

Judges

Walk-thru

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The unconventional punctuation styles you will see are related to the way these studies were originally intended for the e-mail audience, using plain text to keep file sizes smaller for bulk mailing; creatively 'formatting' with punctuation, for various kinds of emphases, in the absence of formatting the actual type. You may find occasional misspellings, and the more rare cases of a Scripture reference going to a wrong passage; those will be 'typos', not intentional. With this type of POD (Print On Demand) publishing, it seems simplest, and the most prudent use of time, to not completely go through and revamp everything, but to just leave things as they are. Please accept this book, warts and all; but rather, please pay attention to, and receive God's Truth presented herein.

Judges

Contents:

- 03 - Right in their own eyes (ch1-2)
- 08 - Testing of Israel (3:1-11)
- 11 - Ehud & Shamgar (3:12-31)
- 15 - Deborah & Barak (ch4-5)
- 20 - Gideon (ch6-8)
- 27 - Abimelech (ch9)
- 32 - Jephthah (ch10-12)
- 38 - Samson (ch13-16)
- 43 - Micah's idols (ch17)
- 49 - Dan...Micah's missionary outreach (ch18)
- 53 - and What is the Result? (ch19-21)

Right in their own eyes (*Judges 1-2*)

"In those days there was no king in Israel. Every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Jdg21:25)

Every child who regularly attends Sunday school knows the stories about Gideon, Samson, Jephthah: 300 torches and shofars, the strong man, the man whose daughter was killed, the commander who was killed with a tent stake through the head. Even the world entertains itself with plays and operas on "Samson and Delilah", I suspect because it includes what the world likes: lust, sex and intrigue. Some also pay attention to the dancing virgins and bachelors jumping out to grab wives for themselves. For many of them it is entertainment or the 'fairy tales' of awe and wonderment. Whoa dude, did you see that?? Wow!!

The book of the Judges is approximately 300 years of Israel's history; a period of time longer than the US has been a nation. A period of time between its Egyptian bondage, and the fame of David and Solomon. Joshua who followed on the heels of Moses, followed God and was faithful. David again was a man "after God's heart" (1Sa13:14) During Joshua's leadership Israel experienced 'success' as a nation. But after Joshua's death, it wasn't until David that Israel rose to a state of prominence and was (generally) 'pleasing' to God. Judges is a period of darkness and uncertainty; not a period of time where they could be lauded as being a "Godly" nation... because THEY WERE NOT.

Where the book of Joshua begins with God exhorting Joshua and Israel to "be strong and courageous" to FOLLOW GOD (Josh1:6-9); Judges ends with the summation that Israel DID NOT FOLLOW God; Joshua chided them "you cannot serve Jehovah", and they said, 'Yes we can' (Josh24:19,21); but their history proved Joshua right... everyone did, as the world is doing today: they DID THEIR OWN THING.

All those Sunday School 'lite' stories are not properly taught without understanding the underlying wickedness and rebellion that characterized Israel. Why did those episodes occur? Joshua ended with an inkling of what was to come when Joshua chided Israel to "put away the foreign gods which are among you..." (Josh24:23) The first two chapters of Judges somewhat overlap between the end of Joshua's days, and the events of Judges. They encapsulate the gist of the next 300 years. They set the stage and explain them. After all the victories under Joshua, how did they come to be in a place where they were always under the heel of their enemies, needing rescuing?

THEY STARTED OUT WELL...

"Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass that the children of ISRAEL ASKED JEHOVAH, saying, Who shall first go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them?" (1:1)

Remember how they convened and decided amongst themselves how to take Ai, and got whooped. When the Gibeonites came around they "did not ask...Jehovah" (Jos9:14) Initially, here, they have learned. They -ASK- God: How shall we proceed? So God gives direction. So Judah and Simeon partner up and help each other and (you can read for yourselves) had great successes. And it says...

"Thus Jehovah was with Judah. And they dispossessed the mountains..." (1:19a)

Caleb had asked Joshua, "Give me this mountain". Perhaps God will give success. (Josh14:12) And God gave success. And this spirit was in the whole family as territory was bequeathed. (1:14-15) Not only that, but Moses' father-in-law's family also joined and settled in Judah's territory. (1:16) So far, so good...

"...but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the lowland, because they had chariots of iron." (1:19b)

Now, when Ephraim had complained about having to chop down trees, Joshua had encouraged them...

"...you shall dispossess the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots and are strong" (Josh17:18)

Was God not keeping His promise, or are we seeing the beginnings of failure? As Israel was failing to get to work and take possession, Joshua had given them a tongue lashing:

"How long will you be slack to go and possess the land which Jehovah the God of your fathers has given to you?" (Josh18:3)

God -has- 'given' the land. Already a done deal. If Israel will, but, be faithful, they can go in and TAKE POSSESSION. God has already promised to be with them and give them the ability, if they remain true to Him. (Josh23:5-8)

But it says: Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites. (1:21) Joseph has some victories. HOWEVER, "Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shean..." (1:27) Over and over: "did not drive out to dispossess them" (vs28) "but the Canaanites dwell...among them" (vs29-30) Asher "dwelt among the Canaanites...for they did not drive them out" (vs32) Naphtali "dwelt among the Canaanites" (vs33)

Remember from Joshua, the command against: "mak[ing] marriages with them, and go[ing] in to them and they to you" (Josh23:12) What happened when Solomon married many pagan wives? They "thrust away his heart...thrust his heart aside" from God. (1Ki11:3-4)

Well, this is what happened. Israel refused to finish the job God gave them, to "dispossess" the pagans out of the land. They lived -among- them. The pagans live -among- Israel. And what is the natural course of events when people live together? Whoever is living together, also get married together. And when they get married, things become joined: physical, cultural and religious. And unlike our western cultures, in eastern cultures the cultural and religious is often inexorably entwined

Like I've shared on other occasions: When I grew up as a (missionary) child in Japan (I was born there), there were the various things about Japan I grew up with. There are certain ways they would walk, carry their loads on their backs, load their goods onto the train as they would go to market, pump their water, sweep the steps and walk-ways, put their hands up to their mouth/face when coughing, mannerisms and bowing when talking to other people... all the stuff that to my childhood mind was, simply, JAPAN. As a child I did not understand anything 'religious' to all their activities. It was, just, JAPAN. Culture. We came back to America where I finished growing up, went to Bible college, and for English we were assigned to 'pick-a-topic' and write a term paper. (Lesson in 'how-to' write a proper paper) For whatever reason I picked "Shinto", the national state religion of Japan. When I researched, I suddenly realized that some of those hand mannerisms over the mouth, or the manner in which they held their brooms and swept had -religious- connotations. The certain way they would cough was "Shinto". The sweeping they did IN THAT WAY? Shinto. Religion. Shinto -lives- its religion, even down to some of the daily mannerisms.

Some years ago we observed how on Bali, what we westerners consider to be "art", to them is a form of -worship-, to their gods.
www.a-voice.org/portions/05-06-99.htm

And so, instead of being -HOLY- (separated) to God, Israel settled down, got lazy, refused to exterminate the land of its pagans, and intermingled. They learned their culture (religion). They learned their mannerisms (religion). They observed their holidays (religion). They married their spouses... who brought their religion with them. And if one is claiming to "love" somebody, how do they refuse their religion? Like we will see with Samson "You only hate me! You do not love me!" (14:16) whiny boo hoo... because he would not tell her the riddle.

"And the children of Israel did evil in the eyes of Jehovah, and served the Baals; and they forsook Jehovah the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they went after other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to

them; and they provoked Jehovah to anger. They forsook Jehovah and served Baal and Ashtaroth. And the anger of Jehovah burned against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies." (2:11-14)

And so like God promised through Joshua (23:16), that's exactly what He did...

"Wherever they went out, the hand of Jehovah was against them for evil, as Jehovah had said, and as Jehovah had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed" (2:15)

But God had appeared to them...

"And the Angel of Jehovah (another expression for Jesus appearing in a theophany) came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: I led you up from Egypt and brought you into the land of which I had sworn to your fathers; and I said, I will never break My covenant with you. And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall pull down their altars. But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? Therefore I also have said, I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you. And it came about, when the Angel of Jehovah spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept. Thus they called the name of that place Bochim; and they sacrificed there unto Jehovah." (2:1-5)

But when Joshua died, and all the leaders concurrent with Joshua, a new generation rose up

"who had not known Jehovah nor the work which He had done for Israel" (2:10)

God would raise up judges to lead them, but

"they would not heed their judges, but they committed adultery with other gods" (2:17)

Or if God raised up a judge that they obeyed, then when that judge died,

"...they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, by going after other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They HAVE NOT FAILED FROM THEIR OWN DOINGS NOR FROM THEIR STUBBORN WAY" (2:19)

Israel had promised Joshua...

"Far be it from us to forsake Jehovah to serve other gods... We...will serve Jehovah, for He is our God" (Josh24:16,18b)

But, since this was the way Israel was choosing to go, God made a new promise...

"I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua has left when he died, so that through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the way of Jehovah, to walk in it as their fathers have kept it, or not." (2:21-22)

Some will object: BUT... GRAEEEESSSS!!! Isn't God a "gracious" God? Paul addresses that...

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Let it not be! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" (Rom6:1-2)

In Egypt Israel had cried out to God for deliverance; God delivered them. Now they are rejecting Him? Even animals don't do that. The last cat I had, when he had been nursed back to health where another cat had bested him and chomped into his hind paw and it got infected; the rest of his life he was always loyal. I have seen dogs who had been rescued from abuse; loyal to the new (kind) master who was now caring for them. But Israel, rescued from Egypt, led "by the hand" (Ps77:20) through the wilderness, shown God's awesome works, given a land, given victories over their enemies.

They "FORSOOK JEHOVAH" (2:12)

So... why is it that there are preachers today who proclaim that "God accepts you JUST AS YOU ARE!" God "don't make no junk". You are of "great value" to God. God's "graeesss" accepts you and you DON'T NEED TO CHANGE A THING. And so, that which calls itself "church" lives AMONG the world, LIKE the world, FOR the world, refusing to...

"be holy (separated) for I am holy" (1Pt1:16)

"Therefore, Come out from among them and be separate (holy), says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." (2Co6:17)

God's intent was to let Israel fully possess the land progressively, not all at once, "lest the beasts of the field become too numerous" (De7:22) But He did not intend or desire for it to take the 400 years that it did through to David's reign. But because of how Israel was, He didn't commission Joshua to stick around for its completion...

"Therefore Jehovah left those nations, without driving them out quickly; nor did He deliver them into the hand of Joshua" (2:23)

Testing of Israel (Judges 3:1-11)

"Now these are the nations which Jehovah left, that He might test Israel by them...

"Thus the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons; and they served their gods. And the children of Israel did evil in the eyes of Jehovah. They forgot Jehovah their God, and served the Baals and groves." (vs1,5-7)

In vs22 of the previous chapter God is leaving the surrounding nations in order to "test" Israel, to see whether or not they will follow God. In the first couple of verses of this chapter, if you read what we didn't quote, the surrounding nations also served to "test" Israel militarily. Remember when David was to go against Goliath, he was given Saul's armor, but he took it back off because he had not "tested" it. (1Sa17:39) He was not trained as a military soldier.

Israel, also, at this point is not a military power. If what is said on other occasions is true, Israel really had no weapons to speak of. They had been slaves. They had wandered around in the wilderness. I'm not sure - what- they had for weapons under Joshua. But they did not have a history of military training and prowess. They did not have a line-of-succession of academies, leaders, trainers; nor a history of military superiority. Remember, more died of the hail stones than what Israel killed, during Joshua's long day. It was not Israel's prowess, but -God- who fought for them. They have been living a supernatural existence for over 70 years. Now they are in a new land, a new (non-Egyptian) culture that they are creating for themselves, the (supernatural) manna has stopped so they are living off the land again, and they must now also begin to learn how to (physically) defend themselves. How are tactics learned? By -doing-. If I was faced with an aggressor, I'd be in trouble; I've never learned how to fight. In high-school PE during the 'wrestling' segment I was out with medical excuse for treatments to a bad wrist, from when a broken arm healed. How do boxers learn to fight? They get in the ring and 'spar', the coach gives pointers, they train, bulk up, get physically fit, etc. Something I do know: How does one play the piano? Lessons and PRACTICE. -Doing-

You see... being 'armed' is not sin. Knowing self-defense is a good idea. Jesus used several such examples about the "strong man" guarding his own house and goods. (Mt12:29, Mk3:27, Lk11:21) And as He was ready to be crucified, and giving advice for how the disciples should survive on their own as they will be travelling around the world once He is gone, He also suggests being armed; to buy a sword. (Lk22:36) In other words, in the Wild West Christians could expect to appropriately wear 6-shooters on their hips; and in today's culture, for whatever part of the world in which a

Believer finds themselves, it would not be "un-Christian" to have a means of self-defense. "Trusting the Lord" does not mean to lie down and invite the aggressor, in a normal secular non-persecution setting, "Here, shoot me!" As this is being written, recently Spokane has seen a lot of hold-ups at drug stores and espresso stands. Recently, one espresso stand was held up, and the barista pulled out a gun she had behind the counter, stuck it in the face of the would-be robber, and defended herself. In God's economy, she could just as easily have been a Christian, and been 'pleasing' to God. God judges murder and other crime, and supports people defending themselves; even if the burglar gets killed in the scuffle. (Ex22:2)

And so, even though Israel is rebellious, we see Rom8:28 in play. Israel is disobeying God, so He leaves some of the pagan nations in tact to test Israel. But as God has a "purpose" and causes all things to "work together for good" for His own, these remaining nations will also serve to -train- Israel, to eventually, under David, become a force to be reckoned with in that region of the world.

