

Scripture Text Commentaries

Peter Damonse

Judges

Study Guide for Judges 1
Study Guide for Judges 2
Study Guide for Judges 3
Study Guide for Judges 4
Study Guide for Judges 5
Study Guide for Judges 6
Study Guide for Judges 7
Study Guide for Judges 8
Study Guide for Judges 9
Study Guide for Judges 10
Study Guide for Judges 11
Study Guide for Judges 12
Study Guide for Judges 13
Study Guide for Judges 14
Study Guide for Judges 15
Study Guide for Judges 16
Study Guide for Judges 17
Study Guide for Judges 18
Study Guide for Judges 19
Study Guide for Judges 20
Study Guide for Judges 21

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Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 1

VICTORY AND DEFEAT IN THE PROMISED LAND

A. Continuing victory in Israel.

1. (Judges 1:1a) After the death of Ieso.

Now after the death of Ieso

a. **Now after the death of Ieso:** In this period of the Judges, Israel lost the critical next link in its divine leadership. MoUse was the great leader used by Aleim to bring them out of Egypt; Ieso was MoUse' assistant and the great leader used by Aleim to bring them into the land of promise. But Judges appointed no leader after him to guide the whole nation. They were in a critical place where they had to trust Aleim more intensely than they ever had before.

i. Aleim gives wonderful human leaders to His work on this earth, and it is always difficult for Aleim's people when those human leaders pass from the scene. In such a situation, we may live in the past, wishing that leader were still with us.

b. **After the death of Ieso:** During this period of the judges (lasting some 340 years), there was no standing "office" of national leadership. Israel had no king, no president, and no prime minister on earth – only Aleim in heaven. Yet at the necessary and appropriate times Aleim brought forth a leader for the nation. For the most part these leaders would rise up, do his (or her) job, and then return to their obscurity. This required that the people of Israel maintain a real, abiding trust in Aleim.

i. These national deliverers were not elected and they didn't come to leadership through royal succession. They were specially gifted by Aleim for leadership in their times, and the people of Aleim recognized and respected that gifting.

ii. When this book uses the term *judge*, it doesn't mean someone who sits in a court and decides legal issues; the Hebrew word *shaphat* has more the idea of a *heroic leader*. "The Hebrew word *Shophetim* is derived from a word meaning to put right, and so to rule, and this is exactly what these men did." (Edgar Phillips)

iii. The people of Israel had great obstacles. They were surrounded by people who lived in the most terrible immorality and idolatry, making a constant temptation to the same sins. The idolatrous lives of the Canaanites who lived around Israel were focused mainly on three things: money, sex, and having a relationship with Aleim on *my* terms instead of *Aleim's* terms.

c. **After the death of Ieso:** The Book of Judges shows us a time that is sometimes confusing, difficult, and dark. For this reason, many neglect the Judges and regard this period of time as a "dark ages" of Israel's history. Yet if we neglect this book we neglect a wonderful account of the love and graciousness of Aleim, and how He lovingly corrects His people.

i. What we find out about *man* in Judges is depressing; but what we find out about *Aleim* in Judges is wonderful. "On the human side, it is a story of disobedience and disaster; and on the Divine side, of continued direction and deliverance." (Edgar Phillips)

ii. "There is, however, one light in which the whole book may be viewed, which renders it invaluable; it is a most remarkable

history of the longsuffering of Aleim towards the Israelites, in which we find the most signal instances of his *justice* and *mercy* alternately displayed; the people *sinned*, and were *punished*; they *repented*, and found *mercy*. Something of this kind we meet with in every page. And these things are written for our warning. None should *presume*, for Aleim is just; none need *despair*, for Aleim is merciful." (Peter Damonse)

2. (Judges 1:1b-2) After Ieso's death, Israel seeks the Ruler.

It came to pass that the children of Israel asked the Ruler, saying, "Who shall be first to go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them?" And the Ruler said, "Judah shall go up. Indeed I have delivered the land into his hand."

a. **The children of Israel asked the Ruler:** Here they did the *right* thing – the thing Judges would have wanted them to do. With Judges gone, they were not left without a leader; they were simply called to a renewed trust in Aleim.

b. **And the Ruler said:** When Israel sought the Ruler, He guided them. This is a consistent pattern through the Book of Judges. Aleim never failed to deliver and help His people when they sought Him.

i. IESO expressed the same idea in Louka 11:9: "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." When we ask of Aleim and seek Him in sincerity we should expect that He will answer us. His response may come in an unexpected way, but we should expect that it will come.

c. **Judah shall go up:** Aleim directed that the tribe of Judah – the tribe that the Mosea would come from – should lead the way in this fight. Judah was also the largest and strongest tribe. In this case, Aleim's plan made obvious military sense as well.

i. Under the leadership of Judges Israel had broken the back of the Canaanite's military strength; yet it remained for each individual tribe to actually go in and possess what Aleim had given them.

3. (Judges 1:3-7) Judah (with the tribe of Simeon) defeats Bezek and their king.

So Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me to my allotted territory, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I will likewise go with you to your allotted territory." And Simeon went with him. Then Judah went up, and the Ruler delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand; and they killed ten thousand men at Bezek. And they found Adoni-Bezek in Bezek, and fought against him; and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. Then Adoni-Bezek fled, and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. And Adoni-Bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to gather scraps under my table; as I have done, so Aleim has repaid me." Then they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

a. **Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me":** The leaders of the tribe of Judah acted wisely here. By partnering with another tribe, the work was much easier. Here, the tribes functioned in the same way that Aleim wants the Ekklesia to function – as a body, with each part of the body helping out other parts of the body.

i. “The tribes of Judah and Simeon were blood-brothers (Judges 29:33-35) and are uniformly depicted as acting in the closest relationship.” (Peter Damonse)

b. **The Ruler delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand:** Seeking the Ruler, obeying His guidance, and working together as a body always produces great results. Their success was plain to see: **the Ruler delivered** all their enemies into their hands.

c. **They killed ten thousand men at Bezek:** This place where the conquered was called **Bezek** and the leader of this city was **Adoni-Bezek**, which means “Ruler of Lightning.” This was an enemy with a fearful name, but Judah and Simeon defeated him none the less.

i. **And they found Adoni-Bezek in Bezek:** The word **found** in this verse expresses a hostile encounter. The armies of Judah and Simeon didn’t just stumble over **Adoni-Bezek**.

ii. Their punishment of **Adoni-Bezek** may seem cruel, yet we see that it was simply justice in its truest sense. He had done this same thing to **seventy kings**; so now he had his own toes and fingers cut off.

iii. The punishment made Adoni-Bezek worthless as a warrior; he could trouble Israhael no more as a military man. “It was a custom among those Romans who did not like a military life, to cut off their own thumbs, that they might not be called into the army. Sometimes the parents cut off the thumbs of their children, that they might not be called into the army.” (Peter Damonse).

iv. We also see Judah and Simeon acting in an unselfish manner. They fought a battle in territory that did not directly belong to them. The city of Bezek was far to the north of Judah’s tribal lands.

4. (Judges 1:8-20) Judah’s victories in the southern part of the land given to Israhael.

Now the children of Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it; they struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire. And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who dwelt in the mountains, in the South, and in the lowland. Then Judah went against the Canaanites who dwelt in Hebron. (Now the name of Hebron was formerly Kirjath Arba.) And they killed Sesai, Aiman, and Talmi. From there they went against the inhabitants of Debir. (The name of Debir was formerly Kirjath Sepher.) Then Kaleb said, “Whoever attacks Kirjath Sepher and takes it, to him I will give my daughter Achsa as wife.” And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Kaleb’s younger brother, took it; so he gave him his daughter Achsa as wife. Now it happened, when she came to him, that she urged him to ask her father for a field. And she dismounted from her donkey, and Kaleb said to her, “What do you wish?” So she said to him, “Give me a blessing; since you have given me land in the South, give me also springs of water.” And Kaleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs. Now the children of the Kenite, MoUse’s father-in-law, went up from the City of Palms with the children of Judah into the Wilderness of Judah, which *lies* in the South *near* Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people. And Judah went with his brother Simeon, and they attacked the Canaanites who

inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. So the name of the city was called Hormah. Also Judah took Gaza with its territory, Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory. So the Ruler was with Judah. And they drove out the mountaineers, but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the lowland, because they had chariots of iron. And they gave Hebron to Kaleb, as MoUse had said. Then he expelled from there the three sons of Anak.

a. **Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it:** Here it is recorded that the city of Jerusalem fell to Judah. It was occupied for a time (Adoni-Bezek was taken there and died there), but later fell back to the Jebusites (see Judges 1:21). Under the leadership of King David Israhael conquered the city again some 400 years later (2 Samouel 5:6-10).

i. “The city of Jerusalem is one of the oldest cities in the world, having been occupied almost continually for a period of 5,000 years.” (Peter Damonse)

b. **Then Judah went against the Canaanites who dwelt in Hebron:** Judah also conquered Hebron, and the city was given to faithful Kaleb and his family (see Judges 15:13-19).

i. Hebron was the ancient city of Abrahaam and the city which discouraged the ten unfaithful spies from taking the promised land in MoUse’s day because of the Anakim which lived there (4th MoUse (Numbers) 13:22-23).

ii. Peter Damonse notes that Judges 1:9 describes the three major geographic divisions of Israhael:

• **The mountains**, or more literally *the hill country*, “which describes the mountainous regions between Jerusalem and Hebron.”

• **The South**, also known as the *Negev*, which is “the semi-arid area between Hebron and Kadesh-barnea.”

