



# PT Butler

## Bible Study Notebooks

### Study of Judges

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## INTRODUCTION

The Hebrew name for the book of Judges is Shophetim (pronounced, Show-fet-eem) and means “Judges.” When the OT was translated into the Greek language (and became the Septuagint) 200 B.C., the book was called Kritai, a Greek word meaning “Judges.” When the Bible was translated into Latin the book was called Liber Judicum, meaning “Book of the Judges.” Thus the book has always been called by the name “Judges” from the history of most of the judges who delivered and ruled Israel. The word “judge” has often been used synonymously with “king” in later Biblical times (Psa. 2:10; 148:11; Isa. 33:22; 40:23; Amos 2:3). There are 14 Judges mentioned in the Book of Judges: (1) Othniel (of the tribe of Judah) who ruled 40 years; (2) Ehud (of Benjamin) who ruled 80 years; (3) Shamgar; (probably of Naphtali), length of rule unknown; (4) Deborah (of Ephraim) and (5) Barak (of Naphtali) ruled 40 years; (6) Gideon (of Manasseh) ruled 40 years; (7) Abimelech (usurper—of the tribe of Manasseh) ruled 3 years; (8) Tola (of Issachar) ruled 23 years; (9) Jair (of Gilead in E. Manasseh) ruled 22 years; (10) Jephthah (of Gilead in E. Manasseh) ruled 6 years; (11) Ibzan (of Bethlehem in Judah) ruled 7 years; (12) Elon (of Zebulun) ruled 10 years; (13) Abdon (of Ephraim) ruled 8 years; (14) Samson (of Dan) ruled 20 years. That is a total of 290 years, the Israelites were under the oppression of the foreigners they allowed to remain in the land numerous times in between the tenure of each Judge. However, Eli and Samuel were also considered to be judges. The tenure of the Judges probably overlapped each other somewhat but adding Eli and Samuel the total period of “Judges” is about 350 years. From the Pilgrims in Plymouth, MA, to 2003, is about 383 years—so you can see how long 350 years is that the Israelites were a land filled with disorganization of 12 separate tribes being oppressed and fighting one another. How would you like to have a “national” history like that!

The Hebrew nation, after the death of Joshua, had no strong central government. They were a confederacy of 12 independent tribes, with no unifying force, except God and his law. The form of government in the days of the Judges is called the “Theocracy”—that is, God himself was supposed to be the direct ruler of the nation through the law as administered by the priesthood at the tabernacle, and through the tribal heads. But the priests and tribal leaders defaulted on their responsibilities as “teachers and administrators” of the law of God—and the people loved to have it so! The people did not drive out of the land all of the Canaanite heathen (Judg. chs. 1-3)—in fact some of the Hebrews (even judges, e.g., Samson) married some of the heathen women and the Hebrew people became enamored of the heathen “gods” and heathen “worship” because it involved promiscuous sexual perversions and other violations of God’s law which the Hebrews considered “too restrictive of our desired life-style” and “keeps us from prospering as these idol-worshippers have.” The phrase, “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) is the “key” to the whole book of Judges. So, the Hebrews kept deliberately going into apostasy and idolatry which led the Lord leaving them defenseless against the heathen they had left in the land and the Hebrews often had to

live in holes and dens and caves in the ground (e.g. Judg. 6:1-6). When the Israelites were not being oppressed by the heathen in the land, they were often at “civil war” with their own people (Judg. chs. 8-9; chs. 17-20). For 25% of the time of the Judges the land was in almost total anarchy—no one was safe from either heathen or one another!

The Judges of Israel, as a peculiar group of leaders, were God’s chief executive officers—God reserving for himself the supreme rulership through his law as it was supposed to be taught and lived out in the lives of the people. When these Judges were elevated to their office, they ruled for their lifetimes. As a group, they led Israel through broken sequences of apostasy and anarchy from the time of Joshua through the time of Samuel—including Samuel’s tenure and that would total about 450 years (from the time of the Pilgrims at Plymouth in 1621 to 2071 would be equal!). Individuals, chosen by God for their righteous and fearless courage (with the exception of Abimilech, the usurper), were “called” by God’s Holy Spirit either stirring up their own hearts or the hearts of the people who themselves chose certain people to “judge” them (e.g. Judg. 11:1-11). They were given a special endowment of the Spirit of God (sometimes the ability to do “miraculous” things, e.g., Samson’s superhuman strength). These Judges, unlike the kings in the surrounding territories and in Israel at a later period, were without pomp, equipage, or financial remuneration, and perquisites of royalty. They did not have the power to make laws, for the laws were given by God through Moses. They tried their best to uphold the law of Moses and enforce it. They were avengers of all crimes, particularly of idolatry and its attendant vices. They were, generally speaking, great military leaders. In the judges the people of Israel began to find a visible expression of unity which later culminated in their asking God (and Samuel) to give them “a king like the nations.”

Jewish tradition says that Samuel was the author of the book called “Judges.” That probably being the case, the book was written about 1050 B.C. The book of Judges is a record of relapses, results, and brief restorations. It is a record of one of the darkest periods of Israel’s history. Numbers records forty 40 years of Israel wandering in sin; Judges records almost ten times that number of years in idolatry, apostasy and warfare. It was the sad story of Israel trying to “marry a drunkard (the heathen left in the land) to reform him.” Instead of lifting the degenerate people whom they were told to utterly exterminate, they were pulled down to the lustful level of the Canaanites. The book of Ruth gives a charming picture of life during the interludes of righteousness between the years of apostasy.

There are a number of unique features in Judges: (1) it contains the oldest known parable in the Bible (9:8-15); (2) it contains the grandest battle-song in the Bible (ch. 5); (3) it contains the earliest record in history of the emergence of a woman (probably a widow) into prominence and leadership of a nation (chs. 4 & 5).

The purposes of the book of Judges are: (1) To bridge in some manner the historical gap between the death of Joshua and the inauguration of the monarchy; (2) To show the moral and political degradation of a people who neglected their religious heritage and compromised their faith with the surrounding paganism; (3) To show the need of the people for unity and leadership by a strong central government in the person of a king. The book emphasizes two things: (1) “the wages of sin is death”; and

“behold, your sin will find you out”—there is only safety in absolute separation from that which is heathen and idolatrous; (2) God pardons the truly penitent. Therefore, the judges (or “saviors”), as well as kings, were a type of our Lord Jesus Christ, our true Deliverer and Savior from sin and the punishment we all so thoroughly deserve.

## JUDGES 1:1—5:31

The peoples bordering on Canaan were to be made “forced laborers” if they surrendered to the Israelites (Deut. 20:10-15), however, the peoples who were in the land of Canaan which the Lord “gave to Israel for an inheritance,” were to be utterly destroyed—nothing “was to be saved alive” (Deut. 20:16-18). The Israelites did not carry out the Lord’s command about the inhabitants of their “inheritance” (the land of Canaan). That is documented in Joshua 16:12-13, and in the book of Judges 1:19-36; 2:2, etc. WHY DIDN’T ISRAEL DO AS THE LORD HAD COMMANDED? We are not told explicitly—but we are told enough to make some inferences: (a) the Israelites wanted to be “nice” to those who had given them assistance (1:22-26); (b) the Israelites wanted the Canaanites as “forced laborers” to do their menial work for them—the Israelites had a lazy-streak in them (1:29,33,35); (c) the Israelites wanted the Canaanite women as wives (3:6) (perhaps the Israelites thought Canaanite women would bring better “doweries” to their marriages, or were better-looking, or more sophisticated than their own Israelite women); (d) some of the Israelites evidently were afraid to go up against “chariots of iron” (1:19). The Israelites just didn’t have the “guts” (integrity and faith) to do what the Lord specifically told them to do! That’s what it all comes down to in the end! They were like king Saul, some generations later, who was told by the Lord (through Samuel) to utterly destroy the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:1-33) and Saul deliberately disobeyed the Lord’s command because he coveted what the Amalekites had (1 Sam. 15:19). Then Samuel tried to blame his covetousness on the people instead of himself (1 Sam. 15:21). Samuel had to do Saul’s job for him (1 Sam. 15:32-33). And you know what Samuel said to Saul: “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams, For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry” (1 Sam. 15:22-23). The question before the church of Jesus Christ in the 21st century is: Do Christians have the “guts” (integrity and faith) to actually DO what Christ commands in the NT through the Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Revelation? Christ left his apostles “in the world, but not of the world” (Jn. 17:13-19) to be “sanctified (i.e., set apart from heathenism and worldliness) in the truth” Jn. 17:17. If the church does not “rid” itself of heathenism (in some of its practices and theologies) it will suffer the oppression of its enemies just as the Israelites in the days of the Judges!