However, this is pretty much the -only- redeeming factor to Israel for the next period of time, because...

They intermarry, they do evil, they forget the Lord, they serve the baals and groves. Baal and Ashtoreth were gods and goddesses of sexual pleasure and fertility. The groves were where demons were worshipped; just as they are today for the Skull-n-Bones, voodoo and other societies

And so God brings the king of Mesopotamia against them, whom they serve. In this case "serve" likely means -taxation-. Certain percentage of the profit of the land going into the oppressor's granaries; taken by force. Israel is in servitude for eight years. Israel cries out to God (like they did in Egypt), and God raises up Othniel.

Interesting, isn't it, how Israel runs off in their own way; they -FORGET- God; but then when trouble comes, suddenly their collective memories are -REFRESHED-. They suddenly REMEMBER GOD in their troubles.

First time out God raises up a known quantity. Remember who Othniel is? When Israel asks God who should go first to start conquering, God says Judah. As they are in conquest mode, Caleb gives an incentive: Whoever captures Kirjath Sepher gets to marry my daughter. (1:12) Othniel does so. (1:13) And Othniel is Caleb's nephew. Caleb knew the Lord and loved God, one of the two (Joshua and Caleb) who did not rebel at Kadesh Barnea. Caleb was the one who asked Joshua, "give me this mountain" and perhaps God will give me victory. (Josh14:12) Loving and trusting in God seems to run in this particular family.

As Caleb was earlier, Othniel is now. And it says "the Spirit of Jehovah came upon him" (vs10) And God gave victory; and the land has rest. (vs11)

Another thing to notice as we start into this book. Notice that Israel is in trouble for eight years. And when Othniel comes and leads Israel to victory, they have rest for 40 years, until Othniel's death. Then Israel is going to revert (next lesson) to their old ways. We are going to notice a pattern of so-many-years in bondage, and when the deliverer rises up, so-many-years of peace and rest.

Israel starts out with a relatively 'short' 8 years trouble, compared to a 'greater' 40 years peace. The time of peace is longer than the time under distress. By the time we come to the end, to Samson the last judge, it will be 40 years of bondage, compared to a shorter 20 years of peace; where Israel's history then sees Samuel, Saul, David and so forth. But even those 20 years of 'peace' are filled with trouble. As Israel continues to rebel, the troubles are more and more, and the peace is less and less.

Ehud & Shamgar (*Judges 3:12-31*)

"And the children of Israel again did evil in the eyes of Jehovah. So Jehovah strengthened Eglon king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the eyes of Jehovah. And he gathered to himself the sons of Ammon and Amalek, went and struck Israel, and took possession of the City of Palm Trees. And the children of Israel served Eglon king of Moab eighteen years." (vs12-14)

Israel has had peace for 40 years under Othniel. Othniel dies, and Israel again does evil. 40 years, the period of time Israel was in the wilderness for their rebellion at Kadesh Barnea; the period of time for a new generation to be born and grow into adulthood. A new generation 'in charge'.

Caleb's family apparently knew how to train up their children; Caleb's nephew Othniel was righteous. God had commanded...

"And these Words which I am commanding you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." (De6:6-9)

Not only is Israel sinning against God with their idols, they are also training up their children in the pagan ways. They are not like the Rechabites during the days of Jeremiah, whose father commanded them not to drink wine, and to live a nomadic lifestyle. When Jeremiah sits them down, puts wine in front of them and says, "Drink wine!", they refuse. (Jer35) Whereupon Jeremiah uses them as an example to the rest of Judah of their faithfulness to their father's commands...but Israel is not obeying God as the Rechabites did their father.

Godly wisdom is to...

"Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Pr22:6)

"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but nurture them in the discipline and admonition of the Lord." (Eph6:4)

Peter says that Noah was "one of eight" (2Pt2:5) For all the evangelizing that Noah did to the world before the flood, apparently he messed up with his own children. What of the incident of Ham, the father of Canaan. (Gen9:22) Evil Ham begot the evil Canaanites whom God had to deal with through Israel; and yet it is the Canaanites with whom Israel is now sharing in idolatry. He was also the great grandfather of Nimrod; and how

soon after the flood was it that Nimrod began the Babylon system of global religion, even though Noah was still alive at the time. As the patriarch, did Noah not have control/influence on his 'family'?

Samuel, who anointed David; if David was characterized by the "heart of God", and Samuel was the one who anointed David; is not the anointer higher than the anointee? And yet, Samuel's own sons were too corrupt, the people didn't want his sons leading them; they asked for a king. (1Sa8:3-5) For as great as Samuel was in leading the nation of Israel, yet his fathering skills seem to have been lacking. Or were they like Esau, known to be evil from the womb?

There is an aspect of parents training up children. There is also the individual heart. Judgment is based on the individual's -own- heart, not the parent or child on behalf of each other. (De24:16) Just because a parent is one way, does not guarantee the child will be like the parent. (Ezk18,33) As Paul teaches,

"So then each of us shall give account concerning himself to God."
(Rom14:12)

But how many parents sluff off? Where their children -could- be raised up to be good, they slack off and allow the world to raise them in the world's pagan ways. And then when the child grows up to adulthood, they wonder why they "turned out" bad.

-Somebody- WILL train the children. The question is: WHO?

When Israel cried out to God from under their burdens, they would turn to God. They would feign obeisance to God. They would carry out the obligatory sacrifices and feasts; but that's all it was: OBLIGATION. They did not "love Jehovah" with all their hearts "IN EVERY WAY" (De6:5) Had they had such a love for the Most High, their children would have picked up on their heart's fervor. It is said that you can tell people by the nature and temperament of their pets. Even moreso the nature and spirit of their children. No matter how clever adults think they are, their children -know- them. And whatever the parents are in their -true- hearts is what their children tend to pick up on, and become. Parents who wring their hands, "I did everything I could, but they still turned out rebellious"... Well... NO YOU DIDN'T. They turned out, pretty much, JUST LIKE YOU TRAINED THEM!

Godliness is clung to or repudiated in marriage. (3:6, 1Co7:39) It is also maintained or rejected generationally in 'how' the parents raise their children. God spoke of the "third and fourth generations of those who hate [God]" (Ex20:5) and of His goodness: to "thousands" of those who follow God, keeping His commandments. (Ex20:6, De5:10)

However, it's not that -all- of Israel is sinning. Even in Elijah's time God assures him that there are "left in Israel seven thousand, all whose knees

have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him" (1Ki19:18) The fact that there is somebody like Ehud to rise up indicates that there are -some-, the "few" (Mt7:14) who are following God... as though a "remnant" (Is1:9, 10:20)

So... who is it that is oppressing Israel this time? Moab, Ammon and Amalek. Primarily Moab. Who is Moab? Moab and Ammon are the two nations that resulted when Lot's two daughters got him drunk, after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and in his drunken state sired sons. (Ge19:37-38) Just because Israel is being disobedient doesn't mean that the ones being used to punish them are righteous. God uses all sorts to accomplish His will, "calling a bird of prey" to "execute [His] counsel" (Is46:11) Some years later God will be calling Nebuchadnezzar, "My servant" (Jer25:9, 27:6) at a time Nebuchadnezzar is punishing Israel, even though he hasn't yet humbled himself before God, to worship the Most High; as he will then become a Believer. (Dan4)

OK... so who is Ehud? He is of the tribe of Benjamin. (vs15) Apparently he is Israel's representative who has been regularly carrying the "tribute" (taxes) to the king of Moab.

Was he a "perfect specimen" of manhood? A -strong- man, who by his own strength is going to 'power' Israel through to victory due to his own intrinsic talents? He had some sort of -limitation- in his right hand. Most of the translations I have at easy access say he was "left-handed". But the Hebrew says nothing of anything being "left". But it's kinda tough to figure out the exact meaning. The Geneva says his right hand was "lame". The LITV, as the vw-edition, "impeded". He has some sort of condition where his right hand was either retarded or somehow "less". It could be, in the mentality of some cultures where "everybody" who is "normal" is right-handed, they would have considered a left-handed person to be retarded. Or, it could have been that he genuinely had a 'problem' with the right hand. The way it makes a point of explaining the manner in which he hides the sword so that he can pull it out with the 'left' hand suggests that, for practical purposes, he might have been the original "one-armed-bandit". Not a fully "able-bodied" man. Perhaps he was chosen by the enemy as seeming to NOT BE A THREAT due to his one-handedness? A -safe- person to be walking into the king's presence to present the tribute? Perhaps not? 'Just trying to speculate as to the possibilities of the situation.

In other words, God does not need something spectacular to fulfill His purposes. God does not save with MIGHTY IMPLEMENTS of FULLY FUNCTIONING military prowess, "for the battle is Jehovah's" (1Sa17:47)

Last lesson we speculated, wondering 'what' Israel used for weapons. This account seems to support the conclusion that they didn't have much in the way of weaponry, because it says that Ehud "made" himself a sword. (vs16) A cubit (18 inches) is a -short- 'sword', or a -long- 'dagger'?

You can read the account for the details, how the fat closes over the sword and the contents of the king's intestines come out.

But the thing that somebody like me takes note of is the intrigue. It's one thing to watch or read about spy stories where people are sneaking around and taking out the bad guys. But how does an honest (Godly) person conduct covert operations right under the nose of the enemy, in broad daylight, inside the enemy's camp, kill the king, calmly/coolly lock the doors, walk through the midst of the enemy without raising suspicion, and then once at safe distance, blow the shofar to rally the troops. (vs27) How many of those 18 years has Ehud been the taxation messenger? He's got only one (1) good arm. According to the enemy he's "harmless". But when God raises him up to be the deliverer, that one good arm is - enough-.

Another during that time, Shamgar. They still haven't done much to upgrade their national weapons cache. He uses an ox goad to kill 600 of the Philistines. Compared to military grade weapons, an ox goad is a relatively lighter weight implement, intended to 'poke' the back of an ox to make it go faster. Somewhat like: last summer when the neighbor's vicious dog, who on another occasion already had bitten me (although I was wearing my motorcycle jacket which protected me from harm), would be at the fence snarling at me when I needed to run the mower, I would carry this dandelion poker at-the-ready as protection, should the dog get loose and get it into her head to climb over the fence and after me. A garden implement as a potential 'weapon'.

It doesn't matter to God....great or small; God is not limited. As Jonathan would say centuries later...

"...for nothing restrains Jehovah, to save by many or by few." (1Sa14:6)

Deborah & Barak (*Judges 4-5*)

"When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did evil in the eyes of Jehovah. And Jehovah sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth Hagoyim. And the children of Israel cried out unto Jehovah; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron, and for twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel." (vs1-3)

80 years of peace, Ehud dies, and Israel again does what it knows best. "evil" before God. Notice there no longer seems to be the need to enumerate -what- the evil is. It's what they do all the time. It's what they know well. As a prophet will say in future days,

"Both hands are on evil to do it well" (Mic7:3)

So this time God sends 900 chariots. (For perspective: Pharaoh followed Israel to the Red Sea with 600 chariots. Ex14:7) In previous lessons we have observed Israel's refusal to get rid of the chariots of the "lowlands" (1:19) So now God sends chariots. Israel did not pre-empt the enemy, so what they failed to do, now ends up turning against them.