• **The lowland**, sometimes called the *Shelphelah* from the Hebrew word used here. This “is the region of foot-hills running north and south between the coastal plain and the central mountain range.”

c. **Give me a blessing:** Charles Edgar Phillips preached a wonderful sermon on Judges 1:12-15 titled, *Aschsa’s Asking, A Pattern of Prayer*. Edgar Phillips showed how the request from a daughter (Aschsa) to a father (Kaleb) gives us a “parable of prayer.”

i. Aschsa was a good example because *she thought about what she wanted before she went to her father*. Before you pray, know what you need before Aleim. She came to Aleim with a very definite request that had been considered before hand. “Think what you are going to ask before you begin to pray, and then pray like business men. This woman does not say to her father, ‘Father, listen to me,’ and then utter some pretty little oration about nothing; but she knows what she is going to ask for, and why she is going to ask it.” (Edgar Phillips)

ii. Aschsa was a good example because *she asked for help with her request*, asking her husband – **she urged him to ask her father for a field**. “A friend, some time ago, said to me, ‘My dear pastor, whenever I cannot pray for myself, and there are times when I feel shut up about myself, I always take to praying for you: ‘Aleim bless him, at any rate!’ and I have not long been praying for you before I begin to feel able to pray for myself.’ I should like to come in for many of those odd bits of prayer. Whenever any of you get stuck in the mud, do

pray for me. It will do you good, and I shall get a blessing.” (Edgar Phillips)

iii. Aschsa was a good example because *she knew it was her father she asked*.

iv. Aschsa was a good example because *she went humbly, yet eagerly*.

v. Aschsa’s prayer was a good example because *her father asked her what she wanted*. Aleim will ask us the same thing and we should know what we want.

vi. Aschsa’s prayer was a good example because *she shows that we should actually ask for what we want before Aleim*. It is a pleasure for Aleim to hear you ask.

vii. Aschsa’s prayer was a good example because *of what she simply prayed*. Her prayer was, “**give me a blessing.**”

viii. Aschsa’s prayer was a good example because *she mingled gratitude with her petition (you have given me land in the South)*.

ix. Aschsa’s prayer was a good example because *she used past blessing as a reason to ask for more*.

x. Aschsa’s prayer was a good example because *she realized that what she had been given before was of no use without continual springs of water*. “What is the use of the hearers if there be not the power of the Holy Spirit going with the Word to bless them? Give me springs of water.” (Edgar Phillips)

xi. Aschsa’s prayer was a good example because *her father gave her what she asked*.

xii. Aschsa’s prayer was a good example because *her father gave to her in large measure*.

xiii. Aschsa’s prayer was a good example because *her father was not critical of the request in the slightest way*.

d. **The city of Palms**: This was another name for the city of Jericho. The Kenites went from there to **Arad**, a city out in the Judean wilderness, west of Masada and the Dead Sea. **Zephath** isn’t too far from there; **Gaza** and **Ashkelon** were out towards the coast and later became Philistine strongholds.

i. Peter Damonse believes that **the city of Palms** was another city further south: “*The city of palm trees* elsewhere indicates Jericho (Judges 3:13), but that identification is ruled out here by the context. Possibly it was located at the southern end of the Dead Sea.”

e. **They had chariots of iron**: As impressive as Judah’s victory was it was nevertheless incomplete. They could not defeat nations that had the latest military technology: **chariots of iron**.

i. “Strange! Were the *iron chariots* too strong for Omnipotence?” (Peter Damonse)

ii. This spoke more to Judah’s lack of full trust in Aleim than it did to Canaanite military superiority. Chariots were no problem for Aleim’s people when they were trusting Aleim (see 2nd MoUse (Exodus) 14:7-29, Judges 11:1-8, and 1 Kings 20:21). Their attitude should have been like that reflected in Psalms 20:7: *Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Ruler our Aleim*.

iii. “If they had believed in Aleim, and gone forth in his name, the horses would soon have fled, as indeed they did when Aleim gave his people faith. When Barhak led the way with Deborah, then they smote Iabin, who had nine hundred

chariots of iron...the imperfection of their faith lay in this, as it may do in yours, my brethren,-that they believed one promise of Aleim and did not believe another. There is a kind of faith which is strong in one direction, but utter weakness if tried in other ways.” (Edgar Phillips)

iv. “An unconverted person is here who has been thinking of coming to The Anointed One, but he says: ‘I cannot give up all my sins. One of them I must retain: all the rest I can leave, hut that one is invincible, for it has chariots of iron. I cannot drive it out,’ That sin must die, or you will perish by it. Depend upon it, that sin which you would save from slaughter will slaughter you.” (Edgar Phillips)

f. **Then he expelled from there the three sons of Anak**: Kaleb’s victory over the **sons of Anak** shows what a trusting Israhel could accomplish. The **sons of Anak** were large men and fierce warriors (4th MoUse (Numbers) 13:33, 5th MoUse (Deuteronomy) 9:2), yet with Aleim’s help Kaleb defeated them (as is also recorded in Judges 15:13-14).

i. “Yet, as if to rebuke them, they had a singular incident set before them for the vindication of Aleim’s power, and of that we read in the twentieth verse. Kaleb, that grand old man, who still lived on, the sole survivor of all who came out of Egypt, had obtained Hebron as his portion, and he went up in his old age, when his bones were sore and set, and slew the three sons of Anak, even three mighty giants, and took possession of their city. In this way the Ruler’s power was trusted and vindicated from the slur which Judah had brought upon it.” (Edgar Phillips)

ii. “I will not speak of Kaleb, for you will tell me, ‘Ah, he was an old, old man, and belonged to another generation. He was just going off the scene; we do not wonder that he did great things.’ Ay, but he had a nephew, one Othniel, a young man...The young hero stood forward, and went up to the fortress, and took the city, and passed it over to his uncle’s hands, and received the promised reward. Oh yes, and we have seen raised up-and shall see it more and more young heroes who have been self-denying, self-distrustful, inconsiderate of themselves, who have been willing for The Anointed One’s sake to be anything or nothing, and Aleim has been with them, and the power of the Most High has rested upon them.” (Edgar Phillips)

B. Incomplete victory and defeat.

1. (Judges 1:21) The tribe of Benjamin does not take possession of Jerusalem.

But the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem; so the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

a. **The children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites**: This was a case where the battle had already been won (Judges 1:8); the tribe of Benjamin simply had to enter into what was already theirs. It would certainly take effort, but the critical battle was over. Jerusalem belonged to them.

b. **So the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day**: Up until the time of the writer of the Book of Judges, the tribe of Benjamin failed to cast out the Jebusites and therefore lived in constant military and spiritual danger.

2. (Judges 1:22-26) The house of Joseph conquers the city of

Bethel.

And the house of Ioseph also went up against Bethel, and the Ruler was with them. So the house of Ioseph sent men to spy out Bethel. (The name of the city was formerly Luz.) And when the spies saw a man coming out of the city, they said to him, "Please show us the entrance to the city, and we will show you mercy." So he showed them the entrance to the city, and they struck the city with the edge of the sword; but they let the man and all his family go. And the man went to the land of the Hittites, built a city, and called its name Luz, which is its name to this day.

a. **The house of Ioseph:** This is an interesting (and somewhat rare) combining of the two tribes that came from Ioseph (Ephraim and Manasse) into one group, **the house of Ioseph**.

b. **And the Ruler was with them:** We might credit the victory to their effective use of military espionage; but the real reason was because **the Ruler was with them**.

c. **But they let the man and all his family go:** They seemed to use the events surrounding Rhaab and the conquering of Jericho as a pattern (Judges 3 and 6), and a successful pattern at that.

3. (Judges 1:27-29) Manasse and Ephraim fail to drive out all the Canaanites.

However, Manasse did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; for the Canaanites were determined to dwell in that land. And it came to pass, when Israhel was strong, that they put the Canaanites under tribute, but did not completely drive them out. Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer; so the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them.

a. **The Canaanites were determined to dwell in the land:** At first there were pockets of Canaanites that these tribes were unable to push out of the land. But when the tribes eventually grew strong enough, they compromised with those Canaanites and thought they could use them to their advantage (**they put the Canaanites under tribute**).

i. "The story as here given reveals that whereas the work began in earnest, it gradually weakened. The Ruler was with Judah and victories resulted. The Ruler was with Ioseph and Beth-el was taken. Manasse and Ephraim and all the rest weakened in the work and Canaanites were left in possession." (Edgar Phillips)

b. **Did not completely drive them out:** In the same way, when someone first begins their Follower life, they may not be strong enough in the **Ruler** to deal with all the things they see that need changing; yet as they grow in the **Ruler**, they must not slack in dealing with those areas. We never are to make a peace treaty with our sins; instead, be determined to **drive them out**.

i. "The one point that Israhel should have borne in mind was that they had no right there. The land was not theirs, it had become Israhel's. And moreover, Aleim was prepared to drive them out; so that his people would have no fighting to do, but only to chase a flying foe." (Edgar Phillips)

ii. **Gezer** didn't belong to Israhel until it was given to

Solomon by Pharaoh (1 Kings 9:16).

4. (Judges 1:30) The tribe of Zebulun compromises and accommodates the Canaanites, putting them under tribute.

Nor did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron or the inhabitants of Nahalol; so the Canaanites dwelt among them, and were put under tribute.

a. **Nor did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants:** Each tribe had its own responsibility and its own battles to fight. In their particular battle, the tribe of **Zebulun** failed to take all that Aleim had portioned for them.

b. **So the Canaanites dwelt among them, and were put under tribute:** The people of Zebulun thought they could make their incomplete obedience work to their advantage, especially economically. They failed to appreciate that the **Canaanites** who **dwelt among them** would eventually bring them into both social and spiritual crisis.

i. Because the crisis was not immediate, it was easy to think that it was not real. Yet it was certain, and only a trusting obedience to Aleim could spare them the later cycle of crisis that marks the Book of Judges.

5. (Judges 1:31-32) The tribe of Aserh fails in taking full possession of their land.

Nor did Aserh drive out the inhabitants of Acco or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik, or Rehob. So the Aserhites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out.

a. **Nor did Aserh drive out:** The tribe of Aserh also failed to take what Aleim had apportioned for them. Each tribe who failed made it easier for the other tribes to also fail.

b. **So the Aserhites dwelt among the Canaanites:** Of the people of Zebulun we read that *the Canaanites dwelt among them* (Judges 1:30). Yet in Aserh it was even worse; it was the **Aserhites** who **dwelt among the Canaanites**. They suffered a worse degree of social and spiritual declension.

i. "Whilst most of the tribes were able to occupy at least some part of their allotted territory, the tribe of Aserh seems to have failed completely to dislodge the Canaanites." (Peter Damonse)

6. (Judges 1:33) The tribe of Naphtali compromises and accommodates the Canaanites, putting them under tribute.

Nor did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh or the inhabitants of Beth Anath; but they dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land. Nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath were put under tribute to them.

a. **Nor did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants:** The tribe of Naphtali found it difficult to counter the trend of the other tribes. The defeat of one affects the condition of others.

i. Aleim never intended for Israhel to conquer the land of Canaan *easily*; He never intended it to happen quickly. 2nd MoUse (Exodus) 23:29-30 and 5th MoUse (Deuteronomy) 7:22-24 both say that Aleim intended to give them the land *little by little*. Though Aleim planned for Israhel to take the land through constant trust in Him and frequent battles, they failed to do this and therefore did not **drive out the inhabitants**. It was almost as if Israhel said, "If we can't have it *easy*, then we don't want it at all."

b. **They dwelt among the Canaanites... Nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath were put under tribute to them:** The people of Naphtali combined both facets of capitulation to the enemy. In some regions of their territory they lived under the shadow of the dominating Canaanites; in other regions they put the Canaanites **under tribute** to them. Both facets fell well short of Aleim's command and intent for the people of Isrhael.

