of Israel sent stalwarts throughout all the tribe of Benjamin saying “What is this evil that has come to be a live issue among you? So now give us the men - the sons of Belial - that are in Gibeah and we will put them to death and we will continually remove[*r[b]*] this evil from Israel but **Benjamin were not willing to listen to the voice of their brothers the sons of Israel**. But the sons of Benjamin mustered from their cities to Gibeah to go to war with the sons of Israel. And in that day the sons of Benjamin committed to go to war at Gibeah from their cities were numbered at twenty six thousand men who drew sword, apart from the inhabitants of Gibeah who had been appointed and committed to the muster - seven hundred excellent tested men. From among this people were seven hundred choice men with no right-handed facility - each of these could sling with a stone to hairsbreadth accuracy without missing. And the men of Israel mustered apart from Benjamin were four hundred thousand men that drew sword; every one of these a trained fighting man.

ISRAEL SEEKS GOD BUT SUSTAINS EARLY CASUALTIES 18-25

But the sons of Israel rose up to the house of God (Bethel) and enquired with God and said “Who amongst us shall go up at the beginning [*i.e. “the vanguard”*] to fight with the sons of Benjamin and the LORD said “Judah shall go up as the vanguard”. So the sons of Israel arose in the morning and set their army against Gibeah. And the men of Israel went out to fight with Benjamin and the men of Israel spread themselves out for war with Gibeah. But the sons of Benjamin issued out of Gibeah and slew to the earth throughout Israel in that day 22,000 men.

But the people of the soldiery of Israel repaired and strengthened them and added to set out a battle order in the same place as they had done on the first day. And the sons of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until evening and they enquired with the LORD saying “Shall I add to urge or drive for war with the sons of Benjamin my brother, and the LORD said “Go up close to him”. So the sons of Israel drew near to the sons of Benjamin on the second day. And Benjamin issued out of Gibeah to encounter them and they slew 18,000 men who dropped to earth; all of these used the sword.

A BATTLE STRATEGY WITH THE HAND OF GOD 26-48

(1) So all the sons of Israel went up and all the people and came to **Bethel** and wept and turned there to the face of the LORD and they fasted that day till evening and (2) Offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to the LORD and **the sons of Israel enquired from the LORD** [for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days and Phineas the son of Eliezer the son of Aaron ministered before his face in those days]

(3) Saying “Shall I add to go to war with my brother Benjamin or will I decline?” And the LORD said “Go up for tomorrow I will deliver him into your hand.” So Israel positioned ambushes around Gibeah and the sons of Israel went up to engage the sons of Benjamin for the third day and

(4) They set out their battle array at Gibeah *blow by blow* (as before). And the sons of Benjamin came out to meet the people and were drawn out from the city and began to strike some of the people casualties in the same blow by blow manner throughout the raised paths where one ascends to Bethel [*“the house of God”*] and one ascends to Gibeah through the arable land. They struck something like 30 men in Israel.

(5) So the sons of Benjamin said “They are defeated before our faces as at the first”

(6) but the sons of Israel said “Let us run away and draw them away from the city to the highways.

(7) So every man of Israel rose from his place and spread out in order in Baal Tamar and Israel’s men lying in ambush burst forth from their place from the dug outs of Gaba or Gibeah.

(8) And 10,000 select soldiers from all Israel came from the front to Gibeah and the fighting was heavy but they did not know that

(9) a calamity of divine judgment [*gn*] was upon them and the LORD struck Benjamin before the face of Israel and the sons of Israel slew throughout Benjamin in that day 25,100 men - all of these swordsmen. So the sons of Benjamin saw that they were defeated for the soldiers of Israel gave way ground to the Benjamites because they were confident of the men in ambush they had placed at Gibeah.

(10) But the men in ambush hastened and invaded and plundered.

(11) The ambushers also gave a long (*ram’s horn*) blast [*Jvm*] and the ambushers struck the entire city with the edge of the sword.