No! The Lord was more than fair with these rebellious, idol-loving, autonomy-flaunting ingrates! Just as the Lord said, “I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you into the land which I swore to give to your fathers. I (the Lord) said I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars. But you have not obeyed my command. What is this you have done?” Did the Lord ever break any of the covenant he had made with their “fathers”? NO! The Lord had literally delivered them miraculously from the bondage of Pharaoh in Egypt. They would never have gotten Pharaoh to “let them go” had the Lord not worked miracles through Moses and Aaron—they would never have escaped Pharaoh’s army if the Lord had not destroyed the Egyptians in the Red Sea!

They would never have found Canaan if the Lord had not led them and sustained (feeding and clothing) them miraculously through the “wilderness.” They would never have conquered as much of Canaan as they had without the miraculous help of the Lord and his leaders Joshua and Caleb. Then, to top it all off, they disobeyed the Lord’s command to utterly destroy every living thing in Canaan! So the Lord left what they did not drive out to become their “adversaries” and their “gods” a “snare” (temptation) to Israel! All this was done, of course, not to “lead” them “into” sin, but to test them (3:1-6) to know whether they would obey his commandments in the law of Moses. The Lord would have been perfectly just and fair to have destroyed Israel as he threatened to do in the law of Moses if they disobeyed him—**BUT THE LORD WAS MERCIFUL—HE IS SLOW TO ANGER AND QUICK TO PARDON—BUT HE WILL NOT ABIDE REBELLION FOREVER!** Human beings have life on this earth as their “probationary” period—if they do not meet the terms of probation here, they will be thrown into the eternal “slammer” (hell) in the next life! The majority of the Jewish people have continued to rebel against God and his Anointed Son, Jesus Christ. And that is after centuries and centuries of merciful patience and long suffering, from the Lord God Almighty—chastening (exile) and redeeming them from their enemies time after time after time. Ever since the destruction of Jerusalem and Judaism in A.D. 70, we have been “in the times of the Gentiles.” The Lord has given over his redemptive covenant to Gentiles (Christians) for fulfilling. But some day, the “times of the Gentiles” will be over and Christ will come the 2nd time—for the last time—and time will be no more. There will be no more opportunities for repentance then. The Lord has been more than fair with his “Gentile-church” for 2 millenniums (2000 years). The question is, **HAS THE CHURCH BEEN OBEDIENT TO THE COMMANDMENTS OF CHRIST AND HIS APOSTLES?** The answer is: the majority of those who claim the name “Christian” have not been obedient to the covenant stipulations in the New Testament Scriptures. When Christ comes the final time, “judgment will begin at the house of God” (1 Pet. 4:17) and if it begins with the church, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? The answer is in 2 Thess. 1:5-12.

It is easy for a second generation of people to forget many things! Second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth generations have forgotten the struggles and woes their “seniors” have gone through in wars to obtain and protect their civil freedoms in America! Second generations alone have forgotten the civil striving within our nation to bring us to where we are today! The second generation since the “great American depression” of the 1930s has forgotten and have over-spent, wasted, and otherwise spoiled third and fourth generations in luxuries that the generation of the 30s only dreamed about! Second generation Americans since WWII have forgotten how godly and “religious” the people were in the 1940s—a greater percentage of people attended Christian churches in the 1940s than today! **IT IS NOT AN “ACCIDENTAL” FORGETTING! IT IS ALMOST ALWAYS A DELIBERATE FORGETTING!** It certainly was with Israel. The Restoration Movement begun by Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, Walter Scott, “Raccoon” John Smith, et al. forgot in just one generation the “unity of believers” for which these men sacrificed so much of their lives and divided up the church in to “instrumental,” “non-instrumental,” and “liberal.” When Christian believers deliberately leave off the absolute authority of God’s word (exegetically and hermeneutically interpreted), they will inevitably “forget the rock from which they were hewn” (see Isa. 51:1-2) and will “forget” the “ancient paths” (Jer. 6:16-19) and walk in their own stubborn way! **AND IF YOU THINK GOD WILL BE ANY LESS MERCIFUL**

TO THE CHURCH IF IT “FORGETS” HIS WORD—JUST READ THE EPISTLES AND THE LETTERS TO THE 7 CHURCHES OF ASIA MINOR IN REVELATION!

No! Jehovah is the God of peace (Rom. 15:33; Heb. 13:20! He named his “capital city” Jerusalem which means, “righteousness and peace.” He sent his Son to accomplish peace by breaking down all walls of hostility of humanity against God and against one another (Isa. 26:3; Eph. 2:11-22). But he is also a God of “war” against evil and wickedness. The Old Testament Law and Prophets teach emphatically that God is in the business of utterly defeating and destroying evil and wickedness wherever it is found! In the OT, God’s methods were often physical when he used his “covenant people” to wage war against “heathen unbelief and wickedness.” However, God also used truth (i.e., his revealed word) to wage war against the wickedness in the hearts of those who claimed to want to have him as their God. Now the God of the NT is the same God as the one of the OT! God used the Roman armies to physically destroy a rebellious and impenitent Jewish nation (see Matt. 22:1-10; Luke 21:20ff; Heb. 8:13; 12:25-28, etc.). And God is using his word (the sword of the Spirit) to wage spiritual warfare on the hearts of unbelievers to bring captive to obedience to Christ every thought (Eph. 6:10ff; 2 Cor. 10:3-5, etc.). This statement in Judges 3:1-4 is satire on the part of the Lord! The Israelites had “forgotten” that it took waging war, literally to rid the land of Canaan of evil and wickedness in both the Canaanites and figuratively through the teaching of the law to the “chosen people” of God. God was going to have to “teach” Israel all over again that they must be militant in making the land of Canaan a “holy” land! Furthermore, God was going to allow those “foreign, heathen” peoples to become adversaries against Israel as a “test to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the Lord.” And that is precisely why God has thrust the church of Christ into the “wilderness” of “worldliness” (see Rev. 12:13-17) to nourish the church through just such testing in “spiritual warfare” against the “beast, false prophet, and harlot.” (See Sunday School lessons from me on Revelation). The church today had better “put on the uniform, take up the weapons, and get in the fight against falsehood, wickedness, and Satan” wherever it is found—in the world and in the church!—LEST GOD ALLOW ITS ENEMIES TO TEST IT MORE SEVERELY THAN IT IS NOW! Just because American Christians do not now suffer physical persecution does not mean they are impervious to it in the mind and will of Almighty God!

It is a tendency of human nature (fallen nature) to fall into temptation when no one is “in charge.” Most human beings will never dare to step over moral boundaries when there is strong spiritual leadership present and active! So long as Moses (a strong spiritual leader) was alive and active, the children of Israel pretty much “toed the line”—and when they didn’t Moses was able by the sheer strength of his character and personal integrity to bring them back to the “line.” OF COURSE THE “LEADER” HAS TO BE A PERSON OF GREAT MORAL INTEGRITY TO KEEP OTHERS “IN LINE.” Many Israelites had “position and office” but some of them had no more personal integrity than the people they were supposed to be leading—we think of King Saul, for example, and Jeroboam, king of Israel in the divided kingdom. It appears that the Israelite priesthood became corrupt very early in their history as “leaders” of the people. Remember that Aaron, just as soon as Moses went up on Sinai mountain and left the Israelites under the leadership of “old weak Aaron” was when the people made a golden calf and fell into all kinds of wickedness—until Moses came down from the

mountain! That is why it is imperative that the church of Jesus Christ have a leadership (“pastors”—i.e., elders, evangelists, and teachers, Eph. 4:11-16) with strong faith, courage, integrity, holiness, forthrightness, and Biblical knowledge! There can be no substitute to for those character-traits. Personality, charisma, charm, eloquence, erudition in secular knowledge, **CANNOT BE SUBSTITUTED FOR GODLY CHARACTER!** Evidently Samson had all those human traits, but it got him into serious trouble with Delilah and he could not serve the Lord until he repented of his “worldliness.” We know King Saul had all those human attributes, but he needed the heart of David! And so do 21st century leaders need the heart of David with his courage, faith, holiness, and forthrightness (when wrong to confess it and receive forgiveness).