7. (Judges 1:34-36) The tribe of Dan fails in taking full possession of their land.

And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountains, for they would not allow them to come down to the valley; and the Amorites were determined to dwell in Mount Heres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim; yet when the strength of the house of Ioseph became greater, they were put under tribute. Now the boundary of the Amorites was from the Ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela, and upward.

a. **The Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountains:** Here, we see the people of Aleim being pushed around by their enemies. This should never be the case when Aleim's people are walking in the strength of their Aleim.

b. **When the strength of the house of Ioseph became greater, they were put under tribute:** Again, instead of doing what Aleim said should be done with these enemies (to completely drive them out), they decided to use them as *they* thought best; to put these enemies under tribute.

i. "This they did out of covetousness, that root of all evil, neglecting the command of Aleim to the contrary." (Phillip Prins)

c. **The boundary of the Amorites:** The end result was that the **Amorites** had an appointed boundary within the inheritance of Aleim's people. This was an unnecessary and dangerous accommodation to the social and spiritual enemies of the people of Aleim.

i. There is a dangerous and seductive form of pacifism in the Follower life, which ignores the reality of the spiritual battle so clearly described in Ephesians 6:10-20 and referred to by analogy in the Book of Judges. This pacifist attitude will happily make a peace with the devil that basically says, "I will not harm your interests if you leave me mostly alone." This attitude of spiritual surrender is unacceptable for the Follower.

ii. Leon Trotsky, the infamous Communist leader said at least one correct thing: "You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you." To take an attitude of spiritual surrender is to willingly *lose* that war.

iii. At this period of time, the tribes of Isrhael at their best experienced incomplete victory; at their worst they simply surrendered to and accommodated the enemy. This makes us value the complete and glorious victory of IESO The Anointed One on our behalf all the more. There was *nothing* left incomplete in the victory He won for us on the cross and through the resurrection.

Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 2

ISRHAEL'S FAILURE, ALEIM'S MERCY

A. From Gilgal to Bochim.

1. (Judges 2:1-3) The Angel of the Ruler preaches to Isrhael.

Then the Angel of the Ruler came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: "I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore 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 tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? Therefore I also 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.'"

a. **The Angel of the Ruler came up from Gilgal:** It is likely that this was Aleim Himself, appearing in a human form. There are frequent Scriptures (Old Testament) appearances of **the Angel of the Ruler** that indicate that it is Aleim Himself.

i. There is a legitimate question as to if *every* mention of **the Angel of the Ruler** is a divine appearance. As G. Campbell Edgar Phillips, "This messenger, referred to as 'the angel of the Ruler,' may have been a prophet, for the word rendered 'angel' may with equal accuracy be rendered messenger. On the other hand it may have been a special divine and angelic personality."

ii. Assuming this to be a divine appearance (as the author believes it does indicate), we surmise that this was IESO The Anointed One appearing to the people of Isrhael before His incarnated appearance in Bethlehem. We know this is IESO for two reasons.

· First because the **Angel of the Ruler** here claimed divinity by saying that He was the one who led Isrhael up from Egypt, who made a covenant with Isrhael (Judges 2:1), and who personally called Isrhael to obedience (Judges 2:2).

· Second because this person, appearing in human form before Isrhael, cannot be Aleim the Father, because the Father is described as *invisible* (1 Timotheo 1:17) and *whom no man has seen or can see* (1 Timotheo 6:16).

iii. The idea of IESO, the Second Person of the Trinity, appearing as a man before Bethlehem is provocative, but logical. We know that He *existed* before Bethlehem (Mika 5:2); why should He *not*, on isolated but important occasions, appear in bodily form? We see other places where this happened, such as Judges 18:16-33, Judges 32:24-30, and Judges 13:1-23.

iv. "Not in such a body as Aleim had prepared for him when he took upon himself the form of a servant, but in such a form and fashion as seemed most congruous to his divine majesty, and to the circumstances of those he visited, this angel of the divine covenant whom we delight in came and spoke unto this people." (Edgar Phillips)

b. **I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land:** The first thing IESO (as **the Angel of the Ruler**) did was to remind Isrhael of His great love and faithfulness to them. He delivered them from Egypt's bondage; He gave them an abundant land of promise; He gave them a covenant that He would never break.

i. It is Aleim's general pattern to remind us of His great love and faithfulness to us *before* calling us to obedience or confronting our sin. We love Him because He first loved us (1 Ioanne 4:19), and we can only really obey Him as we walk in His love and abide in His covenant with us.

ii. The words, "**I will never break My covenant with you**" remind us that even though Isrhael never fully lived up to their part of the covenant, Aleim promised that He would never forsake His part of the covenant.

c. **You have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this?** The **Angel of the Ruler** confronted Isrhael in love. The question was stinging in its simplicity; there is never a *good reason* for our disobedience.

i. Isrhael's real problem was not one of military power or technology; it was a spiritual problem. "The deplorable spiritual condition of the Israelites, not their lack of chariots, lay behind their failure to dispossess the Canaanites." (Peter Damonse)

d. **I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side:** The **Angel of the Ruler** announced that He would allow the work of possessing the land to go unfinished as a way of correcting a disobedient Isrhael.

i. **I will not drive them out before you** reminds us that Aleim would not do the work of conquering Canaan all by Himself. In the early years of the campaign in Canaan Aleim did fight for Isrhael in a supernatural way. Yet He never intended it to be that way for the entire campaign of conquering the Canaanites.

ii. We often wish that Aleim would do the work of Follower maturity for us; that we would wake up one morning and a certain besetting sin will just be gone. Sometimes Aleim grants such a miraculous deliverance, and we praise Him for it. But more commonly He requires our partnership with Him in the process of Follower growth. Our partnership is important to Aleim because it shows that our heart is where His heart is; that we are truly growing close to Aleim.

e. **They shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you:** The announcement that the Canaanites would remain as problems to the nation was promised beforehand to Isrhael if they would not faithfully drive out the Canaanites.

i. *But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell.* (4th MoUse (Numbers) 33:55)

2. (Judges 2:4-6) The people respond with weeping and sorrow.

So it was, when the Angel of the Ruler spoke these words to all the children of Isrhael, that the people lifted up their voices and wept. Then they called the name of that place Bochim; and they sacrificed there to the Ruler. And when Judges had dismissed the people, the children of Isrhael went each to his own inheritance to possess the land.

a. **The people lifted up their voices and wept:** This emotional response of the people was very hopeful. With all the weeping and wailing, there was reason to believe that Aleim's word had a deep impact upon them, and they that were on their way to a genuine revival of Aleim's work among

them.

i. Sadly, it was not the case. The subsequent record of the Book of Judges shows that this initial reaction of sorrow and repentance did not mature into a real, lasting repentance. Real repentance shows itself in action, not necessarily in weeping. We can be sorry about the consequences of our sin without being sorry about the sin itself.

ii. One can weep and outwardly show repentance without ever inwardly repenting. This is why the Ruler challenged Israhel in [Joel 2:13](#): *So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Ruler your Aleim, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness.*

iii. It is good to see people truly weeping over their sin and it should never be discouraged. However, “The tear is the natural drop of moisture, and soon evaporates; the better thing is the inward torrent of grief within the soul, which leaves the indelible mark within...One grain of faith is better than a gallon of tears. A drop of genuine repentance is more precious than a torrent of weeping.” (Edgar Phillips)

b. **They sacrificed there to the Ruler:** In this, they did the right thing. Any awareness of sin should drive us to Aleim’s appointed sacrifice. In their day that meant sin offerings of bulls and rams; in our day it means remembering Aleim’s sacrifice for us on the cross of IESO The Anointed One.

i. They did this “In testimony of their faith in The Anointed One’s merits (for they mourned not desperately) and their thankfulness that Aleim had sent them a preacher, and not an executioner, considering their deserts.” (Phillip Prins)

c. **And when Judges had dismissed the people:** This shows that [Judges 2](#) begins as retrospect, looking back to the days even before the death of Judges (which was described in [Judges 1:1](#)). This hopeful response to the **Angel of the Ruler** started when Judges was still alive.

3. ([Judges 2:7-10](#)) The new generation in Israhel.

So the people served the Ruler all the days of Judges, and all the days of the elders who outlived Judges, who had seen all the great works of the Ruler which He had done for Israhel. Now Judges the son of Nun, the servant of the Ruler, died when he was one hundred and ten years old. And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash. When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Ruler nor the work which He had done for Israhel.

a. **So the people served the Ruler all the days of Judges:** Judges’s legacy was seen in the godliness of Israhel during his leadership. He was truly one of history’s great men of Aleim.

b. **The servant of the Ruler:** This is a deeply meaningful title for Judges. It is applied only to great men of Aleim like MoUse ([5th MoUse \(Deuteronomy\) 34:5](#)), and David ([Psalm 18:1](#), title), and the courageous prophets ([2 Kings 9:7](#)).

c. **And all the days of the elders who outlived Judges:** Israhel was also faithful to Aleim in the days of Judges’s immediate successors. But afterward, there arose a generation who had *not* seen all the great works of the Ruler which He had done for Israhel.

d. **Another generation arose after them who did not know**

the Ruler nor the work which He had done for Israhel: The new generation had no personal relationship with Aleim, and no personal awareness of His power. Aleim was someone who their parents related to and who did great things for their parent’s generation.

B. A summary of Israhel’s history during the time of the Judges.

1. ([Judges 2:11-13](#)) Israhel falls into idolatry.