(12) So there was a time agreed for the men of Israel with the ambushers to put up a great cloud of smoke from the city. So the men of Israel reversed in the battle and the Benjamites pierced to the striking dead of the casualties - about 30 soldiers of the men of Israel for they said “He is surely thoroughly beaten before our face as in the first battle. And the beginning [*hlj*] of the rising flame [*tavm*] sending up from the city in a pillar of smoke and the Benjamites turned and looked behind and behold the entire city was brought to account as it went up [*hl*] to heaven. *At length justice was seen to be done and the city which had housed the most blatant homosexuals-cum-rapists yet known in Israel was torched into ruin. It was fittingly “brought into account” before heaven.*

(13) And the soldiers of Israel turned and the men of Benjamin were terrified [*lhb*] for they saw that calamity had struck them as a plague. So they turned tail in the direction of the wilderness before the men of Israel but the battle clung to them and such as came out of the city were slain in the midst (of Israel).

(14) They surrounded the Gibeonites and gave pursuit from Menuchah they caused them to make their way to before Gibeah on the eastern side. So there fell of Benjamin 18,000 soldiers - all warriors. So they turned and sought to flee for refuge to the desert - to the rock of Rimmon.

(15) But they renewed their action on the highways against 5000 men and chased them to Gidom and struck 2000 of them. So all that fell of Benjamin on that day were 25,000 men that used the sword and all these were valiant. But 600 soldiers turned tail and sped away towards the wilderness to the rock Rimmon and lived in the rock of Rimmon for four months.

(16) But the men of Israel turned on the sons of Benjamin and struck them completely with the edge of the sword from the city from the east to any that was discovered

there, also all the cities they found they sent up in flames. *This military action is described in absolute detail. It put paid to the immorality that was developing in Benjamin and threatened to engulf the nation. The abundant grace of God allowed Israel's first king to emerge out of this severely chastened people - though the Tribe that lead the chastening provided the king who really made his mark-King David. In the long distant future Paul the Apostle was to come from this tribe and his natural instincts were also bellicose but by grace he became a most Christ-like leader. The mighty lesson of the man who loved his concubine and the severe retribution it called forth and the price that Israel paid for regaining the initiative of being her brother's keeper is the outstanding lesson of the book. When a people descend to doing what is right in their own eyes and crass immorality thrives and grows in the body politic a great price must be paid to reverse the malaise. The LORD God did not shy away from rooting out this evil nor did he allow Israel to forget the cost of long neglect of His law. When good men do nothing evil succeeds, and to reverse the stranglehold of evil is very costly.*

CHAPTER 21

COMPASSION FOR THE UNMARRIED BENJAMITES -THE PERCEIVED DANGER OF A TRIBE DYING OUT 1-7

Then the men of Israel swore and oath at Mizpeh saying “No man from among us shall give his daughter as a wife to Benjamin. And the people came to Bethel and remained there until the evening before the face of God and lifted up their voice and wept with great weeping.

(1) They also said “For what reason O LORD God of Israel has this visitation [*dqp*] come in Israel that one tribe is absent from Israel?” But it was a fact **from the morrows** that the people rose early and built there an altar and offered up both burnt offerings and peace offerings. *The Hebrew sustains the implied conclusion that Israel became attentive to the means of atonement and in particular “God’s delight in holiness” (burnt offering) and His “desire for fellowship”. Where these are present the situation in question would not arise. The fact that they asked a subsidiary question in this context in respect of this fellowship shows that they had arrived at a clear answer to their first question. The abiding lesson is that (a) The presence of sin or the absence of holiness and (b) The presence of the world the flesh and the devil and the absence of fellowship with God are the issues that lie at the root of most of our moral issues.*

(2) And the sons of Israel said “Whoever has not come up with the congregation from all the tribes of Israel unto the LORD? For the great oath that whoever would not come up to the LORD to Mizpeh is alive and active saying that he should die the death. But the sons of Israel felt compassion [*mhn*] upon their brother Benjamin and they said “We are very aware [*dqm*] today that one tribe is missing from Israel. How shall we make it possible for those that remain of them to have wives when we have sworn to the LORD “my want” or “my no” as to giving our daughters to them for wives?