Deborah was a “prophetess” before she became a “judge” (i.e., civil leader). Apparently Deborah was a mother (Judg. 5:7). Why did the Lord choose a woman instead of a man to be the “leader” at this time in Israel’s history? We are not told! To say there were no men capable would be to denigrate the capabilities of Barak whom Deborah sent for when the Lord led her (undoubtedly by divine revelation) to throw off the yoke of oppression of Jabin, king of Canaan and his general, Sisera. Barak became an “associate-judge” with Deborah—she apparently hesitated to take on the task of “delivering” Israel by herself. But, then, Barak would not go into battle without Deborah accompanying him. Deborah did accompany Barak and the army of Sisera was totally slain in battle. Deborah accomplished Israel’s first united action since the conquest, 75 years before! The rise of Deborah, the prophetess, to a place of leadership in Israel emphasizes the place of importance played by women of every generation in the Lord’s “elect.” Think of all the “women-behind-the-men” in the OT and of what history may very well have been without their “leadership” in being “help-meets” for their husbands! There was Sara and her faith and prodding of Abraham to reserve the birthright for Isaac; there was Rebekah and her assistance to Jacob to keep the birthright in a spiritual way; there was Jochebed, mother of Moses, and Miriam, his sister, who “took destiny into their hands” and preserved the life of the baby Moses when Pharaoh had ordered all Hebrew male children slain; there was Hannah, mother of Samuel—space prohibits the list of all the female “leaders” in the Bible. Paul would never have had his most trusted companion, Timothy, had it not been for Lois, his mother, and Eunice his grandmother. Aquila probably would never have converted Apollo without the aid of Priscilla. Paul lists numerous responsible, leading women (i.e. deaconesses) in the church at Rome (Rom. 16:3-16). The church of the 21st century does not need to apologize for women of faith and courage like Deborah who “back-up” the men who “are leading the troops.” The NT teaches that the Lord has clearly defined gender roles for male and female in the church. It is not the Lord’s will that any woman should exercise authority over a man (1 Tim. 2:11-12; 1 Cor. 11:2-16, etc.). **BUT THAT DOES NOT MEAN WOMEN ARE NOT TO FUNCTION IN AREAS IN THE CHURCH WHERE MEN WERE NEVER INTENDED TO FUNCTION (see Titus 2:3-5, etc.).** Males are to have “final authority” in the home and in the church—but females are to share “authority” with the males as God has ordained—and males cannot do the “work” of females. **MANY A CONGREGATION WOULD HAVE HAD TO CLOSE ITS DOORS AND BOARD UP ITS WINDOWS HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR STRONG SUPPORT AND “LEADERSHIP” OF WOMEN WHEN THERE WERE NO MEN TO DO SO!**

Jael was the wife of Heber the Kenite. The Kenites (Midianites) were descendants of Hobab, the brother-in-law of Moses (Judg. 1:16; 4:11). Hobab visited Israel as they left Sinai and Moses invited him to come along with Israel and to act as a pathfinder (Num. 10:29-32), which he did. His descendants were friendly with Israel; they went with Judah from Jericho (Judg. 1:16) and amalgamated with the tribe of Judah. Later, Heber the Kenite (Judg. 4:11) separated from the others and moved northward to Kadesh near the Sea of Galilee and made peace with Jabin, the king of Hazor. Heber's wife, Jael, slew Sisera the Canaanite general, and so fulfilled Deborah's prophecy to Barak that a woman would get the honor for his victory (Judg. 4:8-9). What was Jael to do? Sisera was in desperate flight from enemies—he was in no mood to “make nice.” He was a dangerous man. Jael was a woman, her ancestral collaboration with Israel was well known—she could not meet Sisera in combat, so she resorted to cunning, slaying him with a weapon she had long since learned to use—a tent peg—perhaps a huge iron nail. That Deborah, God's prophetess, approved of her act (Judg. 5:24-27) only shows to what extremes a harassed people can be driven by a brutal foe. Jael's deed was considered an act of Israel, hence the manner in which Deborah praised it. The victory over Sisera was attributed to divine intervention (Judg. 5:20). In a war against a wicked, heathen enemy who is attacking you, resistance and defense by what seems cruel and gruesome actions have been approved by God in other instances. In all of the Lord's admonitions against personal violence, he never made sanction against self-defense in either OT or NT. Jael's act was more than “self-defense”—it was an act of deliverance from tyrannical oppression! Surely if the Lord did not disapprove of Samuel's hacking to pieces Agag, the king of the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:33) then he would not disapprove of Jael driving a tent peg through the head of Sisera.

The song of Deborah and Barak was: (a) a recital of the history of God's people and their obedience to God upon their repentance and warfare against their enemies, both ancient and in the time of Deborah; (b) worship, celebrating what God had done for his people; (c) a song of praise to God's faithfulness, mercy, power, and victory over evil for those who are “friends” of God. This song may be “politically incorrect” in some segments of society today—but it hasn't always been so in the church of the Lord. There have been great battle hymns composed and sung by Christians in past generations, e.g., Martin Luther's magnificent hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God,” “Am I a Soldier of the Cross,” “Faith is the Victory,” “Lead on O King Eternal,” “Onward Christian Soldiers,” “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” “Soldiers of Christ Arise,” “Stand Up, Stand Up, for Jesus, Ye Soldiers of the Cross,” “The Banner of the Cross,” “The Son of God Goes Forth,” “Who is On The Lord's Side” and many others. Why don't we sing these songs any more in the church services—are we afraid of being too spiritually-militant and aggressive in evangelizing?—are we afraid we might not be “politically correct.” For the sake of Christ, let us get over our timidity, declare with boldness and conviction and persuasion and evidence that Christ is risen and that he is coming back one day to judge the world of sinners—and “convince some who doubt; save some, by snatching them out of the fire; on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment spoiled by the flesh” (Jude 23)! **WE CANNOT WIN THE WORLD TO CHRIST BY RETREATING WITHIN OURSELVES AND BEING AFRAID TO BE AGGRESSIVE AND MILITANT IN OUR FAITH-PROCLAMATION!**

## JUDGES 6:1—10:18

Gideon was not “testing” the Lord to see if the Lord existed. Gideon needed a miraculous sign from the Lord! Moses and Joshua had plenty of “signs” (visible miracles) that God was with their program of deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Generations have come and gone between Moses and Gideon. Search through the book of Judges and you will not find very many visible, miraculous signs of God’s approval of what the Judges were doing. Yes, God “spoke” to them by “stirring up their spirits with his Holy Spirit” directly to their minds, BUT THAT IS NOT LIKE HAVING A MIRACULOUS SIGN, CONFIRMING BEYOND ANY REASONABLE DOUBT THAT GOD’S PRESENCE IS IN THE WORK! Gideon was being called upon to do what seemed to be an impossible task and Gideon was very humble and reticent about taking the position of leadership of a whole nation of 12 tribes against powerful enemies. We do not need signs like that today to know that God is with us and that the ultimate victory over the worst the devil can do (death to the physical body) has been accomplished “once for all time.”! God has come (“Immanuel”) in the Person of Jesus Christ, into history, at a place, at a time, and demonstrated incontrovertibly that his Holy Spirit is able to dwell in us and work through us to reach the goal of salvation, sanctification and eventual glorification in heaven. God’s ultimate sign was the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (Acts 2:24,32; 3:15; 1 Cor. 15:1-58; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 1:3-5; 2 Pet. 1:16-21; 1 Jn. 1:1-4, etc., etc.). Jesus told the Jews that his resurrection from the “heart of the earth” just like Jonah’s “resurrection” from the belly of the great fish, would be the all sufficient sign and no greater sign would ever be given. Anyone who now seeks a “sign” after God’s ultimate sign in the written record of Jesus’ resurrection is evil! (Matt. 12:38-42). THE WORLD DOES NOT NEED ANY MORE “GIDEON’S FLEECES” TO PROVE THAT GOD HAS REDEEMED IT...AND WHAT THEY SHOULD DO TO APPROPRIATE THAT REDEMPTION—IT IS ALL RECORDED IN HIS NEW COVENANT SCRIPTURES (THE NEW TESTAMENT)!

Gideon started out with 32,000 men to fight the Midianites—22,000 were afraid and were allowed to return to their homes. That must have given Gideon some “pause for thought!” Now he has 10,000, but the Lord indicated this was still too large a number with which Gideon should fight the Midianites. The Lord told Gideon to take his 10,000 men down to the water and let them drink—those who lapped like a dog were to be chosen. Those who took some water in their cupped hands and lapped like a dog gave an indication that they were alert and ready for battle. Those others who probably put their face all the way into the water, were oblivious to what was going on around them, perhaps even splashed and played in the water, were unfit to be soldiers. There were only 300 men left out of an original 32,000 whom the Lord gave to Gideon as his “army.” Now that would really give Gideon “pause for thought!” He was going to have to fight a people as numerous as locusts (7:12) as many as the sand which is upon the seashore! The Lord gave Gideon another “sign” by sending him to spy upon his enemy and overhearing one of them say the Lord had given him a dream that Gideon would conquer. Gideon took courage and took his 300 men, with torches and trumpets and

drove the enemy army from the field with great slaughter. The Lord does not need massive numbers of people to carry out his work of redemption. He started his kingdom with only 12 ordinary men (13 with the apostle Paul). His kingdom began as “small as a mustard seed” but grew into a great tree that has permeated the whole earth. However, true Bible-believing Christians are still in the minority in this world of 6 billion people! CHRISTIANS NEED TO UNDERSTAND THAT IT WILL BE THAT WAY UNTIL THE LORD RETURNS. Many are called—but few are chosen! (Matt. 7:13-14; Luke 13:24; Matt. 19:23-30; 20:16; 22:14). Jesus even questioned, “...when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Lk. 18:8). The message for the church in the 21st century is that she need only depend, in full faith, upon the Lord and the faithful few who are alert and ready for battle—and not upon huge numbers—to get the redemptive work of the Lord done! It will always be that way!