Who is the deliverer this time? A woman? Well... two (2) women. And ooh how today's women preachers love this one! Paul teaches,

"Let a woman learn in silence with all subjection. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to usurp authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not beguiled, but the woman being beguiled, fell into transgression." (1Ti2:11-14)

But when they read of Deborah, they claim to -not- 'understand' what Paul is saying. They -really- 'like' their positions of authority. So they figure out how to make the Bible 'supportive' of what they are doing.

They also look at Miriam, but ignore how she led "all the -WOMEN-" with timbrels and dances (Ex15:20); as Paul instructs the older women to teach the younger women. (1Ti2:3-5) Josiah the -boy- king, when he hears the Law read, sends to Huldah the prophetess. (2Ki22) Josiah became king into similar circumstances as what Deborah was prophetess; Israel had forsaken God and was serving the Baals; and the men were messed up Big Time.

Israel is "evil"... BIG TIME. Deborah is judging. Where are the men? Why is no -man- in charge? Well... if Deborah was appointing somebody to lead the nation into battle, would it not be assumed that she would seek to pick the most qualified person to carry out the task? Somebody with leadership skills and a 'go-gettumm' heart? So, Barak was the "best" she could find? He wimpers...

"...if you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!" (vs8)

Wimp! Cowering yellow-bellied chicken-face! Backbone of a jellyfish! Coward! What other descriptive terms can we come up with? Oh yeah... Mama's boy! Hangin' on to the skirts of a WOMAN! Sorry ladies! Not trying to denigrate you... but you know how it is... this is warfare... a job for a true man's man, a he-man; of Friday-night-Smack-Down, "I'll be back" Schwarzenegger Terminator-type visage.

Deborah agrees to go along and tells him...

"..nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey...for Jehovah will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." (vs9)

Which... if you read these two chapters, you will see how Jael invites Sisera into her tent, gives him milk to drink, and when he falls asleep, thinking he's safe from the chasing Israelis, she takes a tent stake and pins his head, through the temples, to the ground. And then invites Barak in to see her handiwork. (vs17-22)

And notice the summation of the day's events. Barak is not mentioned as the 'victor'.

"So on that day -GOD- subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the sons of Israel" (vs23)

Notice in their victory song a confirmation of our past observations. Israel didn't have much in the way of weapons.

"...not a shield or spear was seen among the forty thousand in Israel" (5:8)

It was -GOD- who "routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak" (vs15) Other than that, and the fact that Israel then chased the enemy, the narrative doesn't give any details. And nobody recorded the day on a video device.

So, let's go back to this "woman leader" thing. Barak might have physically led the men into battle, but Deborah was the 'leader' in Israel; so-to-speak, calling the shots.

When somebody rose up to lead, 40,000 men followed; the men were willing to follow. But Barak was not a leader. He was a wimp. When the land had "forty years" of rest (5:31), it makes no mention of Barak's death. The 'land' was quiet, and then the next chapter opens with Israel again doing evil. Barak does not rate even a memorial mention at the end of this period of peace.

And if Barak was the "best" they had... well... God is not limited when there is no man.

"And He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor. Therefore His own arm brought salvation unto Him; and His righteousness, it sustained Him." (Is59:16)

God wrought the victory, channeled through two women. But these were not women who were on power trips. Deborah does not rate a memorial mention at her death, either.

Let's go back to Miriam. Remember what we observed, how she led "all the women" in song and dances. But what happened when she decided to challenge Moses' authority? After all, wasn't Moses her "baby brother"; and she's the "big sister"? God judged her with leprosy. (Num12:7-10) In the case with Miriam, it was not like with Deborah. There -was- a man, chosen by God, who was leading and doing a good job; and Miriam overstepped her bounds.

During Deborah's day, Israel was soooo spiritually destitute and bankrupt, there weren't any men.

Sorta like when I was in high school, my dad pastored this little Baptist church on the south side of the railroad tracks in Mandan, ND. During those years the church was small...tiny. When there were visitors a 'big' crowd might have been 25 people. I was -the- pianist. And other than my dad (the pastor), and a couple of us guys (high school age), there was only one (1) man; and somewhat hen-pecked at that. Otherwise the church consisted of women. A woman was the Sunday school superintendant, and was up front 'leading'. The single man would certainly do things, when asked to...but he was not a 'leader'. He was a 'nice' and pleasant man. But did not have it within him to take charge in leadership. My dad would ask him to do various things, like lead in prayer, and such things, to -behave- like a leader. But if nobody yanked his chain, he was content to be quiet like a 'mouse'. One of you on this mailing list (my cousin) would remember back and be able to confirm to the rest that my dad was NOT the sort of person to give a woman much leeway. But given the physical make-up of that congregation, women were in leadership.

It seems like Deborah found herself in just such a situation, as well.

But what passes for female leadership today, at least what I've seen, does not fit the same scenario. What I see today is women who, rather than being -given- their positions by God, have -taken- their roles upon themselves. There have been the Jezebel/harlot-like ones like Tammy Fay Bakker, Jan Crouch, and others I've seen on the "worship" channels whose names I don't presently recall; having been freshly to the beauty salon, wearing low-cut tops, sexy getups and tall heels...the "outward

adornment"; but there seems to be no ascertainable "hidden person of the heart" of the "meek and quiet spirit" (1Pt3:3) As Paul exhorts women...

"...in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in appropriate apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, that which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works." (1Ti2:9-10)

What can -we- learn from this account?

First of all, before we get to that, notice the praise upon Jael...

"...blessed is she among women in the tent" (5:24b)

Thing is, I don't know of any 'rosaries' dedicated to her, like there are to Mary. (Lk1:28,42) Nor statues. Nor does Babylon call her "princess of heaven", or some other similar accolade, that I am aware of. Just making a little point here: If Mary was "blessed among women"; well... so was Jael.

But what can we learn?

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no work nor reasoning nor knowledge nor wisdom in Sheol where you go. I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happens to them all." (Ec9:10-11)

"When commanders lead in Israel, when the people willingly offer themselves, bless Jehovah." (5:2)

Out of the millions of Israel, what is 40,000 men? The enemy had chariots, but Barak and those following him were "sent on foot" (5:15) They put their own lives in jeopardy...

"Zebulun is a people who jeopardized their souls even to death" (5:18)

They didn't have chariots. They didn't have spears or shields. They were not equipped with the latest in technology. But they offered -themselves-. And -GOD- gave the victory.

As Paul says...

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God made it grow. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who causes growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and

another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it."
(1Co3:6-10)

This is all God wants from us: Willing 'faithful' (1Co4:2) vessels.

"For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much entreating that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first GAVE THEMSELVES TO THE LORD, and also to us through the will of God." (2Co8:3-5)

Like the story told by a missionary (to one of the African countries) decades ago: in the fall of the year the people would bring their baskets full of produce (for lack of money) and place them at the front of the meeting area as 'gifts' to God. This one young fellow walked up to the front with his basket, put the basket on the ground, and stepped into the basket and stood there. ...giving -himself- to God. That's it!

And so...

"the land was quiet forty years" (5:31)

Gideon (*Judges 6-8*)

"And the children of Israel did evil in the eyes of Jehovah. So Jehovah delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years, and the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. In the face of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains." (vs1-2)

"Same song 73rd verse the fly sat on the wall..." Only now, Israel is in deep trouble. The enemy comes and devastates the land. Israel has no way of feeding themselves, but what the enemy comes and destroys it all. So they revert to hiding their produce in caves, and Gideon was threshing wheat in the wine press, a place that could also be hidden from the enemy. (vs11)

God sends a prophet: God delivered you out of Egypt, drove out your enemies before you, and told you...

"do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But you have not obeyed My voice" (vs10)

And so, while Gideon is at work, the 'Angel of Jehovah' comes and sits under the tree. (vs11) And then appears to Gideon...

"JEHOVAH IS WITH YOU, YOU MIGHTY MAN OF VALOR" (vs12)
Two things here:

1) What a greeting! To me, this rates right up there with the greeting given to Daniel, calling Daniel one who was "greatly beloved" (Dan9:23, 10:11,19) To have what seems to be a 'stranger' come and call you a "man of valor"...!! when you are cowering away from the enemy... It gets your attention!

Not nearly at the same level, but... one of my uncles years ago, when I was in my 'young' adulthood, as I was beginning to forge ahead in ministry, 'music' at the time, called me a "man of God". That gave me a bit of a 'lift'. His meaning in saying it did not escape me. Once this ministry had been underway a few years, somebody labelled me a "prophet" (proclaimer). Somewhat of an outside 'confirmation' of what the Lord had already been doing. As I was preparing to marry what turned out to be the unequal yoke, one of her uncles (an unbeliever) taunted her, "So you're going to marry a -preacher-!" (I was only doing 'music' in those days; I was known for being a 'musician', was performing professionally in Vancouver, was beginning my career, with not an inkling of becoming a 'preacher')

The Lord's encouragement, thus, doesn't necessarily -have- to be through the mouth of a Believer. God and satan (according to Job) have conversations about us, and satan likes to 'accuse' us before God.

(Re12:10) And so it is only natural that we will receive encouragement that we are headed in the right direction, from the taunts of satan's demons and through his unbelievers. Thus, also, apparently the demons often know, before we do, what the Lord is leading us into. But in this account, it is not a prophet who approaches Gideon, like we read about many others throughout Scripture; but God Himself, the "Angel of Jehovah", Jesus Christ. (Ex23:23, 1Co10:4b)

2) Notice how God approaches Gideon. He does not arrive in a bolt of lightning, with razzle dazzle bright shining clothes. He's just a 'guy' sitting there under the tree. Gideon doesn't realize that He is God. "Oh my lord..." In this case "lord", a word that might just as easily mean "sir" or "mister", as a term of respect for -any- 'man' one is being polite with, addressed certainly in the 2nd person, "if Jehovah (3rd person) is with us". Gideon is speaking with this (stranger) 'man' -about- Jehovah, as if Jehovah was somebody -different- from the 'man' he is talking with. Somewhat like the woman of Samaria, until Jesus then comes right out and says, "I Am, the one speaking to you" (Jn4:26) Gideon is going to have a more graphic display in a moment.

This 'man' says...

"Go in this might of yours, and you shall deliver Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?" (vs14)

Oh, how can I do that?! I come from one of the 'least' families of insignificance in my tribe. (vs15)

"Surely I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man" (vs16)

God...? Is it really -You-??? (vs17)

Gideon is starting to get a bit of an inkling. His spirit is stirring within him, that this is no ordinary 'man' with whom he is having this conversation. So he goes and prepares a sacrifice (please read the passage) and God touches the sacrifice, sets it ablaze, and He "departed out of his sight" (vs21)

"And Gideon perceived that He was the Angel of Jehovah. And Gideon said, Alas, O Lord Jehovah! For I have seen the Angel of Jehovah face to face. And Jehovah said to him, Peace unto you; do not fear, you shall not die." (vs22-23)

And so Gideon erects an altar to God, and calls it "Jehovah Shalom" or "God is Peace". (vs24)

And just like God would appear to Solomon years later, after he had dedicated the temple; so now, after Gideon has started the process of

making things right with God by building an altar, God comes to Gideon at night. If we're going to make things right, we must first start by tearing down the altars to Baal. After all, is that not the 'reason' for all the trouble, in the first place? How can we have victory over the enemy, due to idolatry, if the idolatry is left in place? The idolatry must be gotten rid of first (repentance), before we can expect deliverance (salvation). And notice 'whose' altar is to be torn down. The one HIS OWN FATHER had erected. (vs25) Their own 'family' idols. God tells him to tear down the altar, chop down the grove, and use the materials to build a right-proper altar to Jehovah. (vs26)

Since Gideon is scared of family and neighbors, he does this thing by night. After all, to go against one's own father?? Indeed! As God is dispensing judgment in Ezekiel, the command is given to go and kill, and to "begin at My sanctuary". (Ezk9:6) Jesus said,

"First remove the beam from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the twig from your brother's eye." (Mt7:3-5)

This is like I have suggested in other contexts, perhaps a pastor finally has the vision to cleanse the wickedness out of the church; so he gets some men together and a good-sized truck, they back up to the church, somebody climbs up and puts a cable around the steeple, and they pull it over. They open the doors, open the lid to the dumpster, and start hauling stuff out, to go to the dump: the crosses, the altar implements with the labels to the pagan Babylonish gods, the idolatrous images and statues to "jesus" and Mary, the candles, the incense box. Anything that hints of paganism. Perhaps it is during the winter season? That big tree that completely fills up the platform; that, too! From satan's music, the guitars and drums. EVERYTHING.