Then the children of Israhel did evil in the sight of the Ruler, and served the Baals; and they forsook the Ruler Aleim of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Ruler to anger. They forsook the Ruler and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.

a. **The children of Israhel did evil in the sight of the Ruler:** Even in the days of Judges Israhel did not fully possess what they could have in the Promised Land. Yet in that time they remained faithful to Aleim and they did not worship the idols of the Canaanites. After the death of Judges they fell into the worship of these grotesque idols.

i. It is strange that anyone would want to trade a personal, real, living Aleim for a false god that is the figment of man’s imagination. Yet there is something within man that is afraid of the exact Aleim we need; we would rather serve a god of our own creation than the real, living Aleim whom we can’t control. The gods we create are the gods wanted by our sinful desires.

b. **And served the Baals:** The Canaanite idol Baal was an attractive rival to IEUE because he was thought to be the god over the weather and nature for the Canaanites; he was essentially the god of agricultural success. In an agricultural society people served Baal because they wanted good weather for abundant crops and flocks. One might say that the bottom line with Baal *was* the bottom line; he was effectively the god of personal wealth.

i. “There were also ‘Baals’ associated with particular places, like the Baal of Peor ([4th MoUse \(Numbers\) 25:3](#)) or Baal-Berith ([Judges 9:4](#)); and this may account for the plural form.” (Peter Damonse)

ii. According to Peter Damonse, the word *Baal* also meant “husband” or “owner.” Therefore when Israhel worshipped the Canaanite god Baal, they entertained another “husband” or “owner.”

c. **They forsook the Ruler and served Baal and the Ashtoreths:** The Canaanite idol Ashtoreth was an attractive rival to IEUE because she was thought to be the goddess of love, sex, and fertility. She was usually honoured by with the practice of ritual sex with a priestess-prostitute. One might say that the bottom line with Ashtoreth was sex and love.

i. “The religion of the these fertility gods was accompanied by all kinds of lascivious practices, especially in Canaan, where it was found in a degraded form which even incorporated child sacrifice.” (Peter Damonse)

d. **They forsook the Ruler:** Aleim made it clear that Israhel’s pursuit of these gods was nothing less than forsaking **the Ruler Aleim of their fathers**. Yet in all likelihood Israhel did

not see their idolatry as *forsaking* Aleim; they probably just thought they were adding a few gods along side of the **Aleim of their fathers**. Nevertheless, the Aleim of Israhel is a jealous Aleim who demands exclusive worship.

i. One Biblical illustration of our relationship with Aleim is to describe it as a marriage relationship between husband and wife. It would be wrong for a wife (or a husband) to add many lovers to her marriage, claiming that she simply could love them all. A husband or wife as a righteous claim on the exclusive affection of their spouse; Aleim has a righteous claim on our exclusive worship.

e. **In the sight of the Ruler:** This implies that the sin was even more offensive to Aleim because it was done right before His eyes. To give an extreme example, it is bad enough for a married person to commit adultery; but to commit adultery before the very eyes of one's spouse would be especially offensive.

f. **They followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them:** This shows another root cause for Israhel's tragic idolatry. The influence of the Canaanites that they allowed to remain in their midst led them to idolatry. The result of not fully driving out the Canaanites was far worse than Israhel imagined.

i. "We worship other gods — the gods of the nations around the idols of the market-place, the studio, the camp, and the bar." (Edgar Phillips)

2. (Judges 2:14-15) Aleim's wrath upon their sin of idolatry.

And the anger of the Ruler was hot against Israhel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went out, the hand of the Ruler was against them for calamity, as the Ruler had said, and as the Ruler had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed.

a. **And the anger of the Ruler was hot against Israhel:** This response of Aleim to the unfaithfulness of Israhel was no surprise. He specifically promised that He would do this in the covenant He made with Israhel, which was characterized by blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (as in 3rd MoUse (Leviticus) 26 and 5th MoUse (Deuteronomy) 28).

i. We serve Aleim under the terms of a different covenant, a better covenant (Hebrews 8:6). When we forsake Aleim and do not abide in IESO The Anointed One, things may (and often do) go badly for us, but not because Aleim has actively set His hand against us as He did to Israhel under the Old Covenant. When we do not abide in IESO and things go badly for us, it is simply because our actions have consequences and we reap the bitter fruit of not keeping ourselves in the love of Aleim (Iouda 21).

b. **So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them:** The purpose of all this was so that when Israhel was **greatly distressed**, they would turn their hearts back to **Ruler**. Aleim's goal wasn't punishment in itself, but repentance.

i. Therefore, we should see this as a manifestation of Aleim's *love* for Israhel instead of His *hate*. The worst judgment Aleim can bring upon a person is to leave them alone, to stop trying

to bring them to repentance.

ii. We see the same principle in the relationship between parents and children. Though children often wish their parents would just leave them alone, it is really their worst fear that no one would love them enough to correct them. The mid 1990s told the story of a woman named Shannon Wilsey who was a well-known actress in pornographic films. As a 23 year-old woman she made a lot of movies and a lot of money; yet she put a gun to her head and killed herself. Though a success by some standards, the detective investigating her death said, "I think her whole life caused this suicide." Shannon bragged about doing crazy things, yet she told a close friend that she wished her mother would have stopped her. The friend said, "She felt bad because her mother didn't say anything about her being in the [pornography] business." After her suicide, an unmailed letter was found where she described about what she wished her dad would have done. "Where were you when I was dating rock star Gregg Allman when he was twenty-five years older than me? Where were you when I was on heroin? Where were you when I started doing porno movies?" The dad said her would have been there *had she only asked*.

3. (Judges 2:16-19) The cyclical pattern of bondage and deliverance in the days of the Judges.

Nevertheless, the Ruler raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the Ruler; they did not do so. And when the Ruler raised up judges for them, the Ruler was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Ruler was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them. And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.

a. **Nevertheless, the Ruler raised up judges who delivered them:** Because of His great love for His people, Aleim **raised up judges** – heroic leaders – to rescue Israhel from their calamity. Aleim did this **nevertheless**; not because Israhel ever deserved such a deliverer from Aleim, but in spite of the fact that they were undeserving.

i. "It was a method made necessary by the repeated failure of the people. That should be clearly understood." (Edgar Phillips)

b. **Yet they would not listen to their judges, but played the harlot with other gods:** Though Aleim gave Israhel these heroic leaders, they did not **listen to their judges** in matters of spiritual leadership. They wanted the judges as *political* and *military* leaders, but not as spiritual leaders.

i. Phillip Prins explains the idea behind the phrase, **played the harlot**: "Carried on by a spirit of fornication, a strong inclination, a vehement *impetus* to whoredom; so that they care not how they waste all upon it, and will not be reclaimed: so idolaters."

c. **The Ruler was with the judge:** This explains the source of power with the judges Aleim raised up. They were able to lead Isrhael in dramatic acts of deliverance because **the Ruler was with the judge**, not because the judge was necessarily great or powerful in themselves.

d. **The Ruler was moved to pity by their groaning:** During the time of the Judges, Isrhael only cried out to Aleim and really depended on Him in times of emergency. When they did cry out to Him with **groaning**, He answered with **pity** and faithfulness.

i. “This connection of sin, punishment, and deliverance really forms the keynote to the historical movement recorded in the whole of the Book.” (Edgar Phillips)

ii. This principle explains why some people are in a constant state of crisis; Aleim knows that is the only way they can be kept trusting in Him. Instead, Aleim’s desire is that we be in a constant relationship of dependence on Him. This is exactly how IESO lived, as He said in Ioanne 5:19: *Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.*

e. **When the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers:** The pattern of bondage, deliverance and blessing; followed by sin and bondage again is a discouraging fact in many Follower lives today.

i. This discouraging cycle was more understandable in ancient Isrhael than in the life of the modern Follower. This is because the Follower, as part of the New Covenant, lives with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and is made a new creature in IESO. These are privileges that Isrhael in the days of the Judges knew *nothing* of.

ii. “The days of the judges were those in which there was no king over Isrhael. The fitfulness of our experience is often attributable to our failure to recognize the kingship of IESO.” (Edgar Phillips)

f. **They did not cease from their own doings:** Their sin was **their own doings**; they couldn’t blame it on anyone or anything else. In the same way, their sin was **their own** – they didn’t learn it from Aleim, but it came from their own corrupt natures.

g. **Nor from their stubborn way:** The ancient Hebrew word translated **stubborn** (also translated as *stiff-necked*) is a word that was also applied to Isrhael many time during the 2nd MoUse (Exodus) (2nd MoUse (Exodus) 32:9, 33:3, and 2nd MoUse (Exodus) 33:5). This shows that a change of location — even coming into the Promised Land — didn’t necessarily mean a change of heart for Isrhael.

i. We should never count on sanctification by relocation; wherever you go, you take you with you. A new environment doesn’t always mean a new attitude.

ii. The ancient Hebrew word for **stubborn** (*kawsheh*) comes from the idea of being hard or severe. To be stubborn against the Ruler is to have a hard and unyielding heart; and it results in a hard life.

4. (Judges 2:20-23) Aleim gives them over to their sinful compromise.

Then the anger of the Ruler was hot against Isrhael; and

He said, “Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Judges left when he died, so that through them I may test Isrhael, whether they will keep the ways of the Ruler, to walk in them as their fathers kept *them*, or not.” Therefore the Ruler left those nations, without driving them out immediately; nor did He deliver them into the hand of Judges.

a. **Then the anger of the Ruler was hot:** “He is not made all of mercy, as some dream, but can be angry: and ‘who knoweth the power of his wrath?’ (Psalm 90:11). It is such as men can neither avoid nor abide.” (Phillip Prins)

b. **Because this nation has transgressed My covenant:** When Aleim said, “**this nation**” instead of “My nation” it showed that Isrhael wasn’t abiding in their relationship with Aleim.

c. **I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Judges left:** Isrhael wanted these Canaanite nations around, so Aleim gave them the worst punishment He could think of: He would allow it.

d. **Therefore the Ruler left those nations:** After setting their hearts on sinful things, Isrhael found that Aleim *gave* what their sinful hearts desired. This illustrates the great danger of setting our hearts on sinful things; we may get to the point where Aleim may allow us to have them – thus bringing sin, bondage, and pain into our lives.

Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 3

THE FIRST THREE JUDGES

A. The pagan nations remaining in the territory of Israhel.

1. (Judges 3:1-2) Why Aleim allowed these nations to continue in Israhel's territory.

Now these are the nations which the Ruler left, that He might test Israhel by them, that is, all who had not known any of the wars in Canaan (this was only so that the generations of the children of Israhel might be taught to know war, at least those who had not formerly known it),

a. **These are the nations which the Ruler left:** Aleim left these Canaanite nations behind because Israhel was not faithful in driving them out. One might rightly say that it was a combination of both their choice and Aleim's will.

b. **That He might test Israhel by them:** It was within the power of Aleim to eliminate those pagan nations without any help from Israhel. Aleim allowed the troublesome peoples to remain for a reason. The word **test** here is used in the sense of "proving." These nations would remain because Aleim wanted to *prove* the faithfulness of Israhel to Himself, and to *improve* their reliance on Him.

i. Aleim doesn't just instantly change *every* area of our lives so that our relationship with Him can be proved and improved; so that we will live a life of true partnership with Aleim.

c. **So that the generations of the children of Israhel might be taught to know war:** This was another reason why Aleim allowed the Canaanites to remain where Israhel did not drive them out. Aleim wanted His people to be *warriors*, and the presence of these dangerous neighbors would make it necessary for future **generations to know war**.

i. "Israhel was to be in a hostile environment for the major part of her history, due either to the pressures of the petty kingdoms which surrounded her or, at a later stage, due to her strategic position between the successive world-powers of Assyria, Babylonia, Persia and Greece on the one hand and Egypt on the other hand. Military prowess was a necessary accomplishment, humanly speaking, if she was to survive." (Peter Damonse)

ii. No one *likes* the struggle against sin, but the battle is good for us. The symbol of Christianity is a cross, not a feather bed.