Gideon wasn't using “terrorist tactics.” Had he been a “terrorist” he would have ravaged the people of Succoth and Penuel first and then asked for food afterward. Gideon had every moral right to expect these people to at least give food to his famished army—they had not suffered in the battle to free their land of the enemy. They could have, at the least, given aid and comfort to their countrymen who were fighting for them! BUT THEY ARROGANTLY REFUSED TO DO SO UNTIL GIDEON MET THEIR CRITERION FOR SUCCESS—THE CAPTURE OF THE ENEMY GENERALS! Gideon flatly told these people that he was going to go on and capture Zebah & Zahmunna, and when he did he would return and punish them for their cold-hearted treatment of him and his army. Gideon was merely meting out justice as the “Judge (leader)” of Israel! Gideon was not “playing around”—he was engaged in the “dirty, messy, gory, dangerous” business of clearing the land of oppressive heathen “masters.” This was no time for anyone in Israel to be merely a “spectator.” Every Israelite could have contributed something—but these didn't want to do so. THEY GOT WHAT THEY DESERVED—PUNISHMENT! As for Zebah and Zalmunna, who had, in cold-blood, killed Gideon's brothers, Gideon meted out the justice which the Lord ordained from the very beginning of civilization after the Flood (Gen. 9:6) and which was clearly and often spelled out in the law of Moses (Num. 35:16-21; 35:29-31; Exod. 21:12,14,23; Deut. 19:11-13; Deut. 5:17). Capital punishment for capital crime is as valid in the New Testament as it is in the Old (Rom. 13:1-7; Acts 25:11). A great Christian theologian, John Murray, has said, “Nothing shows the moral bankruptcy of a people or of a generation more than disregard for the sanctity of human life. And it is this same atrophy of moral fibre that appears in the pleas for the abolition of the death penalty for the crime of murder...the deeper our regard for life the firmer will be our hold upon the penal sanction which the violation of that sanctity merits.”

Gideon was a humble man and believed the people should allow the Lord to rule over them through his law! That was the way the Lord had planned it through Moses and Joshua. BUT THE PEOPLE EVIDENTLY DID NOT WANT TO BE RULED BY THE LAW OF GOD. They were like the people of Samuel's day who “wanted a king like the nations.” The people were not ready for a “king after God's own heart” like David would later be. Somehow Gideon had enough insight to “refuse the crown.” The Israelite “nation” (if you can call it a nation) was in a mess—civilly speaking! It was a loose confederation of 12 tribes broken down into many “clans.” Each man was doing what was right in his own eyes! (Sounds a lot like the mess America is trying to

straighten out in Iraq). Who would want to try to bring order out of that kind of chaos? NOT GIDEON! Gideon's wish was that the people allow God to rule their lives through his commandments. The human heart, in its arrogance (Jer. 17:9-10), presumes that it knows better than God. The "fallen" human heart is always seeking some human, physical, savior to save them from all "bad" circumstances. They want a "king" to feed them, clothe them, protect them from all physical suffering, but leave them alone to do as they please. The Jews of Jesus' day wanted to take him by force and make him just such a "king" (John 6:15) because he would be such a good "meal-ticket" for them. However, they did not want Jesus to rule their lives—their thoughts, their actions, and their emotions! The request for a "physical king" is a ruse impenitent men use to separate themselves from the kind of relationship they should have with God. To put oneself under the rule of God's commandments (either OT or NT) brings one into a covenant-personal-spiritual relationship with God. The fleshly mind is hostile to that kind of relationship (Rom. 8:5-8). This is why the Restoration Movement churches need no "pope" or "denominational structure and headquarters"—the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ are ruled by God through the preaching and keeping of God's word—elders are not "rulers"—they are servants, along with all the other members of the church! The primary function of elders is to see that pure doctrine is being preached and taught in the congregation!

God can do anything he wishes! This is not the only time we read that God "sent (or allowed) an evil spirit" to test and try human beings (see 1 Sam. 16:14-16; 18:10; 19:9; 1 Kings 22:19-23). The Hebrew word *sholach* is the normal word for "sent" so God actively "sent an evil spirit" between Abimelech and the men of Shechem. Whether this was a denizen from the abyss or whether it was simply God allowing a hostility of their own choosing and devising to arise between these two factions, we are not told. One thing we know—if the Spirit of God abides in a person by faith and obedience to God, the devil and his cohorts cannot abide there! God would never send an evil spirit into anyone who is sincerely attempting to believe, love, and obey the Lord's word. In all the cases we know about in the Bible, whenever God "sent" or "allowed" an evil spirit (or even the devil as in the case of Judas, John 13:27) to enter a person it was because that person wanted to do the devil's will! In this case between Abimelech and the men of Shechem we see the behavior (vengeance, treachery, robbery, assault, war). It was God who allowed the serpent into the Garden of Eden to test and try Eve and Adam! It was God who allowed the devil to test and try Job, the righteous patriarch of old. It was God who allowed the devil to tempt Jesus in the wilderness. The difference in all such cases in the Scriptures is the choice made by those whom God allows to be tested! And do not forget that, even though the devil has been severely "bound" and restricted by the revelation of the Gospel, he is still a "bound" roaring lion prowling around seeking some one to devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

When Jotham (who had escaped Abimelech's assassination of the seventy sons of Gideon), the youngest son of Gideon, gave his fable (9:7-21) before the people of Shechem, he said that if the people had been sincere and just in making Abimelech their "king" then the house of Abimelech should stand as a beneficent monarchy. In other words, if they had some justifiable reason for slaying all of Gideon's sons except him in order to put Abimelech in leadership, then he had no problem with that. If, on the other hand, the people of Shechem had been unjust in allowing him to hire

worthless men and kill all of Gideon's descendants except him, Jotham prayed the curse of God that fire would come to devour the men of Shechem and Abimelech. Abimelech set fire to the city of Shechem and the stronghold at Thebez. In the process, however, Abimelech, himself, met his death. Thus the prayer-curse of Jotham was answered. The people of Shechem were devious and treacherous in their scheme to slay the 70 sons of Gideon—they “financed” Abimelech's assassination of the 70 sons of Gideon---they had no justifiable purpose in the slaughter except their own selfish desires to have only one of the sons of Gideon to rule over them! They probably thought, “Why should we put ourselves under the rule of 70 (and have to support them, etc.) when just one “ruler” will do. Whatever their devious reasons, the conclusion of the whole matter was that God requited the crime of Abimelech...and the wickedness of the men of Shechem...back on their heads and fulfilled the “curse” of Jotham (9:56-57). BE SURE YOUR SINS WILL FIND YOU OUT! GOD IS AWARE OF ALL THE WICKED PURPOSES OF HUMAN BEINGS NO MATTER HOW WELL THEY THINK THEY HAVE HIDDEN THEM!

The tribes of Israel continued on the course which they had followed throughout the years following the death of Joshua which they had explicitly vowed they would not do. Remember? When Joshua gave his challenge, “...put away the gods which your fathers served...choose this day whom you will serve, whether they gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods...” But Judges 10:6 records, “And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals and the Ashtaroath (pl), the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the Gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook the Lord, and did not serve him.” God mercifully delivered them, time after time, through leaders (“judges”) but they mocked his mercy by turning away from him and serving the false idol-gods of the people they should have driven out of the land. THAT IS, PURELY AND SIMPLY, APOSTASY! “Apostasy” literally means, “to stand away from.” It is not accidental—it is deliberate! It is not out of ignorance, but out of reasoned choice! As Joshua said, “Choose this day whom you will serve! They knew the difference between the “gods of their fathers” and the true God, Jehovah! They also knew the consequences of others who had made the wrong choice! So, why did they do it? James analyzes it, “each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death.” (Jas. 1:14-15). IT WAS THEIR OWN HEDONISTIC, FLESHLY, MATERIALISTIC DESIRE TO GRATIFY THE FLESH TO WHICH THEY CAPITULATED (see Jas. 4:1-8). Yes! Indeed! There is apostasy in Christendom today. There are those who claim to be “Christians” who worship idols of all kinds—those statues and “relics” made of wood, stone, marble, etc. There are those who claim to be “Christians” who call human beings “Father” and believe these “Fathers” stand on earth in the place of God. There are those who claim to be “Christians” who worship the “idols” of philosophical and theological ideas and doctrines which deny the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and that is apostasy! (2 Jn. 7-11).