And everybody lived HAPPILY EVER-AFTER! Right? Oh Good! Let's now repent of our idolatry and resume worship of the Most High.

NOT QUITE!

WHO DARES SACRIFICE TO GOD??
www.a-voice.org/portions/05-24-05.htm

WHO DID THIS? Bring him out so we can string him up, because he tore down the worship to Baal! HE DESERVES TO DIE!

Wait just a minute...!!! Is this not Israel? According to God's Law, in what direction was the death penalty supposed to be aimed? Somebody comes along, producing 'signs' and says: Let's worship other gods. Don't follow that person. Furthermore, the person who does that...

"...SHALL BE PUT TO DEATH, because he has spoken apostasy away from Jehovah your God, who is bringing you out of the land of Egypt and is

redeeming you from the house of bondage, to thrust you out of the way in which Jehovah your God has commanded you to walk. Thus you shall put away the evil from your midst." (De13:5)

This is how far the apostasy has progressed in Israel. And is that not pretty much what the situation is today? In 'free' countries the True Christians are castigated as being "hateful", and some are imprisoned for preaching Godly principles about such things as abortion or sodomy. In Muslim countries those who embrace the label "christian" unto themselves -are-killed. Israel was doing just opposite of what God had commanded.

"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil; who put darkness for light and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" (Is5:20)

Well, as it turns out, perhaps Gideon didn't need to worry so much about his father..? How does Joash reply?

"Would you plead for Baal? Would you deliver him? Let the one who would plead for him be put to death by morning! If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been torn down!" (vs31)

As God would do some years later when the Philistines had stolen the ark; they put it in the house of Dagon...

"And when those of Ashdod arose early the next day, behold, Dagon was fallen on his face to the earth before the ark of Jehovah. So they took Dagon and put him back on his place. And when they arose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of Jehovah. The head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were broken off on the threshold; only Dagon's torso was left to him." (1Sa5:3-4)

After Elijah had built the proper altar, and God's fire came down to consume the offering, what was the cry of the people?

"Jehovah, He is God! Jehovah, He is God!" (1Ki18:39)

And what did Elijah do with the prophets of Baal?

"And Elijah said to them, Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let one of them escape! So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and slaughtered them there." (vs40)

Well, the Midianites and Amalekites gather to do battle, and it says...

"...the Spirit of Jehovah clothed Gideon" (vs34)

Most other translations miss out. They say the Holy Spirit "came upon" Gideon. But the word is like "clothing" that one "puts on" and is "fully

covered". When it is -God- who 'anoints' for service, He does a complete job. One's whole being comes under God's direction.

But Gideon is still unsure. He wants to be sure that he's not just experiencing a 'feeling'. (You know: like today's charismatics don't look at - facts-, they let loose from reality and trust their emotions) So as Gideon tests God's Word with the fleece, one night the combination from God comes true. But supposing there was something special going on in the threshing floor, perhaps breezes or this or that. Let's test the opposite. If 'natural' phenomenon caused the fleece to be wet from dew, but not the surrounding area; then the opposite will not happen on-its-own, unless superintended by an outside (unnatural) force. And we know the outcome. God superintended.

And notice that Gideon is using his "mind". He is testing God with a "sound mind" (Rom12:3, 2Ti1:7, Tit1:8, 2:6, 1Pt4:7) On another occasion God will invite of Israel, "Come and let us -REASON- together" (Is1:18) What Gideon did with the fleece was not all that different from technical "troubleshooting" techniques. If one method is implemented, let's test to be sure that it was the 'method', and not some other external force or condition. Make sure that the parameter we are adjusting truly -is- the factor that creates the observed outcome.

In Gideon's case: 'God, is this really You?' God will say to Israel on another occasion, "test Me now with this" (Mal3:10) and see what the outcome is.

And just in case he needs anymore encouragement, God sends Gideon

- - - -

"Therefore I run in this manner: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." (1Co9:26-27)

Anyone who has been to Sunday school knows what comes next, so we won't go over that here. But when the Lord "has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand", how is God doing it? Turning Midian's swords on each other. (7:22)

And so, as the enemy is being routed, Gideon summons Ephraim to "seize" the territory that is being vacated. (7:24) But then, when it's over Ephraim -complains-? Why didn't you call us to fight? (8:1) Well, HELLO!! what was that in 7:24? Some need to fight. Others need to take possession. As there would be a dispute during David's time about those who fought, vs those who guarded the stuff back at the base. (1Sa25:13,30:24) As Paul says...

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God made it grow." (1Co3:6)

Each part of the body has its function. Because one person is doing one thing, the other parts should not complain that they didn't get to have the glory.

"For also the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He intended. And if they were all one member, where would the body be?" (1Co12:14-19)

Sometimes one body part needs help from another. As Gideon and his troops are giving chase, they get hungry, and ask for assistance from Succoth (8:5) and Penuel (8:8) Just some bread. These communities refused. What a fine display of familial support!?! Perhaps they don't have much to spare, due to seven years of rampage? They are not being asked to fight; just lend a hand to those who are risking their lives. If they want peace, will they not at least lift a hand to support that process..? Nope! So when Gideon returns triumphantly, he teaches the leaders of those places a lesson with the briars of the wilderness. (8:16)

So, as in the past, when a person led Israel to victory, and they became the defacto 'leader', Israel wanted the same of Gideon.

"Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, Rule over us, both you and your son, and your son's son also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian" (8:22)

No! "I shall not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; JEHOVAH SHALL RULE OVER YOU" (8:23)

So far, so good! But...

Gideon requests, and they give him, gold from their spoils of war. Gideon takes it and makes an ephod, sets it up...

"And all Israel committed adultery with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house" (8:27)

There -already- was an ephod at Shiloh, the one made during Moses' time, which the Levitical priest wore. While Ex28 & 39 explain how it was made, I don't fully understand its function. When the priest wore it, with the names of the twelve tribes, he was bearing their names "before Jehovah" (Ex28:12,29); symbolically the priest was thus bearing Israel's 'judgment' before God through the ephod. (Ex28:30) David certainly used it to inquire of God. (1Sa23:9, 30:7) But I have never understood why David felt the need for the ephod. Could he not just -pray- to God, and receive an answer? But it was also an ephod that later in the book Micah will make one as part of the worship of his household idols, and when a Levite goes travelling by, will become part of the household and become the family priest....in idolatry. (Jdg17) I understand the symbolism as God intended; but I do not as an object to be SET-UP as an -object- unto itself. A kind of "vest" as an idol? Perhaps an oracle? But that's what they had.

And so, where Gideon exercises courage to tear down his father's Baal worship grove, and his father supports what he did; now that he has become 'big' in Israel, he essentially reverts back to idolatry. Whatever was made for God's worship at the tabernacle, people were not supposed to duplicate things for their own use. Shiloh was where the tabernacle was; not Ophrah.

And so, while Gideon was "clothed" with the Holy Spirit to deliver Israel, he apparently lays aside that clothing. And when he gets old and dies, the people revert to Baal.

Notice it says, "AS SOON AS" Gideon was dead, they turned back to Baal. Also, this was not some 'happenstance' that they 'slipped' back into idolatry. No! They made a very -conscious- choice:

"They -ESTABLISHED- Baal-Berith as their god" (8:33)

Ephraim whined: why didn't you call us? (even though he had) Succoth and Penuel refused to give assistance, even -while- they were being delivered. And after he dies, his body is barely cooled off and in the ground, and they are back to their old ways. They were the proverbial -dog- that "bites the hand that feeds it".

Abimelech (*Judges 9*)

"Then Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal (Gideon) went to Shechem, to his mother's brothers, and spoke with them and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying, Please speak in the ears of all the lords of Shechem: Which is better for you, for all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal to rule over you, or for one to rule over you? Remember that I am your own flesh and bone." (vs1-2)

This chapter is another in the litany of lessons on what happens when a man doesn't stick with just his wife, but also sires offspring by other women. Remember? Because Abraham sired Ishmael through the Egyptian servant woman, the troubles for Israel remain even today from those who wish to wipe them off the map. I don't know the circumstances, why Lot would get drunk as he did, two nights in a row, but Scripture tells us that when he got drunk, his daughters acquired seed from him to raise up the Moabites and Ammonites against Israel. You see... Israel's enemies are not 'strangers'. They are extended 'family' through illicit procreation. What a couple does, does not affect -just- 'them'; as if it is just -their- 'business', and others should keep their noses out of their personal intimate relationship. When offspring are the result, the implications can be far-reaching, into many years, even after their deaths.

Israel was warned about when they would have kings, that their kings should not "multiply" wives to themselves, as Solomon did...

"Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, that his heart not be turned aside..." (De17:17)

Of which Solomon is the prime example...

"And [Solomon] had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives thrust away his heart. For so it was, when Solomon was old, that his wives thrust his heart aside after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with Jehovah his God, as was the heart of his father David. For Solomon departed after Ashtaroth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the eyes of Jehovah, and did not fully follow after Jehovah, like his father David. And Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the children of Ammon. And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods." (1Ki11:3-8)

Gideon, the "mighty man of valor" who was the instrument of great victory against Midian, the one whom God was with, however, had "many wives" (8:30) In those cultures it was not considered 'wrong' to be polygamous. God even gave instructions for the case where a man might have more

than one wife, telling him to treat everyone equally, both the 'loved' and 'hated' wife. (De21:16-17) This 'family' resided at Ophrah. But it seems Gideon also did some travelling, and in Shechem, about 30-40 miles away, he also had a mistress, who bore him a son by the name of Abimelech. It says that Gideon lived in his own house (8:29); that's Ophrah. So if he lived in Ophrah, that means Abimelech was not part of the family. He was "that other son...over there" (perhaps? 'that we don't talk about?') Abimelech is the outcast (?) as far as Gideon's immediate family (of his multiple wives) is concerned..

So, Abimelech starts to stir up trouble. Hadn't his father, Gideon, said that -nobody- should rule over the people; not him nor his son; but -GOD- should rule over them? (8:23) So Abimelech goes to the lords of Shechem. If 'they' don't want to rule, I will. After all, Gideon was my father, and furthermore I am your flesh and bones. They agree; get him some operating expenses from the temple of Baal from which he hires a band of thugs... his 'army'. (vs4)

Now, so far, has there been any indication that Gideon's other (70) sons are making any moves to garner rulership power unto themselves? I don't see it in the passage. Up until now, when Gideon wrought victory, they wanted -him- to rule, and his sons. But he refused. And it seems that his family is a more peaceful humble sort. Remember from a previous lesson... children tend to be what their parents are... and Gideon had been of the attitude, 'Who, me?'

But Abimelech is not of that family. He was not raised by Gideon. And the fact that he accepts Baal-money for wages, means he also is not in tune with God. And like the proverb, "the wicked flee when no one pursues" (Pr28:1), Abimelech assigns imagined evil intentions upon those 70 sons, takes his band of thugs, goes and kills them all preemptively; all, except Jotham who escapes. Getting rid of the 'competition'; so he can rule, unchallenged. And the people of Shechem make him king. (vs6)

But Jotham escaped, and makes a coronation speech from the top of the mountain. (Please read it for yourselves) The essence is: Gideon put his own life in jeopardy in order to give you peace, but you have killed all his sons. If you have dealt with integrity, then have a peaceful reign and prosper. But if not, trouble is coming; Abimelech will be against Shechem, and Shechem will be against Abimelech. (vs16-20)

And so Abimelech rules. The first year... the second year. Abimelech is likely thinking that things are going pretty good. But just because God didn't bring calamity -immediately-, didn't mean that God -forgot- Abimelech's treachery. After three years God stirs things up. (vs22-23) (Again, please read for yourselves the details) The ambushes, the intrigue, and it seems that Abimelech is wiping out his enemies, until a woman drops a millstone on his head and crushes his skull. (vs53)

"Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father by killing his seventy brothers. And all the evil of the men of Shechem God returned upon their own heads, and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal." (vs56-57)

Now... while this chapter is written about Abimelech, it is really an extension of Gideon. God is merciful, but also...

"...by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons and the sons' sons to the third and the fourth generation."
(Ex34:7b)

God punishes the guilty, and does not punish fathers and sons for each other's sins...

"Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall the sons be put to death for their fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin."
(De24:16)

So what does it mean, "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons"? Is not Abimelech a prime example. Yes, Gideon was called a "mighty man of valor"; that God was "with" him. (6:12) And he "willingly" (5:2,9) gave himself to the task of saving Israel. He obeyed God. But was he -perfect-before God?