2. (Judges 3:3-4) The pagan nations are specifically listed.

Namely, five lords of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites who dwelt in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal Hermon to the entrance of Hamath. And they were left, that He might test Israhel by them, to know whether they would obey the commandments of the Ruler, which He had commanded their fathers by the hand of MoUse.

a. **Namely:** Aleim named each of the pagan peoples that stubbornly stayed in the land. After the same pattern, some could today make a specific list of "pagan territory" in the life of the believer. Such a list may indeed be helpful in the way that it causes one to identify their enemy.

b. **That He might test Israhel by them, to know whether they would obey:** The reason that Aleim didn't just eliminate these nations is again stated. It was to *prove* Israhel's commitment to Aleim and His word. If they were obedient to

the word of Aleim the other nations would not hinder them and they would grow strong enough to drive them out completely.

B. The first judge: Othniel.

1. (Judges 3:5-7) The apostasy of Israhel in the days of Othniel.

Thus the children of Israhel 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. So the children of Israhel did evil in the sight of the Ruler. They forgot the Ruler their Aleim, and served the Baals and Asherahs.

a. **They took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons:** Part of the accommodation of Israhel to the pagan peoples surrounding them was their sin of intermarriage with the pagan nations in their midst.

b. **They forgot the Ruler their Aleim, and served the Baals and Asherahs:** Their wicked romances led them to the worship of the pagan deities Baal and Ashtoreth.

i. IESO told us that following Him would require that we give up the things we love most (Marhko 10:29-30). Often an wicked romance falls into this exact category.

2. (Judges 3:8) Israhel's servitude to the king of Mesopotamia. **Therefore the anger of the Ruler was hot against Israhel, and He sold them into the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the children of Israhel served Cushan-Rishathaim eight years.**

a. **He sold them into the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia:** Aleim gave Israhel just what they wanted. They didn't want to serve Aleim, so He allowed them to be in bondage to a pagan king. Israhel reaped exactly what they sowed.

i. "The name of *Cushan-Rishathaim* is also suspect, for it reads literally 'Cushan of double wickedness', not likely a personal name, and it would appear that the historian has made a deliberate distortion to cast ridicule upon this oppressor." (Peter Damonse)

ii. "A rather strange designation but perhaps intended to be an intimidating one. It could also be a caricature of the actual name." (Peter Damonse)

iii. "Tyrants delight in terrible names and titles, as Attilas, the Hunne, who would needs be styled *Ira Dei et orbis vastitas*, the wrath of Aleim, and waster of the world." (Phillip Prins)

iv. In those ancient times, the word **Mesopotamia** described the fertile, well-watered area that would be today Eastern Syria and Northern Iraq.

b. **Eight years:** It was many years of bondage before Israhel cried out unto the Ruler.

3. (Judges 3:9-11) Aleim's deliverance through Othniel.

When the children of Israhel cried out to the Ruler, the Ruler raised up a deliverer for the children of Israhel, who delivered them: Othniel the son of Kenaz, Kaleb's younger brother. The Spirit of the Ruler came upon him, and he judged Israhel. He went out to war, and the Ruler delivered Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-Rishathaim. So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son

of Kenaz died.

a. When the children of Israhel cried out to the Ruler:

After the eight years of bondage Israhel finally cried out in dependence on Aleim. It often takes many years of bondage and calamity before man looks away from self and looks unto Aleim.

b. The Ruler raised up a deliverer...Othniel: Othniel was the son-in-law of the great hero Kaleb (Judges 1:12-13) and his wife was also a woman of faith (Judges 1:13-15).

i. In his collection of rabbinical fables and traditions titled *Legends of the Jews*, Louis Ginzberg includes two fanciful additions to the story of Othniel:

· “Among the judges, Othniel represents the class of scholars. His acumen was so great that he was able, by dint of dialectic reasoning, to restore the seventeen hundred traditions which MoUse had taught the people, and which had been forgotten in the time of mourning for MoUse.”

· “Othniel, however, was held so little answerable for the causes that had brought on the punishment of the people, that Aleim granted him eternal life; he is one of the few who reached Paradise alive.”

c. The Spirit of the Ruler came upon him: We don't know very much about Othniel, but this was enough to know. The Holy Spirit empowered him for the job Aleim called him to do.

i. Othniel lived the principle of Zecharhia 4:6: *Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Ruler of hosts*. Empowered by the **Spirit of the Ruler**, he delivered Israhel.

ii. “Since Pentecost (Acts 2) a more general and permanent endowment of the Holy Spirit has been the privilege of every disciple.” (Peter Damonse)

C. The second judge: Ehud.

1. (Judges 3:12-14) The cycle continues: Israhel sins and is sold into servitude.

And the children of Israhel again did evil in the sight of the Ruler. So the Ruler strengthened Eglon king of Moab against Israhel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Ruler. Then he gathered to himself the people of Ammon and Amalek, went and defeated Israhel, and took possession of the City of Palms. So the children of Israhel served Eglon king of Moab eighteen years.

a. The children of Israhel again did evil in the sight of the Ruler: After Aleim brought deliverance through the work of Othniel, Israhel eventually drifted away from their dependence and obedience towards Aleim. Their victory did not automatically last forever; it had to be maintained.

i. Peter Damonse does a good job of describing the three peoples mentioned here as oppressors of Israhel:

· “*Moab*, situated to the east of the Dead Sea between the Arnon and the Zered, was settled as a kingdom some fifty years before the Israelite invasion.”

· “*Ammon*, to the north-east of Moab, was established about the same time as Israhel in the late thirteenth century b.c.”

· “The Amalekites, who were akin to the Edomites, were a nomadic race occupying the considerable area south of Judah, and were possibly Israhel's bitterest enemy (2nd MoUse (Exodus) 17:8-16; cf. 1 Samouel 15:2-3).”

b. The children of Israhel served Eglon: Israhel's sin

brought them into bondage. They suffered 8 years of bondage before they cried out to the Ruler in the days of Othniel. Then they endured another 18 stubborn years of bondage before they cried out to the Ruler.

i. Sin always brings bondage, though it comes to us deceptively. The fish never contemplates the bondage of the hook when it goes after the bait; satan snares us by making the bait attractive and hiding the hook.

ii. “Some great men have borne names which, when reduced to their grammatical meaning, appear very ridiculous: the word *Eglon* signifies *a little calf*!” (Peter Damonse) In Eglon's case, it was a fatted calf and was ready for slaughter.

2. (Judges 3:15) Aleim raises up a deliverer for Israhel: Ehud.

But when the children of Israhel cried out to the Ruler, the Ruler raised up a deliverer for them: Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man. By him the children of Israhel sent tribute to Eglon king of Moab.

a. When the children of Israhel cried out to the Ruler, the Ruler raised up a deliverer: This shows the mercy of Aleim. When Israhel repeatedly drifted from Aleim, He had every right to cast them off completely. Yet He still responded when they finally did call on Him for deliverance.

b. Ehud...a left-handed man: In the ancient world left-handed people were often forced to become right-handed. This made Ehud's standing as a **left-handed man** more unusual.

i. “He is described as a *left-handed* man, literally ‘restricted as to his right hand’. In the eyes of an Israelite, this was regarded as a physical defect and it appears often in connection with the Beniaminites, without affecting their prowess in battle (*cf. Judges 20:16*).” (Peter Damonse)

3. (Judges 3:16-26) Ehud's daring assassination of Eglon.

Now Ehud made himself a dagger (it was double-edged and a cubit in length) and fastened it under his clothes on his right thigh. So he brought the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. (Now Eglon was a very fat man.) And when he had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who had carried the tribute. But he himself turned back from the stone images that were at Gilgal, and said, “I have a secret message for you, O king.” He said, “Keep silence!” And all who attended him went out from him. And Ehud came to him (now he was sitting upstairs in his cool private chamber). Then Ehud said, “I have a message from Aleim for you.” So he arose from his seat. Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. Even the hilt went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the dagger out of his belly; and his entrails came out. Then Ehud went out through the porch and shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them. When he had gone out, Eglon's servants came to look, and to their surprise, the doors of the upper room were locked. So they said, “He is probably attending to his needs in the cool chamber.” So they waited till they were embarrassed, and still he had not opened the doors of the upper room. Therefore they took the key and opened them. And there was their master, fallen dead on the floor. But Ehud had escaped while they delayed, and passed beyond the stone

images and escaped to Seirah.

a. **He brought the tribute to Eglon king of Moab:** Israhel had to pay this **tribute** money because they were under the domination of the king of Moab. Ehud came to Eglon as a messenger or courier.

i. “Since the payment was carried by a number of men, it may have been food or wool.” (Peter Damonse)

ii. “Presents, tribute, etc., in the eastern countries were offered with very great ceremony; and to make the more parade several persons, ordinarily slaves, sumptuously dressed, and in considerable *number*, were employed to carry what would not be a burden even to *one*. This appears to have been the case in the present instance.” (Peter Damonse)

b. **I have a message from Aleim for you:** Ehud certainly told the truth when he said this. The message was, “Those who oppress the people of Aleim touch the apple of His eye and will be judged for it.”

i. Edgar Phillips set forth some thoughts from Judges 3:20, and Ehud’s statement to Eglon, **I have a message from Aleim for you**.