The Israelites manifested their repentance over and over and over! At least

this time (10:15-18) they said to the Lord, “We have sinned; do to us whatever seems good to thee; only deliver us, we pray thee, this day.” They also put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord. Once again, the Lord showed mercy to these repetitious sinners—because they repented (i.e., changed their minds and their actions to conform them to the will of Jehovah). **AND THE LORD SENT JEPHTHAH TO DELIVER THEM FROM THE AMMONITES!** “We have sinned...” are probably the most difficult words for a human being to utter! It is too easy to blame others (parents, environment, privation, illness) for sins which we have deliberately chosen to commit. The Lord told the prophets (see Deut. 24:16; Jer. 31:29-30; Lam. 5:7; Ezek. 18:1-32 and 33:1-33). he would not accept the “cop-out” that “Our fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (i.e., it is our parents fault that we are sinning). **TRUE REPENTANCE IS TO ADMIT RESPONSIBILITY FOR ONE’S OWN SINS AND ACCEPT THE LORD’S JUDGMENT UPON THAT SIN AND CHANGE ONE’S ACTIONS TOWARD GOD AND MAN.** In the New Testament we are promised upon belief and covenant obedience that God has laid our sins on Jesus Christ (2 cor. 5:21) and has imputed Christ’s righteousness to us. **THAT IS SOMETHING WE MUST ACCEPT BY FAITH—A FAITH THAT IS WILLING TO CHANGE ONE’S ACTIONS TO CONFORM TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE NEW COVENANT COMMANDMENTS!** Once a believer has been immersed into Christ he/she has accepted the New Covenant made for him/her by Christ. But, even after that, if we sin (which, God forbid, that we should deliberately and overtly do), we still have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous—and if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:8—2:1).

## JUDGES 11:1—16:31

It should not shock you any more than the fact that in the genealogical history of the family of Jesus Christ there is a drunk (Noah), a deceiver (Jacob), a whore-monger (Judah), a rape-victim (Tamar) harlot (Rahab), a reformed idolater and Gentile (Ruth), a murderer and adulterer (David), a polygamist (Solomon), a disbeliever (Ahaz), a murderous king (Manasseh), and numerous kings of Judah who were idolaters (see the genealogies in Matt. 2 and Lk. 3). Jephthah could no more “help” being the son of a harlot than could Solomon help being the son conceived out of wed-lock by two adulterers (David & Bathsheba). Jephthah could have “helped” being a desperado leading a band of “worthless scoundrels” (Judg. 11:3). The men of Gilead would have nothing to do with Jephthah until necessity forced them to such deep distress they were driven to seek this “leader” of a gang of “vain” KJV, “worthless” RSV, NIV, men (the Hebrew word is raik, literally, “empty, void, vain”). Just what this “worthless” gang did, we are not told. The RSV interpolates (i.e., inserts) that they went “raiding.” There is no Hebrew word for “raiding” in the text. But they were undoubtedly “up to no good” if they were “worthless.” From being an outcast, Jephthah rose to be head over his people. Such is often the case in modern civil and military government! Ulysses S. Grant, a drunkard, rose to be commanding general of all the armies of the Union forces in the American Civil War and then became U. S. President. Lyndon Johnson came to his office of Congressman by stealing and lying about votes in Texas and then became U.S. President. We could probably list scores of present day members of the U.S. Congress and the administration who were, and still are, scoundrels leading our nation. Jesus had a thief as an apostle traveling with him all during his earthly ministry. Paul the apostle, was a persecutor of the church, before his conversion. NO HUMAN IS WITHOUT HIS/HER BURDEN OF SIN! That goes for the church of Christ in the 21st century. We simply have to choose our leadership from those with humble, penitent hearts and trust them to continue to be that way!

As Willard Winter says in his College Press Textbook commentary on Joshua and Judges, it “begs the question” to decide that Jephthah’s vow was to slay his daughter as he would an animal for a “burnt offering” to the Lord. The Scripture simply says, “Jephthah did according to his vow (11:39), whatever that was. The Bible does not say expressly that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter by slaying her—it simply says that he did with her according to his vow. It is possible that the term “burnt offering” is being used as a metonymy (i.e., a figure of speech consisting of the use of the name of one thing for that of another of which it is an attribute or with which it is associated) for a “sacrifice” to the Lord. It is altogether possible that Jephthah offered his daughter in perpetual service to the Lord, and that would be essentially the same as making a “burnt offering”—she no longer belongs to Jephthah (she is “dead” to him). Here is what the Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary says: “A true worshiper of Jehovah could not regard human sacrifices with anything but abhorrence. Such a thing would be impossible of Jephthah, the chosen leader of God’s people, all of whose dealings are thoroughly godly; who had just been filled with the Spirit of God to carry on his work;

and whose faith is celebrated in Hebrews (Heb. 11:32). Leviticus 27:1-8 contemplates the possibility of a man's vowing to give himself or some person of his household to the Lord, and makes provision for the redemption of such a person in money. We know too from the experience of Samuel that sometimes persons coming under a vow were handed over for the service of the sanctuary (1 Sam. 1:11). It is therefore thought that Jephthah redeemed his daughter with money and gave her up to the service of the Lord as a perpetual virgin. That is the meaning of her request that she be allowed to bewail her virginity for two months, and of the statement made in Judges 11:39, 'and she knew no man.' The fact is, however, that we cannot be absolutely certain of the mode of fulfillment of Jephthah's vow." **WE CAN BE ASSURED THAT JEPHTHAH WOULD NOT SACRIFICE HIS CHILD BY KILLING HER—THIS IS WHAT THE HEATHEN CANAANITES WERE DOING IN THEIR WORSHIP OF MOLECH!** And although Abraham was ready to slay Isaac as a "burnt offering" because the Lord told him to do so—the Lord stayed his hand and prohibited Abraham from slaying his child. What the Lord wanted was Abraham's heart in obedience (Gen. 22:12). The same was true of Jephthah—God wanted Jephthah's complete obedience—not his daughter slain. Many a parent has "sacrificed" their child for God to the mission field in a far off place in the world—some have even suffered the physical death of their child as a missionary—all for God's glory!

Samson was to be set aside for the service of God in a special way. God must have intended him to not only lead the nation in warfare against its oppressors, but also to lead the nation back to holiness of life because their unholiness is what caused them to be oppressed by the Philistines. If ever there was anything Israel needed it was a courageous, powerful civil leader in whom the Spirit of God dwelt in holiness of character! The same is true of any nation in this fallen world. The vows taken by a Nazarite are some of the most exacting and specific on record in the Old Testament. Its regulatory laws are laid down in Numbers 6:1-23. There were two different types of Nazaritism, the temporary and the perpetual, of which the first type was far more common. In fact, we know only of three of the perpetual class—Samson, Samuel and John the Baptist. The 3 principal marks distinguishing the Nazarite were: (a) a renunciation of wine and all products of the vine, including grapes; (b) prohibition of the use of the razor; (c) avoidance of contact with a dead body. It should be noted that the Nazarite was not expected to withdraw from society, that is, to live a monastic type of life, nor to become a celibate. The reasons for taking a Nazarite vow were numerous. A vow might be assumed before the birth of a child; by one in some sort of distress or trouble; by a woman suspected by her husband of unfaithfulness in their marriage relationship until the suspicion should be removed. God blessed Samson and the Spirit of the Lord began to stir Samson to deliver his people from the oppression of the Philistines. **GOD HAD A SPECTACULAR MISSION FOR SAMSON—SAMSON WOULD SHOW THE PHILISTINES THAT ALMIGHTY GOD WAS WITH ISRAEL** (13:5). That would be no small task! One man, alone, to deliver his people from all the power and might of the Philistine nation! He would need every ounce of divine holiness that might be in him. He would need to be focused on, consecrated to, this commission from the Lord with every thought and deed. That is why Samson could not be indulging himself in worldly pursuits! And Samson fulfilled his mission—eventually—after a "season in the far country of rebellion and sin."