Of David it would be said that he had "done what was right" before God "except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1Ki15:5) David was a man "after [God's] own heart" (1Sa13:14) Solomon came through Bathsheba, and God "loved" him. (2Sa12:24) But in a round-about way, coming through Bathsheba, did that not provide the foundation for Solomon, in turn, to grow up and have the 1000 women who turned his heart away from God. David's sin, through the wife/mother who bore Solomon; that's at least the "second generation".

Certainly, both Solomon and Abimelech were their 'own' men. They were responsible for their 'own' actions and behavior, and died their own deaths with their own judgments. But what were the influences under which they were raised? What sort of character did that build? What 'tendencies' did that instill into them?

Gideon obeyed God and redeemed Israel. But then he made the ephod and reverted to idolatry. Which deity was the ephod -to-? Was it an attempt to 'duplicate' the ephod that was at Shiloh, towards Jehovah God? If it was, it was not legitimate, because God was quite explicit that those things made for the tabernacle were not to be duplicated. If they were claiming to worship Jehovah, they were not doing so in God's way, thus in reality they were worshipping something or someone -else-.

God was clear: "But you shall regularly seek out the 'place' where Jehovah your God chooses, out of all your tribes" (at the time, that was Shiloh) "There you shall bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand" (not where you want to set things up) "You shall not do as we are doing here today; every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes" (De12:5,6,8)

As it so-happens (as I look it up on a map right here), Shiloh was pretty much right-smack-dab between Ophra and Shechem; on a 'straight line' between Ophra and Shechem. In their regular journeys, the tabernacle was right 'there' where they were. Gideon didn't 'need' to make a worship aid. He was used to travelling to Shechem to visit his mistress? Shiloh was directly right along the way there. So, why did he make this ephod? After his experience in being "clothed" with the Holy Spirit, did he suddenly feel he had the gift to behave like a priest? I don't know. Just asking. If he could make the journey to visit the mistress, it was only half the distance to the tabernacle. David did this all the time (we won't look up specifics now). He would go to the tabernacle, or when circumstances required, he would ask the -priest- to bring the ephod, so he could enquire of God. But he never took it upon himself to -make- an ephod 'different' from the one at the tabernacle.

So what can we learn from all this?

First of all, God does not require -perfection- in order to use us, if we are 'willing' to follow. We are seeing how imperfect Gideon was; but God used him in a big way to deliver Israel.

And then, what we do in our own 'privacy' -does- matter. We may think it will hurt nobody but ourselves, that it is nobody else's business what we do. But when it involves procreation, it -does- matter. What will progeny do long after the parents' death, for which the parents' behavior will have laid the ground work? They may totally disobey God and cause all sorts of grief; but how much of their disobedience is -caused-, even if 'partially', by the parents? They may suffer their own consequences of God's judgment. But how much of what guided them to their rebellion started with the parents' unfaithfulness in their formative years?

Adam and Eve likely didn't think their disobedience of God would affect anybody but themselves. But because of them, the whole world "lies in wickedness" (1Jn5:19b)

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to every person, because everyone sinned." (Rom5:12)

Some people like to excuse away their sin: The devil made me do it. With what we are studying of Gideon, perhaps we might expand on that saying

with: Adam made me do it. Or perhaps: My parents made me do it. We are each accountable for ourselves before God.

"So then each of us shall give account concerning himself to God."
(Rom14:12)

But seeing what we see from this lesson, perhaps we can feel a certain sense of relief that: What we are is not totally our fault; because we had nothing to do with our birth into this world, or our upbringing.

However, once we grow into adulthood, and come to know God, does it not behove us to behave righteously for the sake of all who follow us. Yes, -I- am (individually) answerable to God. But how many other lives is my life impacting, and to what degree am I 'responsible' for their outcome?

Cain asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Ge4:9)

As a matter of fact: Yes I am!

Amen!

Jephthah (*Judges 10-12*)

"And the children of Israel cried out unto Jehovah, saying, We have sinned against You, because we have both forsaken our God and served the Baals! So Jehovah said to the children of Israel, Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites and from the sons of Ammon and from the Philistines? Also the Sidonians and Amalekites and Maonites have oppressed you; and you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hand. Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress." (vs10-14)

Abimelech follows Gideon with three years of political upheavals; as the people have already reverted to idolatry. There's 45 years of Tola and Jair; for whom no details are given. (10:1-5) But after them Israel "again did evil in the eyes of Jehovah" (vs6) And so now trouble is coming from both directions: Philistines and Ammonites.

How many times has this see-saw been going up and down? If one includes all the rebellion in the wilderness under Moses, one begins to lose count. And from His reply it is obvious, God has also had it "up to - here-" with their behavior. God has always been the one 'stable' factor in their existence. And yes, as a jilted lover,

"the anger of Jehovah burned against Israel" (vs7)

Israel -knows- what they have done. It is not that they are ignorant and don't "know any better". It is not that they don't know the doctrine. It is not like God is requiring all that much of them, or that following Him is 'difficult'. They KNOW they have been worshiping idols. But they also know that 'idolatry' is not their only fault. The reason they are bowing down to idols is because they have "forsaken [their] God" (vs10)

So, as God essentially is telling them: You've forsaken Me? I also forsake you. You want your other gods? Go to them now in your times of trouble. Let -them- deliver you!

Like an adulterous wife who leaves her husband and runs off with a lover. Things turn sour, and so she comes running back to husband. I'll do whatever you want... just... take me back... pleeeeeease!!!

And Israel cries out: Do to us whatever You want. Punish us. But here... we are tossing out the idols, and we are back with You. (vs15-16) But the events have already been set in motion. War is looming. And so who is going to lead Israel? What sort of Godly, holy person, of high credentials and pristine family background?

What is this? All we have, who is qualified, is this illegitimate son of Gilead? The son of a prostitute? What did the Gileadites do to him? You don't belong here, you bastard. Go on! Get outta here! But now the Ammonites are closing in: Hey! Jephthah, ol' buddy, ol' pal: come and lead us into battle.

Does not Jephthah's response sound eerily similar to God's...

"Did you not hate me, and drive me out of my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?"

Was it -Jephthah's- 'fault' that the circumstances of his birth were what they were? Did -he-, prior to his own conception, enter his father's mind and force him to have an immoral relationship? Silliness! Well, they reply...

"That is why we have turned again to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the sons of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead." (vs8)

"THAT IS WHY..." ???

Because they hated him, "that is why" they are now asking him to lead them? I don't think so! Truth is: They are in deep doodoo; in a big pickle; and have heard God's rejection. They have tried to make deals with God: Do anything to us... just save us. Now they're doing the same to Jephthah. And so they swear a deal with Jephthah: If they experience victory under his leadership, they will vote him "president". (or whatever they would call their "head")

And so, before just charging blindly into battle, Jephthah sends a delegation to attempt to negotiate. Find out 'why' Ammon is after them. And it turns out to be something not at all dissimilar to what is going on in Israel today, between Israel and the so-called 'Palestinians'. (Please read the passage for the details)

You're living in territory that's ours! We want it back!

So Jephthah gives them a little history lesson. The territory never belonged to Ammon. But those who lived there attacked Israel, so in battle Israel was victorious; and now the territory is the spoils of war.

"And now Jehovah the God of Israel has dispossessed the Amorites before His people Israel; should you then possess it? Will you not possess whatever Chemosh your god gives you to possess? Thus, whatever Jehovah our God dispossesses before us, we will possess" (11:23-24)

Just like today... the world wishes to push Israel back to the pre-1967 borders. Not to mention that Israel has prior millennia of history in the land, which the Arabs do not. But even if they didn't, in 1967 Israel's enemies

were about to attack, Israel was victorious, took territory as a result of the victory, which, by all historical standards of warfare, they now 'possess'. They are "possessors" and "dwellers" of the land; not "occupiers"; as though the "palestinians" (an entity that has never before existed, and even today is a pseudonym for what began as a band of terrorists who roamed from country to country) were the rightful owners; as though Israel "stole" it from them. The land is Israel's, by birthright, through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Ex6:8, Ge15:18, 17:19)

And so, when the king of Ammon rejects Jephthah's words, Jephthah takes off, marching to battle, and makes a vow to God...

"If You will give over to deliver up the sons of Ammon into my hands, then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, shall surely be Jehovah's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering" (11:30-31)

The Lord gives victory, Jephthah returns home, and...

"..behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing; and she was his only child. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter" (vs34)

As our current vernacular would say, "WHAT AN IDIOT!!!"

What did he -think- would come out the door of his house? A sheep or goat? Perhaps an ox? Maybe one of the chickens? It's his -house-. Yes, in those cultures, the animals would also be in the living quarters. Did they live in a 'tent'? It says "house". To our western minds it might be hard to visualize any farmyard animals being in the house...with linoleum or carpeted floors. Well, I suppose, back in the day, some hippies might have lived that way. But supposing it might have been anything like rural houses in Japan, where/when I grew up back in the 50s, you might walk through the door and you would find yourself on a 'dirt' floor in the area where the stove was, where the cooking was done. If you entered the rest of the house where visiting and sleeping was done, you would take your shoes off and step 'up' to the floor level, open the sliding doors, and go in. It's been so many years ago, I no longer remember 'everything' that might have been found in that dirt floor area. Did they also do the butchering in there? I don't recall. I do recall it was not 'clean' like the rest of the house was. So, animals could be in there.

But -THINK-, Jephthah, -THINK-!! If you are returning home in the triumph of victory, in addition to some animals, -what- is the -purpose- of the house? Is it not where -people- live? Your -FAMILY-?? Will they not have been home 'worried' for your safety... so when they hear the sounds of your return, are they not -likely- to come out rejoicing?

Your own daughter!!!

Something that has always troubled me about this incident: WHY did not somebody step forward and -stop- the sacrifice??? Remember when Jonathan ate the honey while Saul's army was chasing the enemy? Saul had issued a curse, which Jonathan hadn't heard, that anybody who would taste food before he had victory would be executed. They have victory, and Saul is enquiring of God what to do next, but God is not answering. When he discovers that Jonathan has eaten the honey, Saul is about to execute his son, and the rest of the people put a quick stop to it.

"Shall Jonathan die, who has accomplished this great deliverance in Israel? Let it not be! As Jehovah lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day. So the people rescued Jonathan, and he did not die." (1Sa14:45)

Why was there not a similar rescue for Jephthah's daughter? Yes, God wants us to keep our promises. But when it is a -foolish- promise, does God delight in the death of a person, just to keep an oath? Jephthah offered his daughter in sacrifice. But God had said...

"And you shall not give any of your seed to pass through the fire to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am Jehovah." (Le18:21)

"And they built the high places of Baal, in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech; which I did not command them, nor did it even enter My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin." (Jer32:35)

What God despised being offered to idols, He wanted in sacrifice to Himself? That does not fit with God's character. Notice that it was not something God -told- him to do. He made a really pitifully stupid vow!

What we have here is a prime example of what happens when somebody speaks "rashly" with their lips. God commanded...

"When you vow a vow unto Jehovah your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for Jehovah your God will seek to require it of you, and it would be sin in you. But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin in you. That which has gone forth from your lips you shall keep and do; that which you have voluntarily vowed unto Jehovah your God, what you have promised with your mouth." (De23:21-23)

"When you vow a vow to God, do not hesitate to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay that which you have vowed. It is better that you should not vow, than that you should vow and not pay. Do not permit your mouth to cause your flesh to sin; do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?" (Ec5:4-6)

There was also a principle that if a wife or daughter, while under the authority of a husband or father, made a vow, the husband or father could disallow the vow.

"But if her father has disallowed her on the day that he hears, then none of her vows nor her bonds by which she has bound her soul shall stand; and Jehovah will forgive her, because her father has disallowed her. And if she belongs to a husband, when she has bound her soul with a vow or rash utterance of her lips, and her husband has heard, and has kept silent to her on the day that he hears, then her vows have been confirmed, and her bonds by which she bound her soul shall stand. But if her husband disallows her on the day that he hears it, he has made void her vow which she uttered with her lips, with which she bound her soul; and Jehovah will forgive her." (Nu30:5-8)

These vows typically were promises to bring certain produce to the temple, or animal sacrifices, or for certain vows where one would bind oneself...such as when Samson did not cut his hair, nor drink wine. But was God pleased with the keeping of the vow when it involved killing his daughter? Yes, God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac; but also provided a ram of redemption, at the last minute calling to Abraham to -stop- the knife from being plunged into Isaac. (Ge22:9-13)

Could not Jephthah have also redeemed his daughter with a lamb?