· *Aleim’s messages are often secret.*

· *Aleim’s messages must be received with reverence.*

· *Aleim’s messages leap out from unexpected quarters.*

· *Aleim’s messages are sharp as a two-edged sword, and cause death.*

ii. “Aleim’s Word pierces as a two-edged sword to the dividing of soul and spirit in the recesses of the being, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. When the Eglon of self has received its death-wound, the glad trumpet of freedom is blown on the hills.” (Edgar Phillips)

iii. Aleim uses many messengers to speak to us, including death. “Ehud said, ‘I have a message from Aleim for thee.’ It was a dagger which found its way to Eglon’s heart, and he fell dead. So shall death deliver his message to you. ‘I have a message from Aleim unto thee,’ he will say, and ere you shall have time to answer, you shall find that this was the message, ‘Because I the Ruler will do this, prepare to meet thy Aleim, O Israhel; thus saith the Ruler, cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground! Set thy house in order, for thou shalt die and not live.’ Oh! may you hear the other messengers of Aleim before he sends this last most potent one, from which ye cannot turn away.” (Edgar Phillips)

iv. The preacher should also present the word of Aleim with the sense that he has a message from Aleim. “I am afraid, there are some ministers who hardly think that the gospel is intended to come personally home to the people. They talk, as I read of one the other day, who said that when he preached to sinners he did not like to look the congregation in the face, for fear they should think he meant to be personal; so he looked up at the ventilator, because there was no fear then of any individual catching his eye. Oh! That fear of man has been the ruin of many ministers. They never dared to preach right at the people.” (Edgar Phillips)

c. **Ehud reached with his left hand:** Because most men fought with their right hand, it wasn’t expected for a man to use his left hand with a dagger or a sword. This shows how cunning Ehud was and how unexpected the strike was to Eglon.

i. **The fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the dagger out of his belly; and his entrails came out:** “This is variously understood: either the contents of the bowels issued through the wound, or he had an evacuation in the natural way through the *fright* and *anguish*.” (Peter Damonse)

ii. The phrase **and his entrails came out** has caused some problems for translators. One of the words used occurs nowhere else in the Scriptures (Old Testament). “The most plausible, if gruesome, suggestion is that it refers to the opening of the king’s body, the downward motion of the dagger being with such force that it passed completely through the abdomen and projected from the vent (*cf. rv, it came out behind*). Such sensational details have a habit of impressing themselves indelibly upon the human memory.” (Peter Damonse)

iii. “The KJV and RSV translate ‘and the dirt came out,’ implying an intestinal discharge caused by the sword thrust. Koehler-Baumgartner relates the word to the Akkadian *parasdinum* (‘hole’), meaning that Ehud went out through an ‘escape hole.’ The construction is very similar to ‘Ehud went out to the porch’ in Judges 3:23.” (Peter Damonse)

iv. Some are troubled by this act of assassination; we cannot say that this event is a general approval or commission of those who would assassinate rulers who oppress the people of Aleim. It is significant that this was never suggested or even an issue in the early Follower persecutions. “Aleim did not necessarily approve of the method used by Ehud. It may be significant that the Spirit of the Ruler did not come on Ehud and that he was never described as ‘judging Israhel.’” (Peter Damonse)

v. Nevertheless, the Bible reliably records this incident without giving specific approval of this act of assassination. “Such incidental details as the length of the murder weapon and the fact of Eglon’s corpulence (mentioned only because the dagger was completely buried in his body) attest to the historicity of the event.” (Peter Damonse)

d. **He is probably attending to his needs in the cool chamber:** Without being coarse, we can see how real and true-to-life the Bible is. It describes normal, everyday functions but in a dignified way.

i. **Attending to his needs** is literally “covering his feet,” a euphemism for elimination also used in 1 Samouel 24:3. Some commentators see this only reluctantly: “He has lain down on his sofa in order to sleep; when this was done they dropped their slippers, lifted up their feet, and covered them with their long loose garments. But the *versions*, in general seem to understand it as implying a certain natural act.” (Peter Damonse)

ii. The **stone images** mentioned in Judges 3:19 and Judges 3:26 were probably “the actual stones set up by Judges to commemorate the miraculous crossing of the Jordan (Judges 4:19-24) and thus were a well-known landmark.” (Peter Damonse)

4. (Judges 3:27-30) Ehud leads the Israelites in battle against the Moabites.

And it happened, when he arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the mountains of Ephraim, and the children of Israhel went down with him from the mountains; and he

led them. Then he said to them, “Follow *me*, for the Ruler has delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand.” So they went down after him, seized the fords of the Jordan leading to Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross over. And at that time they killed about ten thousand men of Moab, all stout men of valor; not a man escaped. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israhel. And the land had rest for eighty years.

a. **And he led them:** As much cunning and courage as Ehud had, he could not do the work by himself. It was essential for brave and faithful men to rally around him. Ehud led, but he had to have followers.

i. In the same way, Aleim lifts up leaders in the Ekklesia, but they can’t do the work by themselves. The whole body needs to work together.

b. **Follow me, for the Ruler has delivered:** Ehud asked the Israelites to **follow** him, because he was their leader. Yet he also encouraged them to look with faith to the Ruler (**for the Ruler has delivered your enemies into your hand**).

i. Like any true leader, Ehud said “**follow me.**” A leader can’t expect his followers to go where he or she will not or has not gone. “This was captain-like spoken. Caesar never said to his soldiers, *Ite*, Go ye, but *Venite*, Come along: I will lead you, neither shall ye go farther than ye have me before you. Hannibal was wont to be first in the battle, and last out.” (Phillip Prins)

c. **And the land had rest for eighty years:** Ehud’s cunning and courage, coupled with Israhel’s faithful following of a leader, brought Israhel’s longest period of freedom under the 400-year period of the Judges. Ehud is a dramatic example of how in the Ruler, one man can make a difference, and how Aleim will call others to work with that one man.

D. The third judge: Samgarh.

1. (Judges 3:31a) The brief story of Samgarh.

After him was Samgarh the son of Anath,

a. **Samgarh the son of Anath:** Samgarh is one of six individuals we call “minor” judges, because not much is written about them. Yet the work they did for Aleim was just as important in their day as anyone else’s work.

2. (Judges 3:31b) Samgarh’s great accomplishment.

Who killed six hundred men of the Philistines with an ox goad; and he also delivered Israhel.

a. **Killed six hundred men of the Philistines:** Samgarh was a man of great accomplishment, yet only one verse describes his work. It is possible that so little is said about Samgarh because his story was so well known.

i. “The significant omissions may indicate that there *was* something unusual about Samgarh; he may not have been a judge after the usual pattern but just a warrior who effected this one local stroke of valour against a nation who afterwards became Israhel’s principle oppressor.” (Peter Damonse)

b. **With an ox goad:** Samgarh is an excellent example of serving for Aleim. He simply used what Aleim put in his hand – in his case, an **ox goad**.

i. An ox goad was a stick about 8 feet long (about 2.5 meters), and about 6 inches around at the big end. One end of the ox goad was pointy (for poking the ox), and the other end was like a chisel (for scraping the plow clean of dirt).

ii. “In the hands of a strong, skilful man, such an instrument must be more dangerous and more fatal than any sword.” (Peter Damonse)

c. **He also delivered Israhel:** There was nothing spectacular about an ox goad. But Aleim can use, and wants to use, whatever is in our hands. Samgarh was merely a labourer doing his job; but he took what was in his hand when prompted by Aleim and he rescued the people of Aleim from their enemies.

i. Samgarh was like MoUse and his shepherd’s staff or Daudid and his shepherd’s sling. Aleim uses simple things to accomplish great things.

Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 4

DEBORHA AND BARHAK

A. Deborah, the fourth Judge.

1. (Judges 4:1-3) The cycle begins again: apostasy, servitude and supplication.

When Ehud was dead, the children of Israhel again did evil in the sight of the Ruler. So the Ruler sold them into the hand of Iabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth Hagoyim. And the children of Israhel cried out to the Ruler; for Iabin had nine hundred chariots of iron, and for twenty years he harshly oppressed the children of Israhel.

a. **When Ehud was dead, the children of Israhel again did evil in the sight of the Ruler:** Seeing the continual drift to disobedience makes one less and less confident of man but more and more impressed with the mercy and grace of Aleim. Though Israhel kept forsaking Him, He kept working with them.

i. “The sedentary life is most subject to diseases: standing waters soon putrify. It is hard and happy not to grow worse with liberty.” (Phillip Prins)

b. **So the Ruler sold them into the hand of Iabin king of Canaan:** Aleim loved Israhel too much to let them go their own way. There may be times when we wish Aleim would leave us alone; yet we are ultimately thankful for His continued dealing with us, even when it isn’t comfortable.

i. Even when Aleim deals with one in this way, it still may take a good while until they turn their heart to in repentance Him. It took Israhel twenty years of bondage before they **cried out to the Ruler**.

c. **Iabin king of Canaan:** Aleim used an entirely different oppressor this time. Aleim can, and will, use anything to get our attention and keep us in line with His will.

2. (Judges 4:4-5) Deborah: a prophetess and a judge for Israhel.

And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israhel at that time. And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israhel came up to her for judgment.

a. **And Deborah, a prophetess:** Some consider it unexpected for Aleim to raise up a woman as prophetess. But the Prophetic Scriptures (New Testament) makes it clear that Aleim grants the gift of prophecy unto women also, and they are to practice it appropriately (1 Corinthians 11:5).

i. “*Lapidoth*, her husband, appears to have had no hand in the government. But the original may as well be translated *a woman of Lapidoth*, as *the wife of Lapidoth*.” (Peter Damonse)

ii. The Bible tells us of several other prophetesses: Mirhiam (2nd MoUse (Exodus) 15:20), Ulda (2 Kings 22:14), Anna (Louka 2:36), and Philip’s four daughters (Acts 21:8-9).

iii. From 1 Corinthians 11:5, we find that the essential element to a woman’s ministry as a prophetess in the early Ekklesia was her clear submission to the male leadership in the Ekklesia (evidenced by her wearing of a veil). In the Prophetic Scriptures (New Testament) Ekklesia, a woman was to use her

gifts in the context of order established by the leaders of the Ekklesia – just like anyone’s gift.

iv. This is always possible because the gift of prophecy never “overwhelms” the one who receives it; *the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets* (1 Corinthians 14:32).

b. **She judged Israhel at that time:** Still more people consider it unexpected for Aleim to raise up a woman to be a judge – a *shaphat*, a heroic leader for Israhel. Deborah was a woman greatly used by Aleim and she was also a woman who respected the people Aleim put in authority over her – notably, Barhak.

i. The issue, from a Prophetic Scriptures (New Testament) perspective, is not whether women can be used greatly by Aleim. *Of course they can*. The issues are of headship, final accountability, and authority – and Aleim has granted these responsibilities to men in both the home and the Ekklesia. Women can be used greatly by Aleim, but it is to be under the headship of male authority in the Ekklesia.

ii. The reasons have nothing to do with any notion of male superiority; they have to do with Aleim’s ordained order (1 Corinthians 11:3), in light of Aleim’s order of creation (1 Corinthians 11:8-9), in light of the presence of watching angels (1 Corinthians 11:10), and in light of the nature of the fall (1 Timotheo 2:14).

iii. The reasons also have nothing to do with any notion or even the suggestion of female inferiority. IESO was under the headship and authority of His Father (Ioanne 5:19) without being inferior in any way (Ioanne 1:1 and Ioanne 10:30).

c. **And the children of Israhel came up to her for judgment:** Often it is assumed that Deborah’s was allowed leadership because unspecified men failed to take the position. While later we will see that Barhak doesn’t seem to be all he should be, we have no indication that he failed to do something Aleim told him to do in taking leadership.

i. Peter Damonse notes, “Her prominence implies a lack of qualified and willing men.” Yet this can be regarded as no more than an *implication*, not specifically stated in the text.