Whether the Lord approved of it or not, Samson did it! Samson was a head-strong young man. It was not customary in the era of the Judges for a boy to make arrangements for his own marriage. Throughout patriarchal times the father made arrangements for the marriage of his son. Manoh and his wife expressed their disapproval by calling the Philistines “uncircumcised” (meaning, outside the covenant of Jehovah). The Philistines were descendants of Ham and not a part of the covenant nation of God. It really was a violation of the Law of Moses for an Israelite to marry a Canaanite or make any kind of “covenant” with a Canaanite (Deut. 7:2-3; Ex. 23:32-33; 34:12,15,16; Num. 31:17; Deut. 7:16). It is a violation of the “spirit” of the New Testament scriptures for a Christian to marry an unbeliever (1 Cor. 7:1-40) Christians do, and the Lord can use such a marriage to “sanctify” (convert) the unbelieving spouse. Joseph married an Egyptian (the daughter of an heathen Egyptian priest); Moses married a Midianite. God still carried forward his redemptive program in spite of these “un-Biblical” marriages. IT IS ALWAYS RIGHT, HOWEVER, TO FOLLOW THE WORD OF GOD IN MARRIAGE. Some “marriages” of two who profess to be Christian end in divorce! So, it isn’t always a fact that the marriage of two professing Christians will remain steadfast until death.

Samson’s marriage to the Philistine woman might have “worked” had not Samson provoked the Philistines with his “riddle.” When Samson was finally persuaded by his “weeping” wife (who had been threatened, along with her family, with death by burning) to tell him the meaning of his riddle, she went and told the 30 Philistine men who had been “partying” with Samson at his wedding reception. Samson had made a “wager” with them, now he had to pay up. He had not the resources to pay his wager (30 linen garments and 30 sets of clothing), so he went down to a Philistine city (Ashkelon), struck down 30 of them and took their belongings and gave their clothes to those who had explained the riddle. Then, to top it all off, his father-in-law gave his wife to another man as wife. If one young man did not suit the father-in-law’s purposes, he felt he was at liberty to arrange for his daughter’s marriage to another man (14:20—15:2). This started a “feud” between Samson and the Philistines (15:3-12). He sent foxes with their tails on fire through Philistine wheat fields burning their food-supply to the ground. The Philistine men, in turn, burned Samson’s former wife and her father to death. Samson, a broken-hearted lover, really went on a rampage after that! He stirred up so much trouble between the Israelites and Philistines, even his own Israelite “brothers” wanted to turn him over to the Philistines (15:9-12). Samson even used the betrayal of his own countrymen to slay a 1000 Philistines with the jaw-bone of an ass (15:12-20). All things, even the rebellions of human beings, work together for good to those who love God (Rom. 8:28). This is how the writer of Judges interprets the disobedience of the law of Moses by Samson—Samson became an instrument in the redemptive purpose of God and his “marriage” (briefly) to this Philistine woman. His marriage eventually caused “strife” between the Israelites and the Philistines. This doesn’t mean that God approved of Samson’s rebellion in marrying the Philistine woman—it simply means, as is often recorded in the OT (see Isa. 10:5-34 where God used the aggression of the Assyria emperor to chasten Israel) that God uses the wickedness of men to serve his purposes. TAKE HEART, CHRISTIAN, GOD IS STILL THE SAME GOD AS THEN—HE IS STILL ABLE TO USE THE SCHEMES AND ACTIONS OF WICKED UNBELIEVERS TO CARRY FORWARD HIS REDEMPTIVE PROGRAM. One day, every “Philistine” (i.e., unbeliever) knee will bow, and every tongue will confess (whether they want to or not)

that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father!

No! God would never approve of anyone, let alone a “Judge” of Israel, going in to a prostitute! Prostitution (whoredom) is strictly forbidden in both the OT and the NT, as well as “whore-mongering” (fornicating with whores). The book of Revelation (21:8 & 22:15) make it clear that impenitent “fornicators” will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone! That means the prostitutes and those who have sex with prostitutes! The prostitute’s house “is the way to hell” (Prov. 7:27). Samson’s first step to ruin had already been taken when he insisted on marrying a woman of the “uncircumcised” Philistine nation. If he will compromise his Israelite faith and integrity to do that, then to go into lie with a prostitute, he will be an easy mark for a seductress like Delilah! Spiritual ruin usually comes incrementally—not all at once! The Philistines once again tried to capture Samson, but the Lord was merciful and allowed him to escape his stupidity once—he pulled up the doors, posts and all, of the city gates of Gaza and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron. He probably flaunted his power to escape before the would-be Philistine captors! But then he “fell head over heels in love” with another Philistine woman, Delilah, of the Valley of Sorek. The Valley of Sorek was almost directly west of the city of Jerusalem. It runs from the heights near the city of Jerusalem down through the hills and valleys leading to the Mediterranean seacoast. It was near the home of Samson. “Delilah” means “dainty one.” She was probably a beautiful woman and very feminine, but again, she was a Gentile—a Canaanite. We know she was very seductive—and very persistent in getting what she wanted! But Samson was never one to turn away from the female gender or deny them whatever they wanted.

Samson “toyed” with Delilah when she kept asking him the source of his super-human strength. He knew all along he was going to eventually tell her. He couldn’t resist a woman’s desires! Finally, Delilah pulled the old, “How can I say I love you if you won’t confide in me (give me what I want)?” (16:15). She whimpered, pretending to flatter him by admiring his “great strength.” “You have made a fool of men and haven’t told me the secret of your great strength.” The Bible says she “pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him” until his soul was vexed to death (16:16). In other words, she petulantly nagged him until he could tolerate it no longer! That’s all she could talk to him about; that’s all she had on her mind. Samson probably had other things in mind—and decided he wasn’t going to get what he wanted until he gave in and told her what she wanted to know! **EVE DIDN’T EVEN HAVE TO “PESTER” ADAM THAT MUCH TO GET HIM TO TAKE OF THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT!** Sin has a way of persisting! God told Cain “sin is lying at your door” (Heb. rovetz “couching”) (Gen. 4:7). **SIN LIES IN WAIT FOR MAN—SIN NEVER GOES TO SLEEP—IT NEVER GOES AWAY!** It “nags and nags” and only the one who is letting God “nag and nag” him with the divine Word is able to resist the nagging of sin! The devil was persistent with Eve—he nagged and nagged her until, by his cunning, he led her thoughts astray from sincere and pure devotion to God (2 Cor. 11:3). **WE MUST MAKE IT A PRACTICE TO LET THE WORD OF GOD (BY READING IT EVERY DAY) “NAG AND NAG AND NAG” US TO KEEP US SAFE FROM THE CONSTANT “NAGGING” OF THE DEVIL TO DISOBEY GOD!**

Samson had let his hair grow long again so as to proclaim he belonged to the

Lord God Jehovah—he was a Nazarite again—thoroughly committed to do the Lord’s will. Samson was repenting that he had betrayed his Lord and his people. The Philistines were “making sport” of Samson and thus “making sport” of Samson’s God. God will not forever tolerate those who blaspheme his name. He must vindicate his authority and power in order that some might come to know him, believe in him, and be saved! Sampson prayed, “O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.” The Lord heard Samson’s prayer, primarily that the Lord might glorify his own name. Samson’s strength was restored just once more and he pushed on the pillars of the heathen, idolatrous temple of Dagon (idol-god of the Philistines) and Almighty God proved to the Philistines that he was more powerful than all their gods put together. Samson destroyed the temple to Dagon and killed more Philistines by his own death than he did when he was alive! Samson was willing to “die to self” to glorify the Lord (see Gal. 2:20; 6:14, etc.). Contrary to physical strength, the Lord is glorified in Christians when they are “weak” (2 Cor. 12:7-10). The Lord is glorified in Christians when they are content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. Can you comprehend that?! Can you believe it and trust it? **THAT IS WHEN THE CHRISTIAN IS THE STRONGEST—WHEN HE ACKNOWLEDGES THAT THE “GRACE OF GOD IS SUFFICIENT” FOR HIM!**

## JUDGES 17:1—21:25

One must remember that we have covered at least 300-350 years of history from Joshua's death to the end of the book of Judges. For 350 years the Israelites have lived alongside all the Canaanites they did not drive out of the land. Daily, the Israelites were exposed to Canaanite idolatry. Some of the Israelites had also brought idols with them in the Exodus from Egypt. The only place the "Law of Moses" could be heard in its purity would be at the tabernacle at Shiloh and the priests would have to read it to the people. Other than that, the Israelites would have to rely on what they could remember hearing at the great feast days (if the priests actually read all the law on such days) when they might go (and we are not sure how many would go) to the tabernacle as they were required to do in the Law. So it is not surprising at all that Micah could be "blatantly ignorant" about what the Law said about images! One would think, however, that as often as God punished them for making images, and other forms of idolatry, they would have gotten the message by the time Micah comes along! BUT, THEN, HOW LONG HAS IT TAKEN OUR PRESENT 21ST CENTURY WORLD (i.e. IN INDIA AND ASIA, ESP.) TO LEARN THAT IDOL WORSHIP IS FALSE AND RESULTS IN MUCH SOCIAL EVIL? And, how long will it take "Christendom" to learn that idolatry (whether it is in "images" and statues, or whether it is in philosophies and false theologies) is false and under the condemnation of Almighty God??? Do not forget that "idolatry" within the Christian church began as early as the first century (see Rev. chs. 2-3)!!! And it has continued for 2000 years in some segments of "Christendom" and is alive and well in A. D. 2003 (whether it be Roman Catholic images, or liberal Christianity's evolution and neo-orthodoxy). The Christian church in America had better be on its toes about falling into the idolatry of the church at Laodicea (Rev. 3:15-22), i.e., "lukewarm" complacency, independent in its "riches" (numbers, big buildings, "mega-churches," etc., etc.). That, too, is a form of idolatry—it is "self-worship."