But here comes Ephraim again...complaining. Remember Ephraim starting with We Can't Take This Mountain?

While everybody was refusing to drive out the inhabitants of the land, Ephraim was right there among them; they did not drive out the Canaanites from Gezer. (1:29) And remember when Gideon was routing the enemy, he sends to Ephraim for them to take possession of what he had liberated (7:24); but when the war was over, who comes along belly-aching that Gideon hadn't called them to join the battle. (8:1) Now, Jephthah has wrought victory, and who comes along complaining again? Ephraim. (12:1) In typical fashion, Ephraim would not put up when called upon (12:2); but once victory is attained, they complain because they are not receiving the accolades of victors...because they refused to fight; and furthermore Jephthah and his band are 'nobodies'. (12:4) So now, suddenly, they have no trouble fighting. The battle ensues, and Jephthah whoops their backsides. Is that the end of Ephraim's problems? Just wait another couple of lessons..!

They won't fight the enemy (in the mountains), or anywhere else; but they seemingly have no trouble fighting their brothers, who -are- fighting the enemy. They are sorta like what we might see today: Somebody accomplishes a major feat, and a by-stander says, "Aw, I coulda done that!" So, Ephraim... Why didn't you?!

And so Israel has peace for six years under Jephthah. (vs7)

And after him, for 25 years under Ibzan, Elon and Abdon. (vs8-15)

Samson (*Judges 13-16*)

"And the Angel of Jehovah appeared to [Manoah's wife] and said to her, Behold now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. Now therefore, take heed and do not drink wine or strong drink, and do not eat anything unclean. For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite unto God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." (vs3-5)

"Again" (vs1) Israel does evil before God; so now the enemy is the Philistines. The Philistines will be a thorn in Israel's side for several generations, before and through Samson, Samuel, Saul; and eventually David will totally subdue them

The Philistines occupied an area similar to where the (so-called) "palestinians" like to call 'home' today. On one excursion Samson goes to Gaza, the same place it is today. Just as many rockets and bombs are lobbed into Israel today from Gaza, back then the Philistines had all the weapons. Israel had none. Blacksmiths were not allowed in Israel; when an Israeli farmer wanted his plowshares, ax or sickle sharpened, he took them to the Philistines. (1Sa13:19-20)

Zorah was located just a stone's throw to the east of the Philistines. As Tina Fey (playing Sarah Palin) joked on SNL that she could see Russia "from her back porch" (in Alaska), this was literally the case for Manoah's family. Samson would grow up in the Philistine's "back yard"; or... depending on perspective... they were in his "back yard".

And as God seems to love (?) to do, He uses people in what seems like an 'impossible' situation. Manoah's wife was childless. Remember? Same deal as with Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, Elizabeth.

Well, in this case we are not even given "the woman's name. But Jesus (the Angel of Jehovah) comes to her and instructs her in how she should take care of herself while she is pregnant, and then how Samson should be raised. No alcohol or unclean foods. And Samson is not to have his hair cut.

Since we had a little discussion of "woman leadership" issues a few lessons ago, with Deborah, I sense a bit of a related issue here. Regarding Sarah having Isaac, God speaks with Abraham. Regarding John being born to Elizabeth, the angel speaks with Zacharias. But here we see God speaking with "the woman". She of course tells her husband what happened, and so Manoah prays that the 'angel' will come again. (vs8) Again, God appears to "the woman". (vs9) And so when Manoah is called, he comes, and the conversation takes place; it almost seems like he is

seeking to "take charge" of the situation..? (vs12) And God essentially puts the responsibility on the woman...

"Of all that I have said to the woman let her take heed" (vs13)

So Manoah jumps in there again: Let us set a meal before you. The 'angel' says 'no'... but if you want to do something, offer your offering to Jehovah. (vs16) And so, God does similar to what He did before Gideon... disappears up through the smoke of the sacrifice.

God's call of "Nazirite" was to Samson, not Manoah. From the womb. (vs7) Certainly, it was a good thing that Manoah was "in charge" of his wife. And it seems that she was also, already, submissive to him. But Samson's ministry was not to be -as- the "-son- of Manoah", but at -God's- call "from the womb". People were not to look at Samson, the "son of Manoah"; but Samson, God's servant... as we see right away in the next chapter.

Like we often say to those in ministry: Man of God, did God call -you-? Then -you- are in ministry. Not your wife, and not your father. -You- are answerable -to- 'God'... not your family.

And we also see how "the woman" was better qualified at the moment. If Manoah wanted to be such a 'leader', all of a sudden, why wasn't he leading Israel? Notice how he becomes all fearful at having "seen God"; but it is "the woman" who calms him down and speaks reason: Would God have shown us all these things, if He was just going to turn around and kill us? (vs22-23) Perhaps the commission was given to the woman because, like in Deborah's day, she was more spiritually attuned to God? There weren't any 'men'..? Not even her own husband?

And so, as Samson grows up and starts to do what he was born for, was he a 'perfect' man? Was he "righteous" in all his behavior? After all, he was a -NAZIRITE-!!! Right? From the accounts, he actually appears more to be a lady's man. His "ministry" seems to revolve around his romantic relationships with women: the one he wants to marry in Timnah (14:1), the prostitute in Gaza (16:1), and Delilah (16:4) who became the instrument to his downfall and defeat.

What did he look like? Was he a prime specimen as what appears regularly on Friday night prime time, WWE "Friday Night Smackdown", where these -hulks- of male testosterone gather, growl at each other, pound their chests like gorillas, and perform choreographed simulations of violence upon each other...smashing a few chairs and tables in the process to make it look good, to prove how 'tough' they are!? Where he pulls up the gate of the city (16:3) and carries it up the hill, one would almost think so. In fact, are not Sunday school pictures drawn like that. Indeed, there are some who bulk up to where they can do things like pull a train along a track single-handedly, and other similar feats of strength.

But how does God typically work? Remember when 30,000 and 10,000 men was "too many" for Gideon. God pared his army down to 300, lest the people should boast that -they- had defeated the enemy. If Samson had been a 'Smackdown' all-star, would he not have been known as a "strong man", and people would have not continually been 'surprised' at his strength. One -expects- a "Goliath" to be strong. You see the BIG MUSCLES, you don't ask, "where does your strength come from?" Well duh! The BIG MUSCLES; what do you think these are? But one does not expect such feats of an ordinary man. Or was he like Jackie Chan... incredibly 'fast' with the jumps, twirls and kicks? Small and fast? I've heard it suggested by others who have reasoned this topic, that he was likely an 'ordinary' man, whom the Spirit of God "moved upon" (13:25) In fact, for -God- to be his power, is it not even possible that he might have actually been somewhat 'scrawny' in appearance?

We are not going to review all his battles here, nor the repeated attempts to bind him and he gets away, etc. Those are the legends of Sunday school stories. If you are not familiar with them, please read these four chapters. But there are some things about character, God's purposes and Samson's spiritual state that we need to observe.

All of Samson's dealings with the Philistines, as recorded, come about due to his relationships with women. First, he wishes to marry one woman. And certainly, are not Manoah and his mother's concerns valid?

"Is there no woman among the daughters of your brethren, or among all my people, that you must go and get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" (14:3)

Was this not -the- prime reason for Israel's apostasies away from God, and into idolatry! We don't need to review those passages again, do we? They would intermarry with the heathen, and also embrace the heathen gods. God warned against it, Israel did it, and God chastised them for having done it. And yet it says of Samson...

"But his father and mother did not know that it was of Jehovah, that He was seeking an occasion against the Philistines." (14:4)

Is this the same sort of category as when God specifically tells Hosea to marry a woman of prostitution? (Hosea ch3) Hosea was a prophet to an 'adulterous' nation, and was 'illustrating', at God's command, how God would purchase back Israel unto Himself, as they will "fear Jehovah and His goodness" in the "latter days". (Hos3:5) Seeing as how Israel today (at the time of this writing) is still in unbelief, these "latter days" are obviously yet future. But Hosea was instructed to actually -do- something that, otherwise for normal people, would have been 'wrong'!

Is that also what Samson is doing? Although, it is not recorded that God -commands- him to do this, like was the case with Hosea. Perhaps it is that

Samson has hormones driving him to lust, and God is just -using- what is 'already' in play? Somewhat how God uses "all things for good" (Rom8:28) concept for His own glory and purposes? I don't want to try to second-guess God on this one.

However, is this a viable 'excuse' for Believers today who lust after unbelievers of the world? Paul answers this...

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Let it not be! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" (Rom6:1-2)

Paul in another context exhorts regarding marriage, that the choosing of a mate should be...

"...only in the Lord." (1Co7:39)

Reading through these passages, it is clear that Samson is somewhat a "loose cannon", has quite the temper, and likely quite self-centered. The Philistines 'upset' -him-, personally, and he retaliates out of personal retribution and vengeance. We don't see him -leading- an army of people. But as the original "army of one", he is quite a thorn in the collective 'side' of the Philistines.

And so... like most anybody who is characterized by always going off half-cocked, eventually hot-tempered people meet their doom. He luuuuvs the lovin' of a beautiful woman. Delilah, even though she has "set him up" so many times; does he not realize that she does not truly love him?? Why does he stay with her?! Why does he not counter her pouts ("you have mocked me and told me lies" 16:10) with, "Because you keep tying me up and calling the Philistines against me."? Anyway, she works her womanly charms and elicits out of Samson the secret of his long hair; and the hair is shaved off.

Samson has been -strong- for so long, he has forgotten his Nazirite vow. He has forgotten God. Even though he tells Delilah that his strength is related to the hair, he forgets that it is the Holy Spirit through the hair, instead presuming by his actions that his strength is self-originated, within himself. And that final time he is taunted he figures -he- will overpower his enemies like all the other times. But it says...

"But he had not perceived that Jehovah had departed from him." (16:20)

He broke his Nazirite vow, his promise to God, to keep his hair long. So God severed His tie with Samson, to make him strong. And since Samson was soooo enjoying his lustful relationship with this woman, God was 'gone', and Samson didn't even know it!

Samson was like a majority of today's so-called "church", who wiggle around sensuously and lust after the goddesses of satanic music, ask to be "spirit-filled"...but they don't realize that their "fillings" are from demons. (1Co10:20-21) They do not even realize that God is not with them. But they presume they can wield all sorts of supernatural power by simply intoning: "I command in the name of Jezzuuusss!" They think they are 'full', but do not realize that they are...

"wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (Rev3:17)

Samson's final great slaughter of Philistines was for what? While he was grinding in prison (16:21) did he finally come to himself? ...come to his senses? Did he repent before God for his unfaithfulness? When he gets ready to push apart the support pillars (16:26) was his prayer: Your will be done?

"O Lord Jehovah, remember -me-, I pray! Strengthen -me-, I pray, only this once, O God, that -I- may once -TAKE-VENGEANCE- on the Philistines for -my- two eyes!" (16:20)

He prays like many "christians" do: O Lord. Dear Lord. Lord, Lord, Lord. O God. Let me make this request. I ask that you will do... X,Y,Z. What did Jesus say?

"But why do you call Me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?" (Lk6:46)

Even so, God granted Samson's request in spite of himself, for the greater purpose of killing many Philistines.

Samson is the last in the series of judges, before the period of Samuel, and then the kings. Israel had slidden so far down, Samson was raised by his 'mother'. And considering how far gone Israel was, Samson was about the best they could expect, I suppose? It would be a few more years, a couple more generations, before Israel would have a leader "after [God's] own heart" (1Sa13:14), David, to fully establish Israel as a full-fledged nation.

God -knew- of what sort Samson would be. Thus, did He not say of Samson that he would...

"~~..-BEGIN-~~ TO deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (13:5)

It would be another hundred years until David would 'finish' the job.

The name "Samson" means, "like the sun"; which was God's intention. But his fleshly ways ended up grinding in the dark dungeon, in death; and more bleak days ahead for Israel.

Micah's idols (Judges 17)

"[Micah's] mother said, I had wholly consecrated the silver from my hand unto Jehovah for my son, to make a graven image, and a molten image; now therefore, I will return it to you...Then his mother took two hundred shekels of silver and gave them to the silversmith, and he made it into a graven image, and a molten image; and they were in the house of Micah. And the man Micah had a house of gods, and made an ephod and household idols; and he confirmed the hand of one of his sons, who became his priest." (vs3-5)

Remember when the Gileadites rejected Jephthah, but then found themselves in need of a leader into battle, they said, "That is why we have turned to you" for leadership. (ch11) We hated you, and chased you away... 'THAT IS WHY' we now want you to lead us. Remember how I scoffed at that logic.