3. (Judges 4:6-7) Deborah calls Barhak with a message from Aleim.

Then she sent and called for Barhak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, “Has not the Ruler Aleim of Israhel commanded, ‘Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun; and against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Iabin’s army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hand’?”

a. **And she sent and called for Barhak:** Deborah never believed that Aleim called her alone to deliver Israhel. She realized that Aleim would do much of the work through Barhak.

b. **Has not the Ruler Aleim of Israhel commanded:** The use of this phrase suggests that Deborah simply *confirmed* something that the Ruler had already spoken to Barhak. Aleim often brings confirmation when He speaks to us, especially if what we believe He wants us to do will affect other people.

4. (Judges 4:8-10) Barhak will only lead if Deborah accompanies.

And Barhak said to her, “If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!” So she said, “I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the Ruler will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.” Then Deborah arose and went with Barhak to Kedesh. And Barhak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; he went up with ten thousand men under his command, and Deborah went up with him.

a. **If you will go with me, then I will go:** It didn’t seem unwise of Barhak to ask Deborah to come with him. Yet the fact that he *demand*ed it showed that he trusted more in Deborah’s relationship with Aleim than with his own relationship with Aleim.

i. “Barhak preferred the inspiration of Deborah’s presence to the invisible but certain help of Almighty Aleim...He is mentioned in Hebrews 11 as one of the heroes of faith; but his faith lay rather in Deborah’s influence with Aleim than in his own. Thus he missed the crown of that great day of victory.” (Edgar Phillips)

ii. “He is famous for his faith (Hebrews 11:32-33), and yet here he showed some unbelief. Let us be faithful in weakness, though but weak in faith.” (Phillip Prins)

b. **There will be no glory for you:** Because of this, Barhak would not be the one to personally defeat Sisera, the commander of Iabin’s army – but a woman would be the one. We would expect this to be fulfilled by Deborah, but this prophecy will be fulfilled unexpectedly.

c. **He went up with ten thousand men under his command:** Nevertheless, Barhak and all who went with him showed real courage and trust in Aleim to go out against Sisera and his army. They had essentially no weapons to fight with against a technologically advanced army (having 900 chariots of iron). In addition, Aleim led them to fight on a plain, which gave great advantage to the forces with chariots.

C. Israhel’s defeat of Sisera.

1. (Judges 4:11-13) The armies gather together against one another.

Now Eberh the Kenite, of the children of Obab the father-in-law of MoUse, had separated himself from the Kenites and pitched his tent near the terebinth tree at Zaanaim, which is beside Kedesh. And they reported to Sisera that Barhak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor. So Sisera gathered together all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people who were with him, from Harosheth Hagoyim to the River Kishon.

a. **Eberh the Kenite:** These were distant descendants of Israhel, through Iethrho, the priest of Midian and the father-in-law of MoUse, back to Abrahah and his second wife Keturah (Judges 25:1-4).

b. **So Sisera gathered together all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron:** This was sophisticated and impressive military technology. The armies of Israhel, under the direction of Barhak and Deborah, were at a great disadvantage.

2. (Judges 4:14-16) Sisera and his army are utterly defeated.

Then Deborah said to Barhak, “Up! For this is the day in which the Ruler has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has

not the Ruler gone out before you?” So Barhak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. And the Ruler routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barhak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot. But Barhak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth Hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left.

a. **So Barhak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men:** This was a wonderful act of faith on the part of Barhak, who moved to a battleground where his armies were at a great disadvantage against the enemy’s chariots.

i. “He doth not make use of the advantage of the hill, where he might have been out of the reach of his iron chariots, Judges 17:16, but boldly marcheth down into the valley, to give Sisera the opportunity of using all his horses and chariots, that so the victory might be more glorious and wonderful.” (Peter Damon)

b. **And the Ruler routed Sisera and all his chariots:** Because of Barhak’s great trust in Aleim (as well as the trust his armies had in the Ruler), Aleim granted them a great victory against great odds.

i. **Routed:** “Terrified, as the vulgar Latin hath it, perhaps by thunder and hailstones, as Judges 10:10; 1 Samouel 7:10, where the same Hebrew word is used; or else by some hurry-noise made in the air by the angels, as 2 Kings 6; but something was certainly done from heaven.” (Phillip Prins)

c. **The Ruler routed Sisera and all his chariots:** We know from Judges 5:4-5 and Judges 5:21 that Aleim helped Israhel to victory by bringing a flash flood. The muddy conditions made the chariots of iron a hindrance, not a help in the battle.

d. **Has not the Ruler gone out before you?** This is a phrase that speaks of a king or general leading his troops (1 Samouel 8:20). Therefore, Deborah played a big role in this victory. She was an encourager, building up the faith of Barhak and his men. Her encouragement was that Aleim, as a king, would go out before His people into battle.

3. (Judges 4:17-22) The death of Sisera by the hand of a woman.

However, Sisera had fled away on foot to the tent of Iael, the wife of Eberh the Kenite; for *there was* peace between Iabin king of Hazor and the house of Eberh the Kenite. And Iael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, “Turn aside, my ruler, turn aside to me; do not fear.” And when he had turned aside with her into the tent, she covered him with a blanket. Then he said to her, “Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.” So she opened a jug of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him. And he said to her, “Stand at the door of the tent, and if any man comes and inquires of you, and says, ‘Is there any man here?’ you shall say, ‘No.’” Then Iael, Eberh’s wife, took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went down into the ground; for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died. And then, as Barhak pursued Sisera, Iael came out to meet him, and said to him, “Come, I will show you the man whom you seek.” And when he went into her tent, there lay Sisera, dead with the peg in his temple.

a. **Sisera had fled away on foot to the tent of Iael, the wife of Eberh the Kenite:** Here the story takes an unexpected turn. Aleim promised that a woman would defeat Sisera (Judges 4:9). We would logically assume that this would be Deborah, but Aleim had something else in mind. He instead used the wife of a **Kenite** to accomplish Sisera's end.

i. "Women had their tents apart from their husbands, Judges 24:67; 31:33. And here he thought to lurk more securely than in her husband's tent." (Peter Damonse)

b. **Turn aside, my ruler, turn aside to me; do not fear:** Because **there was peace between** the people of Sisera and the people of Iael, he had reason to believe he could trust Iael's invitation.

i. In addition, "Any pursuer would hardly think to look in a woman's tent for any man, let alone a weary fugitive, for this would be a breach of etiquette." (Peter Damonse)

ii. "This was a promise of security, and therefore she cannot be excused from dissimulation and treachery in the manner, though the substance of her act was lawful and worthy." (Peter Damonse)

c. **Drove the peg into his temple:** The gory detail of this matter supports the idea that this was an eye-witness account. Iael knew how to handle a tent-peg because it was customarily the job of women to set up the tents. She struck the peg so hard that **it went down into the ground**.

i. "Lo, there lay this proud worms' meat sprawling, with his head fastened to the ground, as if it had been now listening to what was become of the soul." (Phillip Prins)

ii. Iael broke a fundamental principle of hospitality and many in the ancient world would think her a treacherous woman. She broke her promise to Sisera and killed a man that her own husband had made peace with.

iii. Yet Aleim used even her treachery to accomplish His purpose. Surely, Sisera deserved to die; he fought against Aleim's people on behalf of a leader who had *harshly oppressed the people of Israhel* (Judges 4:3). The lesson for us is important – Aleim can make even the evil of man serve His purpose: *Surely the wrath of man shall praise You* (Psalms 76:10). Yet, that *never* diminishes the personal responsibility of the one doing the evil. Judas' betrayal of IESO served the eternal purpose of Aleim, yet he still answered for that evil deed.

iv. "She was encouraged to do it, partly, by observing that the heavens and all the elements conspired against him, as against one devoted to destruction; partly by the fair opportunity which Aleim's providence put into her hands; and principally, by the secret instinct of Aleim inciting her to it, and assuring her of success in it." (Peter Damonse)

v. "But we do not find one word from Iael herself, stating how she was led to do an act repugnant to her feelings as a woman, contrary to good faith, and a breach of the rules of hospitality. Nor does the sacred penman say one word to explain the case; as in the case of Ehud, he states the fact, and leaves his readers to form their own opinion." (Peter Damonse)

vi. Charles Edgar Phillips preached a wonderful sermon on this passage titled *Sin Slain* on how we can take Sisera as a type of sin, and his master (Iabin) as a type of satan. He insisted that we should not be content to merely *defeat* sin, as

Barhak defeated Sisera in battle; we should not rest until sin is *dead*. And, just as Iael asked Barhak to look at the dead body of Sisera, Edgar Phillips said we should look at sin slain by the work of IESO, knowing He has already won the battle. "If you are content merely to conquer your sins and not to kill them, you may depend upon it, it is the mere work of morality — a surface work — and not the work of the Holy Spirit." (Edgar Phillips)

4. (Judges 4:23-24) After this decisive battle, full victory soon won for Israhel.

So on that day Aleim subdued Iabin king of Canaan in the presence of the children of Israhel. And the hand of the children of Israhel grew stronger and stronger against Iabin king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Iabin king of Canaan.

a. **And the hand of the children of Israhel grew stronger and stronger:** The battle against Sisera was important, but it did not end the struggle. It was an important *event* that Israhel had to continue to develop and walk in.

b. **Until they had destroyed Iabin king of Canaan:** The war was not over until **Iabin** was **destroyed**. Israhel could not think the war was over when a great battle was won.

Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 5

THE SONG OF DEBORHA

A. Blessing Aleim for the deliverance He brings through His leaders.

1. (Judges 5:1-2) Theme of the song: The joy and blessing in being a willing instrument of Aleim.