(1) THE FIRST SCHEME - PUNISH JABESH AND PROVIDE WIVES FOR THE MEN HOLED UP AT RIMMON 8-15

So they said “Which one from the tribes of Israel is there who did not come up to the LORD to Mizpeh? And behold not a man from the camp or host of Jabesh Gilead came up to the gathering together. For they had reviewed the people and behold there was not a man there from those that lived at Jabesh Gilead. So the assembly sent

12,000 men there from the sons of valour and gave them command saying “Go and cause the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead to be afflicted by the edge of the sword, even the women and children. And this is the precise action you shall undertake; you shall utterly devote to Herem every male and every woman who has lain intimately with man. But they found **400 young virgin girls** among the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead who had not had not had male female relationship by lying with a man and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh which is in the land of Canaan. *The implication is that these 400 young women were bettered by coming into the promise of the inheritance in Canaan which the LORD promised and they were being introduced to worship and the faith of Israel afresh after being essentially apostatised.*

(B) THE SECOND SCHEME - ELOPEMENT AT THE SHILOH ANNUAL BALL OR HARVEST DANCE 13 -23

Also the whole congregation sent and took up the matter in conversation with the sons of Benjamin who were holed up in the Rimmon Rock and proclaimed peace or amnesty for them. So the Benjamites returned at that time and they gave them wives which they had kept alive from the women of Jabesh Gilead and even at that there were not sufficient women for them. Then the people showed compassion towards Benjamin for the LORD had made a break-down in the tribes of Israel. But the elders of the congregation said “What shall we do to get wives for the remainder since woman are perished from Benjamin. And they said “An inheritance must be preserved for Benjamin that a tribe be not blotted out from Israel but we are not able to give them wives from our daughters because the sons of Israel have taken an oath saying “cursed is he who gives a woman to Benjamin.” But they said “Behold there is a feast of the LORD in Shiloh. It is for two days north of Bethel on the eastern sunrise side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem and on the south of Lebonah [*“frankincense”*]. So they commanded the sons of Benjamin saying “Go and set ambushes in the vineyards. And look and see if the daughters of Shiloh come to dance in dances and you emerge out from the vineyards and you may catch *wives*. Each man may catch his wife from the daughters of Shiloh and go to the land of Benjamin. And it will be an issue when their fathers or brothers come to dispute with us we will say to them “Be gracious to them for we did not capture each man’s wife in the war because you did not give them wives at like time you bear guilt or suffer punishment.” So the sons of Benjamin did just this and carried off wives equal to their number from those who were dancing - whom they snatched away and went off and returned to their inheritance and built the cities and lived in them.

THE RULE OF LAW UNDER THE THEOCRACY FAILED OF APPLICATION. MAJOR MORAL ISSUES COULD EASILY RECUR 24-26

And the sons of Israel travelled around from there at that time each man to his tribe and family and they went from there each to his inheritance. In those days there was no king in Israel; a man did that which was esteemed right in his eyes. *In Judges 17.6 this precise expression is used - the central rule of a king was clearly in mind as the most effective way to establish national government and secure the worship of Yahweh alone within the bounds of Israel’s theocracy. The first mention of the expression is within the immediate context of nascent idolatrous practice. The solution to the problem of the growth of sexual licence and also of the wise conduct of warfare awaited a unified leadership and for these reasons “kingship” was being envisaged by Israel’s spiritual and prophetic leaders like the writer of this book.*

FINIS

SCRIBAL FOOTNOTE qzj

“SEIZING” “HEALING” “REPAIR” “STRENGTHENING”

The title of this scribal or rabbinic comment says it all. The broken struggling nation needed “healing” and good leadership promoted such healing as did obedience to the law of God. It is important to note how Israel sought the God of Bethel and that with prayer and fasting and atonement and peace offerings. It is equally important that the leaders showed evident compassion towards those deeply hurt by war and towards the tribe whose future rested on 400 young virgins of Jabesh and the dancing girls of Bethel who brought new hope to the decimated tribe of Benjamin.

The Book of Judges is the portion of those (the 618) who open or kiss the plunder-(*cf the 618 commandments*). The holy appointed ones fear the LORD. But they divide in two and they struggle and shatter the children of Israel with violence. But the hand of the LORD’S power creeps along softly. The lips of the old men are considerate or lay it to heart or set it in order [mmv]

The comment tells us that Israel held to the commandments and yet the nation became divided. No blame is applied, which shows that the comment did not favour Judah or Benjamin but the commentator is sad to admit the fact. The resulting struggle and violence is attested but again no glory. Amid all this the power of the LORD grows and the leaders learn wisdom and consideration to bring some order to the shattered nation. This order and unity eventually improved with the emergence of kingly rule, though the nation in O.T. time remained long divided.

Bob Coffey

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