Now let's consider the logic of a scenario where a wife or girlfriend is setting about to cook a 'nice' meal for her beloved. He utterly detests beets, can't stand them, and if they enter his mouth, he wrinkles up his nose, twists his mouth around and spits the beets out, and quickly grabs some water or milk or something by which to 'wash away' the -awful- taste. And she knows this about him. (OK...some of you may like beets. Tomayto...tomahto. For the sake of this illustration, please follow along as if you, also, detest beets.) So she sets about to make this romantic dinner for the two of them, and creates this beet casserole, with beet sauce to go over it, and for the toast in their glasses, a beet cocktail juice. (I don't know if such a thing as beet casserole even exists, but just play along here, OK? I'm a 'man' and don't know these things) So it's time for dinner, and he sits down, and is served beets, beets, beets! Everything is beets!!! How is he to react? Is he pleased? What happens to their relationship?

God is the "husband". (Is54:5) And what does God's 'wife' know about God?

"I am Jehovah your God... You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything in the heavens above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them; for I, Jehovah your God, am a jealous Mighty God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me," (Ex20:2-5)

So... Micah might have -stolen- the silver from his mother; certainly a punishable offense. But instead of retribution, blessing!

"Blessed of Jehovah are you, my son!" (vs2b)
In other words, you did wrong: God bless you!

And then... -WHAT- does she intend to be done with the silver? It is - dedicated- TO GOD. Oh wonderful! For what purpose? To make an idol! To make an idol -for- God. To worship God -with- an idol...!!!

And what does God say? Mmmm, this yummy beet casserole! Here, let me wash that down with the yummy beet cocktail! ???

Oh really????

But what does the "church" do? Does it not do the -exact- same things? God says to not make any "likeness". What is the most "important" -object- the church worships? The pagan cross. Just like Israel had made an idol out of the bronze serpent Moses had made in the wilderness, until Hezekiah finally destroyed it. (2Ki18:4) It was supposed to be a one-time object, but they had made it into a shrine.

There used to be a "christian" musical group locally that would go to churches, putting on concerts. The -object- of the cross was so important to their mentality that, when they would first enter a new sanctuary, they would look around to see 'where' the cross was, to see: 1) -if- the church had a cross, and 2) how prominently it was displayed. If the church didn't have a cross, I don't know what they would have done; but for sure, it was in serious need of 'prayer'. They would also weave together these tiny crowns-of-thorns to give away as -objects- to be adored. Their music was beautiful, usually composed by their director. But.....!

Where did God tell the Church to adore the -object- of the cross, and to make replicas to wear and adorn buildings with? Certainly Paul says...

"But may it never be that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Ga6:14)

But in the context, the cross is not an object of beauty and decoration, but of death. A symbol of one's crucifixion with Christ. (Ga2:20) But it is not an -object- to be -looked- at, but in the Lord's Supper we "remember" the Lord's death...with the bread and cup.

"...do this in REMEMBRANCE of Me" (Lk22:19, 1Co11:24)

It was the giving of His -body- and -blood- that was efficacious. Not satan's symbol of pagan fertility and goddess worship. Thus, nothing of the Lord's Supper includes a mini-cross.

Churches who have crosses adorning their edifices... 'why' do they have them? They claim that the cross is symbolic of Jesus' crucifixion. This is true, only insofar as Jesus was crucified on a 'Roman' cross. But Rome was already using the cross as a means of execution before Jesus came along; so as a physical symbol, it was not unique to Jesus.

So, from where did the cross come? Was it -God's- symbol? Was it something God commanded Israel to make and idolize? Nearly 4500 years ago, right after Noah's flood, Nimrod became a great one in the world. He was the first post-diluvian world ruler. And what do we see on the back side of a coin from Nimrod's days? A cross.

[See these pictures at: www.a-voice.org/walk/judg.htm#09]

Now, what do we see in front of this Southern Baptist church edifice about two blocks down the street from my home? A cross. Notice how nearly 'identical' the two are in appearance, from the 'tiny' cross at the top, to the splayed out base at the bottom. Is this Baptist church honoring Jesus' crucifixion? ...or the kingdom of Nimrod?

Notice that it is constructed, not like the cross on which Jesus died, but as a tall spire... a sacred pillar.

"You shall not set up a sacred pillar, which Jehovah your God hates."
(De16:22)

After taking that picture at the baptist church, I drove up the hill to where I know there is this catholic church, to see what sort of cross they had. Notice the prominent supporting sacred pillar.

We will not delve, here, into the various meanings of the sacred pillar or cross. We have done so at: www.a-voice.org/ga/crosspgn.htm

But the fact that the cross is a symbol of female fertility, and that the pagan religions were about fertility, worshiping female deities, the Queen of Heaven, whom Rome today calls "Mary", and that it is seen back in the time of Nimrod, and Nimrod is the first in the line of antichrists, and considering how Rome, even today, says that the "wounds of Jesus are EVER BLEEDING", thus they depict Jesus always in a state of crucifixion; rather than being a symbol of 'glory' to be emulated, it is a symbol of shame. As the writer of Hebrews says, "crucifying AGAIN...the Son of God, and [exposing] Him to public disgrace" (Heb6:6) Jesus proclaimed in triumph, "It has been finished" (Jn19:30) The cross does not 'honor' Jesus Christ and His 'finished' work; it honors antichrist, who had hoped to do away with Jesus through the instrument of the symbol of the Queen of Heaven, who is antichrist's prime representative; by whom Rome/Babylon seeks to co-opt Jesus' position as "co-redemptrix".

In the past we have also observed the catholic traditions from Babylon, of worshiping the sun [www.a-voice.org/ga/jp2.htm#mary] If you click the link, scroll down a bit and notice the Egyptian obelisk ("sacred pillar") with the (difficult-to-see due to lighting) 'sphere' at the top. The sphere denoting sun worship. Now, to the right (2 links above...at the website these pictures are embedded with this lesson) notice the cross and sun-sphere

adjoined together in one symbol atop the spire of this Nazarene church in Spokane. (Yes... "Nazarene"! located on W. Francis Ave) Remembering my own past, having been deceived into 'respecting' the cross as a holy symbol, I might excuse (in my own mind) a non Babylonish church having a cross; until they might be educated to the truth. But to combine a cross with the sun-sphere suggests a level of -purposeful- knowledge, understanding and idolatry not usually seen in (so-called) "christian" churches. A cross and sphere, and their symbology, do not just 'HAPPEN to' coexist on the same spire with Aaron's excuse: I threw all the gold into the fire and OUT POPPED THIS CALF. (Ex32:24) That sort of symbiosis is purposeful and deliberate.

No! Rather than honoring Jesus Christ, the symbol of the cross is a 'slap' in God's face!

Nimrod was a "mighty hunter before Jehovah" (Ge10:9) Nimrod was the first in the earthly succession to "antichrist". What became the global Babylon. His tower of Babel came to naught when God confounded the languages. But his system continued through the centuries. It became big in Egypt, and then in the surrounding middle-eastern countries, was adapted by Greece, and Rome continued it, and when Rome saw how Christianity was spreading like wildfire, it took on the "christian" name, combined elements of Christianity with the pagan traditions as originated from Nimrod. "Convenient", wasn't it, how Jesus died on a 'cross', thus the pagan symbol could become legitimized and 'christianized', and generally people wouldn't be any-the-wiser.

But where did -GOD- command the Church to venerate Nimrod's cross?

He DIDN'T!!

So, when a person clutches a little mini-cross, kisses it, and 'prays' to God, is their prayer being heard? Here, God, in this spoon I have some yummy beet casserole I'd like to feed You. Would You take a sip of this beet cocktail as I lift it to Your lips? I hope You will be pleased. I made it from 'MY' -OWN- recipe, just for You.

Notice this little section closes with...

"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was RIGHT IN HIS -OWN- EYES" (vs6)

Moses was strictly warned about all the accoutrements for the tabernacle...

"And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain." (Ex25:40)

"You shall not do... every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes"
(De12:8)

For how many years has the "church" been doing things according to man's ideas, and not God's? If something as 'sacred' as the cross is obviously of pagan designs and origins, but the "church" clings to it as its most holy of symbols... WHAT ELSE is the "church" doing that God HATES?? Remember, He said He is a "jealous mighty God". For the "church" today to cling to the cross as it does is NO DIFFERENT than when Israel turned aside to the Baals and Ashtoreth. In fact, Ashtoreth was the prior mutation, after Egypt's Isis, to what Rome today calls "Mary". The Queen of Heaven.

Is God pleased with the church's worship? Does He hear the church's prayers? Does God 'bless' such a "church"?

Well... perhaps you agree partially that the cross is 'pagan'. No, we don't make the "sign of the cross", like the catholics do. Instead, we have the 'fish' symbol. After all, don't you know? Ichthus. "Jesus, Christ, Son of God, Savior" During my college days all the "christian" kids on campus were -experts- in Greek. They knew "ichthus". Jesus' words, "I will make you fishers of men". While it is true that ichthus means "fish" (Lk24:42), "opsarion" is also "fish" (Jn21:9)

But where did the fish symbol come from? From Jesus? Did Paul preach on the fish symbol and how the Church was to venerate it? How did Christians 'recognize' each other? By tracing the fish symbol in the sand? Where was the "witness" of the Holy Spirit in all this? (Rom8:16)

Remember the Philistines and their god Dagon? I have seen pictures of Dagon depicted in various ways: 1) A male torso with the legs section like the tail end of a fish; somewhat like a male equivalent of a mermaid... a "merman". 2) a regular man standing with the open mouth of a fish comprising the top of the man's head. 3) a male body with a complete (whole) fish attached at the neck, such that the man's head -was- a (whole) 'fish'. This last one (#3) is what I've seen depicted most often.

And when the Philistines stole God's Ark and put it in the house of Dagon, what happened to Dagon? Was God pleased? The next morning they found Dagon's fish head broken off and lying on the ground. They replaced it atop the male torso, and the next morning both the fish-head and hands were broken off, on the ground. (1Sam ch5)

Are any of these symbols, not given by God, of pleasure to God? Does He accept veneration through them? God says: Don't make graven images. Man makes graven images and comes, he presumes, to God... Let me worship You with these graven images I've made, that you said not to make. I've brought this yummy beet casserole: Please sit down and eat and 'enjoy'. Let's toast each other with the beet cocktail.

Well...the story continues.

A Levite comes along, travelling, looking for a place to call home. (vs7-8) Comes to Micah's house. Micah hires him to be his personal priest...presiding over all of Micah's house of gods. (He's got more idols than just the one his mother had made with the silver dedicated to Jehovah) And amazingly enough, the Levite agrees.

Oh wonderful...!

"Now I know that Jehovah will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!" (vs13)

Let's put out a sign for passers-by: Everyone welcome to our worship! We have all the accoutrements (that God hates), and we have dedicated them to Him. We have our own -pastor- presiding over these things (that God despises); and he even has the right letters behind his name, he's a Levite. Beet potluck every Wednesday night! B-Y-O-B! (Bring your own Beets)

"Then Jehovah said to me, Do not pray for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence." (Jer14:11-12)

Is it any different for the "church" which does just as Israel did?

"So then... I will vomit you out of My mouth." (Re3:16)

Dan...Micah's missionary outreach (Judges 18)

"In those days there was no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for itself to dwell in; for until that day their inheritance among the tribes of Israel had not fallen to them."
(vs1)

As the different tribes took possession of the land, they did so with varying degrees of speed. And this chapter is about Dan going up north and taking possession at the far north end of the territory. In this country when somebody speaks of the breadth or expanse of the nation, we speak of "from sea to shining sea". In Israel it would become the expression, "from Dan to Beer-Sheba" (20:1, 1Sa3:20, 2Ch30:5)

While there are lessons we could observe about how they took Laish, we would instead like to continue the topic that began in the last lesson.

As the spies travel they come upon Micah and his little self-made temple and hired priest. They "inquire of God" through the priest (vs5) and he gives them exhortations of "peace", and the encouragement that the way they are going "is before Jehovah" (vs6) In other words, according to the priest, God is 'blessing' their travels.

Well... I have also had Mormon missionaries, that I was in the process of sending out the door (at work) or away from my door (at home), tell me "God bless you!" Who is -my- God? Who is -their- god? What is the meaning of that sort of blessing, when I am chasing them away because they are false prophets, for me? It is meaningless. What is the meaning for them...where interspersed with their 'blessing' are also snorts and cursing, because I'm chasing them away?