Apparently the Levite became a priest in a house where there were idols because of money (or some kind of subsistence). So far as I know the OT law, priests and Levites functioned only at the tabernacle—there were no priestly forms of worship permitted in a personal residence! There was only one altar where the Lord permitted sacrifices for the atonement of sins—at the tabernacle. This Levite was, like Micah, in violation of the Law of Moses, big-time! He was not only making "intercessory," priestly functions where he should not, he was doing it in the presence of images—a blatant violation of the first commandment of the Decalogue (Ten Commandments). This priest was a "hireling" and a false teacher! BUT THAT WAS NOTHING NEW IN ISRAEL AT THIS POINT IN TIME! Nor would it cease until God destroyed the temple in A.D. 70—3000 years after Micah and his "house priest." When God's people "back-slide" and "forsake assembling themselves together" to encourage and exhort one another in the word of God—bad things happen to God's church!—it falls in to apostasy, just as these Israelites in the days of the "Judges" were doing, and just as the Hebrew-Christians were doing when Paul wrote the book of Hebrews in the NT! Without the

unadulterated, unencumbered word of God being central in the minds and hearts of members of the church (whether OT or NT), idolatry of some sort is inevitable! “Hirelings” and “idolaters” take over the church. HOW FAR AWAY FROM GOD TRUE WORSHIP FALLS WHEN “EVERY MAN DOES THAT WHICH IS RIGHT IN HIS OWN EYES!” Such apostate worship is an abomination to God and comes under the severest condemnation of God in both OT and NT!

It contaminated the tribe of Dan, spreading apostate religion just like some contagious disease to the farthest borders Israel! Some Danites from Zorah and Eshtaol (just west of Jerusalem) went north looking for a place for the tribe of Dan for an “inheritance” (land, because they didn’t have but a very small portion allotted to them in the south next to Benjamin on the east, Ephraim on the north and Judah on the south). As they proceeded north, they came by the house of Micah in the hill country of Ephraim. There they found this priest, being a “priest” to one family—Micah’s. But they went on to Laish which is in the extreme far north of the land of Palestine, north of the Sea of Galilee, north even of the waters of Merom—at the headwaters of the Jordan River. They found it a secure and fertile land and came back and told their brethren in Zorah and Eshtaol. A great company of Danites then started for Laish. The five “spies” who, on their journey north, had found Micah had a priest doing “priestly” things for just Micah’s family, and they found the “ephod (a sacred vestment somewhat like a “tank-top” slip-over today), the “teraphim” (a household god, see Gen. 31:19; 1 Sam. 19:13-16; 2 Kings 23:24; Hosea 3:4; Ezek. 21:21; Zech. 10:2) and “a graven image made of silver.” These Danites decided they needed what Micah had and persuaded the renegade Levite to go and become a priest to that whole part of their tribe moving north to Laish—they also took along the ephod, the house-hold god, and the graven image. And they set up the graven image for themselves—and made the grandson and great-grandsons of Moses “priests” to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land. (18:30-31). That captivity took place in 721 B.C.—some 400 years later, so the Danites worshiped idols for 400 years because Micah and a renegade Levite had committed apostasy! Apostasy, idolatry, is very dangerous because it is so subtle—it appears to be so “religious” and becomes so pervasive!

There could be homosexuals among the “chosen people” just like there are homosexuals among those who call themselves “Christian” today! Sexual perversion always accompanies apostasy from the true, scriptural, worship of God! Sexual perversion does not merely pertain to homosexual behavior—it also pertains to fornication (illicit sex outside of marriage), adultery (illicit sex inside marriage), incest (sexual relations with an immediate son or daughter, etc.), bestiality (human sexual relations with animals), rape, etc. Homosexual behavior is especially perverted because it is sexual behavior contrary to “nature” or creation! God made males to have, within the sanctity of marriage, sexual relations with females—not males. Homosexual behavior is genocidal—if all human beings practiced homosexual behavior there would soon be a cessation of the human race! “When every man does that which is right in his own eyes,” as in the days of the Judges, and in large segments of the human race today, sexual perversion is inevitable! Homosexual behavior is not caused by genetics (inherited)—it is a moral choice against the law of God and the logic of “nature.” Homosexual urges may be controlled as certainly as fornicating, adulterating, incestuous, or bestial urges may be controlled—BY THE WILLING, CHOOSING,

SUBLIMATION OF THE URGES OF THE FLESH TO THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE WORD OF GOD! And don't let any one deceive you—the NT condemns homosexual behavior just as adamantly as the OT. Romans 1:26-27 is unequivocally against homosexual behavior. Even more explicit are the texts in 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10, both of which use the Greek word arsenokoitai (literally, “male-coitus” sometimes translated “sodomites”) translated, “abusers of themselves with mankind” in KJV, and “sexual perverts” in RSV, and “homosexual offenders” in NIV. Some homosexual practitioners today seek to justify their perversion by claiming “Jesus never condemned homosexual behavior”—unwilling to acknowledge that whatever the apostles wrote in the epistles are as authoritative as the words of Jesus in the Gospels. Don't they know that Jesus promised the apostles that he had many things to say to them while he was still with them on earth which they were unable then to bear—but would send his Holy Spirit to lead them into all truth? God is so serious about all forms of sexual perversion he condemned those who practiced in the OT times to death by stoning!

The Levite hacked the body of his dead concubine into 12 pieces and send a piece to each of the 12 tribes of Israel. HE DID THIS TO GET THEIR ATTENTION AS TO THE DEPRAVITY OF THE SEXUAL ABUSE WHICH KILLED HER. How does one get the attention of a whole “nation” of people who seem so enamored of idolatry and its excesses that they have almost completely forgotten Jehovah-God?! Some people do not comprehend the seriousness of sexual perversity! In America, most people do not seem to understand the seriousness of the perversion of homosexuality even after the AIDS epidemic that has engulfed Africa and southeast Asia, and has spread like a plague among some segments of America's largest cities! AIDS infected America through a homosexual man, and it is now being passed on through illicit sexual intercourse of all kinds—even passed on to unsuspecting and sometimes innocent people. Most of the world goes blithely on in its illicit and depraved sexual behavior unwilling to call it what it really is—and to enforce laws that would reduce the consequences of it. It is not “politically-correct” to call homosexual behavior or any other illicit sexual behavior FOR WHAT IT REALLY IS—A SIN AGAINST GOD AND HUMANKIND! Most people have swallowed the lie of the devil that all kinds of deviant behavior, sexual and otherwise, must be tolerated in the name of “kindness, politeness, freedom, human autonomy,” and a hundred other euphemisms for “doing what is right in one's own eyes.” WAKE UP, WORLD! BEGIN TO CALL DEVIANT BEHAVIOR THE SAME AS GOD CALLS IT IN THE BIBLE —DEPRAVED SIN AGAINST GOD AND MANKIND!