"Out of the same mouth comes forth blessing and cursing" (Ja3:10)

And... "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." (Mt12:34)

Who has the greater fault? The Danite spies for asking after God, through the priest? or the priest for presuming to represent God in the context of all the graven images? All of them, being "Israelites", are they not assuming they are referencing the -same- Jehovah Most High? But Paul says of Israel...

"For not all those of Israel are Israel" (Rom9:6b)

The spies return with their report, and now it's time to take the whole tribe, take possession, and settle in. They are on the move. They get to Micah's house again, and the spies tell the leaders...

"Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod, household idols, a graven image, and a molten image? Now therefore, consider what you should do" (vs14)

Good question! What -SHOULD- they do? What had God commanded?

"If there is found among you, within any of your gates which Jehovah your God is giving you, a man or a woman who has done evil in the eyes of Jehovah your God, in transgressing His covenant, who has gone and served other gods and bowed down to them, either the sun or moon or any of the host of the heavens, which I have not commanded, and it has been reported to you, and you have heard of it, and you have inquired thoroughly, and behold, it is true and the matter is certain, that such an abomination has been done in Israel; then you shall bring out to your gates that man or woman who has done that evil thing, and shall stone that man or woman with stones until they have died." (De17:2-5)

Well, this is an 'easy' decision. There is obviously idolatry going on. These Danites, if they are God-fearing, should go over to Shiloh, make contact with the priest, and they should stone Micah and his household, along with the Levite. Shiloh is somewhat centrally located within Ephraim along the mountains, likely not that far away from where Micah is living. They don't even need to take the matter into their own hands, they can have the priest officiate the matter.

Well, no. That's not what they do. They grab all the idols and the Levite and take off. The Levite isn't so sure.

"Is it better for you to be a priest to the household of one man, or that you be a priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?" (vs19b)

Oooo! A big 'promotion'! Just wait till the other Levites hear about this! I'm now a big-shot! I'm priest for a -whole- tribe. No more wondering if anybody will show up for services this Sunday, the whole tribe will be looking to -me- for -my- direction.

In the mean time Micah is wailing...

"You have taken away my gods which I made..." (vs24)

Aaah...an Israelite who is not Israel. (Rom9:6b)

The tribe goes and takes possession of their territory...

"And the children of Dan set up for themselves the graven image; and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. And they set up for themselves Micah's graven image which he had made, all the days the house of God was in Shiloh." (vs30:31)

Notice what it says here? "until the day of the captivity" Dan engaged in idolatry. That means, when David was king and ruling in righteousness, the tribe of Dan was in idolatry. When the kingdom was split after Solomon and Jeroboam set up the two calves, one in Bethel and the other in Dan (1Ki12:29), it was nothing 'new' for Dan. They were 'already' entrenched in idolatry. But when Jeroboam did so, it...

"became a sin, for the people went before the one, even as far as Dan" (1Ki12:30)

And throughout their history, the northern kings were compared to Jeroboam "the son of Nebat" and his

"sin by which he made Israel to sin to provoke Jehovah the God of Israel to anger with their vanities (vain idols Jer14:22)." (1Ki16:26)

But it started with Dan. And where did Dan get it? From Micah. You see, what Micah did was 'exported' to an entire tribe. Thus, as this section is entitled. In effect, Micah was a "missionary" in his idolatry. And what was the ultimate result?

There are several places in Scripture that list the 12 tribes of Israel by name. The different lists list different sets of names. Sometimes Levi is not named, because they did not receive territory. Sometimes Joseph is not named because his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim were his namesake in Israel. But one of the lists I would think would be 'important' to be on is the one in Rev7:4-8; the "servants of God" who are sealed for protection before God's great final judgments; the 12,000 from each tribe. In that passage there certainly are twelve (12) names listed. But if you look it up, you will notice that Dan and Ephraim are NOT listed.

Is that because of this idolatry we have just observed, which Micah originated, and Dan embraced?

Translate to today's activities: They had their "church", they had their "pastor"; their accoutrements had been dedicated TO GOD. But they did everything CONTRARY to how God had commanded through Moses. And notice it says...

"...all the days the house of God was in Shiloh" (vs31)

They were calling out to God, but God was not pleased. God does not like "beets"!!! And today for that which calls itself "church", clinging to all its pagan ways, while presuming they are in service to God?

At the judgment...

"Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many works of power in Your name? And then I will declare to them, I NEVER KNEW YOU; depart from Me, you who work out lawlessness!" (Mt7:22-23)

Amen!

and What is the Result? (*Judges 19-21*)

These final three chapters tell quite a gruesome story. We won't review the details, you can read for yourselves. The overall account (in summary) is that a Levite, living in Ephraim (where have we heard of Ephraim before?) takes a concubine, who commits adultery, runs back home to her family, the Levite goes to retrieve her, and while staying overnight on the way back home the ruffians of Gibeah ravish the concubine and she dies, the Levite cuts up her body into 12 parts, sends them throughout the land to rally the 12 tribes to the cause, the citizens of Gibeah refuse to hand over the guilty ones, so the congregation goes to war, the tribe of Benjamin comes to Gibeah's aid and ultimately gets wiped out, and they contrive a couple of schemes to find enough girls for wives for the younger Benjamites so that the tribe not come totally to naught. That's it, in a nutshell.

Since the Levite took a "concubine", by definition, did he already have a wife? In those cultures where polygamy was common, a concubine was like a "secondary" wife, of lower status from the full-fledged wives. But the fact that they were considered "married" is indicated when he is called her "husband". (19:3)

The circumstances of her adultery are not given. By law, and being a Levite, he certainly would have known this, for her affair, he could have taken her before the Levitical authorities, and had her stoned to death. (Le20:10) But he seems to be more of the heart as Joseph was, when he thought that Mary had been unfaithful, where he considered putting her away "secretly", not wanting to "make her a public example". (Mt1:19) There is the account of Hosea who was commanded by God to retrieve his erring wife. (Hos3) As God's love is for Israel where He pleads, "yet turn back to Me, says Jehovah" (Jer3:1b) So, it seems the Levite is attempting to put things back together.

It says the father-in-law was "glad" to see the Levite? Why? Had the woman run back home, fearing for her life? So, when the Levite shows up, wanting her back, a 'sigh' of relief that he is not out for blood? I don't know. Or, perhaps they just "got along" well and 'liked' each other?

But, here we go...

As night is approaching the Levite and the servant have a discussion as to which town to seek sleeping accommodations for the night. The servant wants to stay at Jebus (Jerusalem) because it's closer; but this is yet in the days before Jerusalem has been captured by David. It is still occupied by 'heathen'. And so they go to Gibeah, which is occupied by Israel. (vs12-15) The reasoning is: We can't trust the pagans. But if we stay where Israelites live, we will be safe. A logical assumption. Yes?

Translate that to today: If one had the choice between seeking overnight accommodations at a drug-infested hippy commune or a "christian" church, would not a Believer assume the "church" would be the 'safer' choice?

Well....guess what's been on the news around Spokane for awhile. There is this "church" in the area whose youth director has been sleeping with the teen girls. During the time of this writing, charges are in the process of being brought against him. This matter has been on the local news repeatedly over the past several weeks (months?). And then, another news story will come out: Even though he's been discovered, and charges are in process, it turns out that he is -continuing- to sleep with the teen girls at the church. Apparently he has NO SHAME in the matter, nor does the church care enough to REMOVE him from the church and sever his connection with the youth in their church, to protect them? From what we see on the news, this is what it has been looking like.

The last church I was attending before I "came out" (Rev18:4) the pastor had previously, in another area church, had relationships with young boys. And in the church where I knew him, he was not only the pastor (after alleging to have confessed and had 'time' under sanctions away from the ministry), but also was still being allowed to work with the "youth". Notice: I said I "came out" from that church...and it wasn't because of his 'past', but because of what he was proclaiming in the (then) 'present' from the pulpit; his false doctrines. When people are in apostasy, it is a complete package; both in word and deed. They preach false gospels, and also -do- and -condone- sinful behavior.

"who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do them, but also approve of those who practice them." (Rom1:32)

And who can forget the nation-wide scandals of the catholic parishes, of priests with both boys and girls and women. Some of those cases are - still- pending.

What we see in "Israeli" Gibeah is the same thing that happened at Lot's house when the destroying angels came to remove him. The perverse men came around, wanting to molest what they thought were 'men' visiting Lot...not realizing they were angels. And when Lot and his two daughters were safe, what happened? Sodom and Gomorrah were utterly destroyed.

Thus, what happened in Israel (and these churches) was the -same- as Sodom and Gomorrah!

Thus, what comes next is proper and right and just. The congregation would have punished only the guilty ones, but Gibeah refused to give them up. (20:13) So war ensues. Benjamin is destroyed. They did not want to give up the evil-doers, so they were destroyed along with the evil.

Which is why the Just are told to...

"Come out of her, my people, so that you NOT SHARE IN HER SINS, and so that you NOT RECEIVE OF HER PLAGUES. For her sins have reached to Heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her." (Rev18:4)

But also, as Moses warned Israel, "recognize that your sin will find you out" (Nu32:23); did not the concubine's sin find her out. The Levite was bringing her back. But ultimately she ended up 'dead'. They speak of poetic justice: In the manner of her sin, by that same manner she died.

Now... the next set of events I find most hypocritical and troubling, given Israel's overall propensities.

When Benjamin was destroyed, the younger generation would still grow up and need wives, but the rest of Israel swore not to give Benjamin any of their own girls as wives. So what to do? Who didn't come to the battle? Jabesh Gilead. Let's go kill them, and retrieve their virgin daughters and give them to Benjamin. Still not enough. Go to Shiloh and "catch" yourselves wives of the girls that come out dancing.

First of all... what's the big deal about giving one's daughters, WITHIN ISRAEL, to the next generation of Benjamin? They were already giving their daughters to the heathen around them, the pagans, and thinking nothing of it. And they were, thus, also going into idolatry. That practice, of giving their daughters (and taking pagan daughters for themselves) was the WHOLE POINT and CAUSE of their apostasy. But there is a punished, ailing and hurting tribe in their own national 'family'. The sin has been punished, the evildoers are no longer alive. Now we're going to punish their children, as well?! We won't intermarry with them, but to intermarry with pagans is OK...???

And then... whose idea was it to wipe out Jabesh Gilead? God's? They may not have shown up for the punishing of Benjamin...but were they the ones who killed the Levite's wife? What GREAT EVIL had they done, that was worthy of annihilation? We won't give -our- daughters, but we'll kill off another part of the national 'family' and take -their- daughters!

Sorta like a person who loses a finger from one hand, so asks the doctor to cut off a finger from the other hand to replace the finger on the first hand! ??? Doesn't quite make sense, does it.

Notice... When Israel was gathered at Mizpah to execute God's justice upon Gibeah (and by extension, Benjamin), they "inquired of God". (20:18) And when things weren't going well, they continued to "ask counsel of Jehovah" (20:23) and listened when "Jehovah said, Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand" (20:28)

But now that they need wives for Benjamin's next generation, what do they do? Notice that they are "weeping" at God's house. (21:2) And they build an altar and offer "burnt offerings and peace offerings" (21:4) They "had church". But where does it say that they 'asked God' what to do? ...or that they had a word -from- God how to proceed? If it says anything about that, I seem to be missing it from the text.

It says, "the CHILDREN OF ISRAEL said" (21:5) -They- said, -to- themselves.

Just because a group of people is "having church" and "worshipping" and even having a "prayer" meeting, doesn't suddenly mean that -they-, the 'people' now have the authority to MAKE DECISIONS.

When the leaders in Antioch were praying it was the "Holy Spirit [who] said..." (Ac13:2) to send Saul and Barnabas into ministry.

Israel took care of that particular instance of perversity and murder. Good, insofar as that went. But overall, what was Israel's state of spiritual health? They were making and offering to God their "beet casseroles" and "beet cocktails". They were making idols, which God -specifically- told them - NOT- to make...they were doing things God said -NOT- to do, and dedicating them to God as though for His approval and acceptance. So, just because we have just read that all Israel came together to wipe out an instance of evil, did not suddenly mean that "revival" had broken out, and that Israel was now worshiping God, and that they had destroyed idolatry. Not by a long shot! They were still the -same- Israel we've been reading about in Joshua and Judges.

What was of more critical concern? Wives for Benjamin? Or the fact that Dan was big time into idolatry? But then... how does Israel punish Dan for that of which they are also guilty?

Just like we started in this book...

"In those days there was no king in Israel. Every man did what was right in his own eyes" (21:25)