We are not told specifically why the Benjaminites refused to surrender the men guilty of this horrendous crime and sin. The text simply says “And the Benjaminites would not listen to the voice of their brethren, the people of Israel.” Instead, they came together out of the cities to Gibeah, to go out to battle against the people of Israel. Perhaps there were old “tribal” jealousies or hurt feelings that had developed into a grudge. After all, the Benjaminites had been allotted one of the smallest portions of the “Promised Land” and what they had been allotted was mostly mountainous! But the Benjaminites had loyally participated in Deborah's deliverance of Israel from Sisera (Judg. 5:14). And their land, though small and mountainous, was militarily and commercially strategic. The only other reason for their refusal must be that they were so far gone into idolatry and perverted sexual behavior they let their loyalty to their own

tribesmen blind them to righteousness and justice. Yes! They were harboring criminals—fugitives from justice! That made the Benjaminites guilty of aiding and abetting those who committed the crime. According to the Law of Moses, those rapists and murderers should have been stoned to death. A terrible “civil war” within the “Promised Land” among the “chosen people of God” ensued! The people of Israel gathered 400,000 men to go to war against the Benjaminites. The Benjaminites could muster only 26,000 plus 700 of the Canaanite citizens of Gibeah to fight. The tribe of Judah led the attack against the Benjaminites but the Israelite army was defeated and 22,000 of them were killed. The men of Israel mourned their loss and sought the direction of the Lord as to whether they should continue the war. The Lord said, “Yes!” Israel attacked again, and again they were defeated and this time 18,000 of Israel were killed. Israel then withdrew to Bethel, for the ark of the covenant was there at that time, and mourned and sought the Lord’s direction again. The Lord told them they should go against the Benjaminites a third time and he would give them the victory (20:28). Although Israel had lost 40,000 soldiers slain in battle, they obeyed the Lord and laid an ambush (trap) for the Benjaminites and defeated them and killed 25,100 of the Benjaminites. That nearly decimated all the young men of Benjamin! Israel had nearly wiped out completely one whole tribe of the 12 tribes! Only 600 Benjaminite men escaped! What a slaughter—over 65,000 young men were killed and much property destroyed! All because the Benjaminites allowed some homosexual men to assault and kill the Levite’s concubine—and then would not turn them over for justice to be done. AND THE LORD ONLY KNOWS HOW MANY HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE HAVE LOST THEIR LIVES TO VIOLENT, MURDEROUS CRIMINALS IN THE U.S.A. WHO HAVE BEEN FREED OR RELEASED FROM PRISON ON “TECHNICALITIES” IN OUR JURISPRUDENCE SYSTEM!

This is a classic example of the fact that many other innocent lives could be spared if those guilty of murder were executed by capital punishment (whether capital punishment ever deters others or not, at least it rids society of murderers so they cannot murder again!). The Lord cannot be held responsible for the “carnage” of this civil war—the Benjaminites are the responsible ones! The Lord simply permitted Israel to carry out the requirements of justice so emphatically legislated in his “Law” which he gave to Moses. The same justice is required in the NT era (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17, etc.). Do not forget God made hell where he will incarcerate in torments forever those guilty not just of murder, but of being impenitent to the Lord in any sin and rejecting his divine grace through the atoning death of Jesus Christ! Yes! The Lord allows wars of defense against evil aggression! A “just” war is simply “policing” on an international scale. There are, you know, “international criminals” who will “take” territories and goods from defenseless and weak nations by force and aggression—killing and destroying if necessary to attain their goals. Those who have military and commercial might must defend themselves and others against international criminals (in our own time people like the Nazis, the Communists, Saddam Hussein, etc. etc. etc.). These “terrorists” among the Benjaminites and the Benjaminites giving them “safe harbor” sounds just like the “terrorists” of the 21st century and those “rogue nations” who harbor them and support them. Is there any doubt as to why the USA is preparing to see that “justice” is done upon those “harboring terrorists”?

Quite often the writers of the Bible refer to God as the ultimate cause of all

things (e.g., Isa. 10:5-34; 44:21—45:25 {esp. 45:7}; Amos 3:6-8, etc.). Another, classic example of this is when Moses said God hardened Pharaoh's heart ( Ex. 10:20), whereas earlier it had been said that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Ex. 8:32). Moses also said Pharaoh's heart was hardened when the magicians supposedly "imitated" Moses' miracles (Ex. 7:22) without saying whether Pharaoh hardened his own heart or God hardened it. In the days of the Judges, the Benjaminites had made a breach in Israel—and Israel had nearly destroyed one entire tribe—but since they had asked God whether to go to war or not, the statement is made that "God made the breach." **GOD ALLOWED IT—THE BENJAMINITES AND THE REST OF ISRAEL ACTUALLY MADE THE BREACH!** God used the Assyrians (Isa. 10) as the "rod of his anger and the staff of his fury" but it was the Assyrians who made the free-willed-choice to attack Israel and take them into captivity in 721 B.C. God said through Isaiah that he would lead Cyrus on a campaign of world-domination (Isa. 44-45) but Cyrus was the one who made the free-willed-choice to conquer the ancient world. In the book of Revelation it is said, "God has put it into their hearts (the heathen peoples of the ancient Roman empire) to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and giving over their royal power to the beast until the words of God shall be fulfilled" (Rev. 17:15-18). We know it was ancient Rome who persecuted the church and tried to eliminate it—but God allowed the persecution to "nurture" the church (Rev. 12:13-17). So God allowed this "civil war" to purge Israel of the recalcitrant Benjaminites who insisted on harboring rapists and murderers. The Lord also turned all this carnage into "compassion" within Israel for those who had to be punished (21:15). God works all things together for good for those who are his! His chastening purges us of sin and creates a compassion within us for others who sin!

Yes—it was a pragmatic move! Pragmatism is a philosophy that "whatever works is ethical." Shiloh is where the tabernacle was located. Lebonah was about 3 miles west of Shiloh. It was the time of one of the "yearly feasts" of the Lord (probably Passover). If it was, it lasted seven days with feasting, other festivities (including dancing, see Ex. 15:20). So, the Israelites did occasionally go to the tabernacle and observe the "feasts" of Jehovah—mixing the worship of Jehovah with their worship of Canaanite "house gods." The remaining men of Benjamin were encouraged to go and hide in the vineyards of the area around Shiloh. They were instructed to wait until the daughters of Shiloh came out to dance in the celebration of the feast. At that point the men were to come out of hiding and catch wives from among the daughters of Shiloh. They would then return to their homes (down around Jerusalem) and begin a semblance of normal life. Since the daughters of Shiloh were probably the children of the Levites, the vow which the children of Israel had taken at Mizpah (21:1-5) that "no one of us shall give his daughter in marriage to Benjamin." But regardless of whether the "brides" were of the tribe of Levi or not, the rest of Israel worked it out pragmatically in their minds that if the Benjaminites "stole" these girls (kidnapped) it would not break the vow they made, because the Benjaminites did not take the girls in battle, and neither did the other tribes of Israel "give" the girls to the Benjaminites. All of this because the other 11 tribes of Israel could foresee the impending loss of one complete tribe of the 12 if these men did not take wives from Israel. If the Benjaminites had not taken wives of the other tribes, they might have taken wives from the Canaanites and that would have made them vulnerable to assimilation into Canaanite religion and culture and they would be lost to Israel. **WHETHER GOD APPROVED OF THIS "PRAGMATIC" WAY OF SAVING ISRAEL WITH 12 TRIBES, OR NOT, WE ARE NOT**

TOLD. We are told simply that the “elders of the congregation” were fearful that there would be no “inheritance” for the survivors of the Benjaminites if they did not procreate with Hebrew wives, so they made up this scheme to solve the situation without having to break their vow to the Lord. Clearly, the Lord would approve of having 12 tribes in Israel—that is what he instituted back in the days of Jacob! Clearly, the Lord would not approve of the 11 tribes making a vow and then breaking it. We may assume, then, that the Lord approved of this “pragmatic” way of solving the critical problem of the elimination of the “inheritance” for the descendants of Benjamin. The New Testament scriptures do not legislate every single action that must be taken by Christians in order to carry out the principles of faith, love, and obedience to Christ. Often, the elders and the congregations of churches must make “pragmatic” (what works best) decisions based on the revealed principles of the NT scriptures. The Lord will approve of them if his word is the sovereign guide for such “pragmatic” decisions. Situation ethics is the philosophy that the situation is allowed to dictate what is right and wrong—human beings are free to autonomously decide on their own wisdom what their actions should be in light of the “situation.” That is much different than making a “pragmatic” choice, based on the guidelines and principles taught in the New Testament! Some do not see a distinction there—BUT THERE IS CLEARLY A DIFFERENCE! Situation ethics eliminates altogether any consideration of God’s Word—pragmatic decisions using the principles taught in God’s word surrenders reason and feelings to the sovereignty of what is taught throughout the NT.

### Introduction to Paul T. Butler Th.D

Paul was born in Springfield Missouri and graduated from Conway High School prior to enlistment in the US Navy. He began serious bible study with correspondence courses from San Jose Bible College. He later enrolled in Ozark Bible College and acquired his Bachelor of Theology degree June of 1961. He received a Master of Biblical Literature degree from Ozark in May of 1973. He received a Doctorate of Theology from The Theological University of America in October of 1990.

Paul taught at Ozark Christian College from 1960 to 1997. He also served many years as registrar for the college.

### Introduction to the Sound Bible Study project.

The Sound Bible Study project is a cooperative effort of Christian educators and Jordan Media Enterprises LLC to provide the serious examination of the Scriptures for the conscientious student. All the teachers are experienced educators who have spent countless hours in the classroom on both sides of the lectern. The audio recordings and written notes are made available for those who wish to learn God's Word at a collegiate level but have been unable to matriculate. There is no intention to compete with the many faithful Bible schools, but rather to serve along side and strengthen both the student and the teacher for a stronger and more effective Kingdom of God that knows how to properly divide the Word of God.