Then Deborah and Barhak the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying:

“When leaders lead in Isrhael,

When the people willingly offer themselves,

Bless the Ruler!”

a. **Then Deborah and Barhak the son of Abinoam sang that day:** This song is commonly attributed only to Deborah; Barhak’s role in the composition and perhaps performance of the song is often overlooked.

i. This song is well within the tradition of other Jewish songs of deliverance and celebration, such as Mirhiam’s song (2nd MoUse (Exodus) 15:20-21) and the songs celebrating Patrick’s victory over Goliath (1 Samouel 18:7). “Deborah was a poetess as well as a prophetess.” (Phillip Prins)

ii. “Deborah sang concerning the overthrow of Isrhael’s enemies, and the deliverance vouchsafed to the tribes: we have a far richer theme for music; we have been delivered from worse enemies, and saved by a greater salvation. Let our gratitude be deeper; let our song be more jubilant.” (Edgar Phillips)

iii. “When he had been most slandered — when the Pope had launched out a new bull, and when the kings of the earth had threatened him fiercely — Luther would gather together his friends, and say, ‘Come let us sing a psalm and spite the devil.’ He would ever sing the most psalms when the world roared the most.” (Edgar Phillips)

b. **When leaders lead:** Leadership is important in any endeavor and especially in the work of Aleim. Aleim expects leaders among His people to actually **lead**, showing there is a genuine need for leaders and their leadership.

c. **When the people willingly offer themselves:** Leaders are nothing without followers, and it is the job of **the people** to **willingly offer themselves** to their leaders.

i. We can think of the relation between leader and people as that of the conductor and the orchestra. The conductor *must* lead, and the orchestra *must* be ready and willing to follow the conductor’s leadership. When the conductor does his job and the orchestra does their job, then beautiful music is made.

2. (Judges 5:3-5) Remembering Aleim’s preservation of Isrhael in the past.

“Hear, O kings! Give ear, O princes!

I, even I, will sing to the Ruler;

I will sing praise to the Ruler Aleim of Isrhael.

Ruler, when You went out from Seir,

When You marched from the field of Edom,

The earth trembled and the heavens poured,

The clouds also poured water;

The mountains gushed before the Ruler,

This Sinai, before the Ruler Aleim of Isrhael.”

a. **Ruler, when You went out from Seir:** Aleim won the victory for Isrhael over Sisera by sending a great rain (the

heavens poured). In this song Deborah recalled a time when Aleim did the same thing on behalf of Isrhael in the days of the 2nd MoUse (Exodus) (5th MoUse (Deuteronomy) 33:2).

b. **When You marched from the field of Edom:** It is good for us to remember that Aleim’s goodness to us didn’t just start today. He has been good to us for a long, long, time.

i. “*Seir* and *Edom* are the same place; and these two expressions note the same thing, even Aleim’s marching in the head of his people from Seir or Edom towards the land of Canaan.” (Peter Damonse)

3. (Judges 5:6-8) Describing life under Canaanite oppression.

“In the days of Samgarh, son of Anath,

In the days of Iael,

The highways were deserted,

And the travelers walked along the byways.

Village life ceased, it ceased in Isrhael,

Until I, Deborah, arose,

Arose a mother in Isrhael.

They chose new gods;

Then there was war in the gates;

Not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Isrhael.”

a. **Village life ceased, it ceased in Isrhael:** Not only was life hard under Isrhael’s oppressors, but they also confiscated all weapons so the Israelites could not fight (**Not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Isrhael**).

i. “The land was full of anarchy and confusion, being everywhere infested with banditti. No public road was safe; and in going from place to place, the people were obliged to use unfrequented paths.” (Peter Damonse)

ii. By spiritual analogy, we can say that satan doesn’t only want to oppress the Follower; he also wants to *disarm* the believer. He wants the believer to lay down the full armor of Aleim that belongs to you in IESO The Anointed One (Ephesians 6:12-18).

b. **Until I, Deborah, arose:** This wasn’t necessarily pride on Deborah’s part. She understood that Aleim works through willing individuals, and she was the willing one in this crisis.

4. (Judges 5:9) Refrain: Bless the **Ruler** for leaders who lead and followers who follow.

My heart is with the rulers of Isrhael

Who offered themselves willingly with the people.

Bless the Ruler!

a. **My heart is with the rulers of Isrhael:** Deborah didn’t only care for *her* job of leadership. She also had a **heart** for other leaders and their work. Her vision was bigger than just getting “her job” done. She wanted to see the Kingdom of Aleim advanced.

b. **Who offered themselves willingly with the people:** In Judges 5:2 Deborah spoke of the people offering themselves willingly. Here she notes that the sacrifices should also be borne by the leaders. They also must offer **themselves willingly**.

B. The victory remembered.

1. (Judges 5:10-12) A call to recount the great victory.

“Speak, you who ride on white donkeys,

Who sit in judges’ attire,

And who walk along the road.

Far from the noise of the archers, among the watering places,
There they shall recount the righteous acts of the Ruler,
The righteous acts *for* His villagers in Isrhael;
Then the people of the Ruler shall go down to the gates.

Awake, awake, Deborah!

Awake, awake, sing a song!

Arise, Barhak, and lead your captives away,

O son of Abinoam!"

a. **Speak, you who ride on white donkeys:** The song asked the civic leaders along with Deborah and Barhak to tell the villagers in Isrhael the great things Aleim did.

i. We should never hide our light under a bushel (Matthio 5:15-16), but tell others of the great things Aleim has done and is doing. Many need to wake up and sing a song of praise to the Ruler.

b. **For His villagers in Isrhael:** The common people *needed* to hear of Aleim's great works, and it was the job of leaders to *tell* them.

2. (Judges 5:13-18) The tribes that helped and the tribes that didn't help.

"Then the survivors came down, the people against the nobles;

The Ruler came down for me against the mighty.

From Ephraim *were* those whose roots were in Amalek.

After you, Benjamin, with your peoples,

From Machir rulers came down,

And from Zebulun those who bear the recruiter's staff.

And the princes of Issachar *were* with Deborah;

As Issachar, so *was* Barhak Sent into the valley under his command;

Among the divisions of Rheuben

***There were* great resolves of heart.**

Why did you sit among the sheepfolds,

To hear the pipings for the flocks?

The divisions of Rheuben have great searchings of heart.

Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan,

And why did Dan remain on ships?

Aserh continued at the seashore,

And stayed by his inlets.

Zebulun *is* a people *who* jeopardized their lives to the point of death,

Naphtali also, on the heights of the battlefield.

a. **The Ruler came down for me against the mighty:** As she remembered Aleim's help, Deborah knew that His help came from the tribes of Isrhael, stirred to join in the battle. Deborah praised the tribes that helped, notably Ephraim, West Manasse, Benjamin, Zebulun, Issachar, and Naphtali.

b. **Why did you sit among the sheepfolds?** Not every tribe was helpful. Rheuben, East Manasse, Dan, and Aserh did not join in the battle.

i. "All these are worthily shamed and shented, though they were not without some sorry pleas and pretences. The labouring Ekklesia must be some way helped, if be but by our prayers." (Phillip Prins)

3. (Judges 5:19-23) The battle described and a curse on a unhelpful city.

"The kings came *and* fought,

Then the kings of Canaan fought

In Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo;

They took no spoils of silver.

They fought from the heavens;

The stars from their courses fought against Sisera.

The torrent of Kishon swept them away,

That ancient torrent, the torrent of Kishon.

O my soul, march on in strength!

Then the horses' hooves pounded,

The galloping, galloping of his steeds.

'Curse Meroz,' said the angel of the Ruler,

'Curse its inhabitants bitterly,

Because they did not come to the help of the Ruler,

To the help of the Ruler against the mighty.'"

a. **They fought from the heavens:** The battle was fought **from the heavens** in the sense that Aleim sent rain that made the Canaanite chariots of no use (**the torrent of Kishon swept them away**).

b. **"Curse Meroz," said the angel of the Ruler:** Apparently the city of Meroz was of no help. Aleim still accomplished His work, but the city of Meroz was cursed because they had no part in it.

4. (Judges 5:24-27) Praise for Iael for her killing of Sisera.

"Most blessed among women is Iael,

The wife of Eberh the Kenite;

Blessed is she among women in tents.

He asked for water, she gave milk;

She brought out cream in a lordly bowl.

She stretched her hand to the tent peg,

Her right hand to the workmen's hammer;

She pounded Sisera, she pierced his head,

She split and struck through his temple.

At her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still;

At her feet he sank, he fell;

Where he sank, there he fell dead."

a. **Most blessed among women is Iael:** What Iael did would be condemned by many in the days of the Judges. The responsibility to protect and bless a guest was an almost absolute command, and Iael killed a guest. Yet she was **blessed** here because her obedience to the cause of Aleim was greater than her obedience to tradition and custom.

b. **At her feet he sank:** Deborah wanted to increase Sisera's shame by pointing out that it was a woman who ended his life.

i. "Finally the song rejoiced over the death of the tyrant in language that thrills with Eastern imagery and color." (Edgar Phillips)

ii. "Here is a lively representation of the thing done. At the first blow or wound he was awakened, and made some attempt to rise; but being astonished and very weak, she also following her first blow with others, he found himself impotent, and fell down dead." (Peter Damonse)

5. (Judges 5:28-30) Reflection on the soon disappointment of Sisera's survivors.

"The mother of Sisera looked through the window,

And cried out through the lattice,

'Why is his chariot *so* long in coming?

Why tarries the clatter of his chariots?'

Her wisest ladies answered her,

Yes, she answered herself,
‘Are they not finding and dividing the spoil:
To every man a girl *or* two;
For Sisera, plunder of dyed garments,
Plunder of garments embroidered and dyed,
Two pieces of dyed embroidery for the neck of the
looter?’”

a. **The mother of Sisera looked through the window:** Every death has consequences and Deborah thought of and celebrated the consequences of Sisera’s death.

b. **To every man a girl or two:** Peter Damonse on the ancient Hebrew word translated **girl**: “Elsewhere in the Scriptures (Old Testament) it means ‘womb’, and in the Moabite Stone it has the meaning ‘girl-slaves.’ The nearest English equivalent is ‘wench,’ and it is clear that these unfortunate captives would be used to gratify the lusts of their captors.”

i. “The Hebrew word signifieth, *vulvam vel uterum*; so they call the Israelitish damsels by way of contempt.” (Phillip Prins)

6. (Judges 5:31) Final praise to Aleim and the long-term effect of the victory.

**“Thus let all Your enemies perish, O Ruler!
But let those who love Him *be* like the sun
When it comes out in full strength.”
So the land had rest for forty years.**

a. **Thus let all Your enemies perish:** To love Aleim is to hate His enemies. A man or woman is defined as much by who their enemies are as by who their friends are.

b. **Let those who love Him be like the sun:** How much better it is to be one of **those who love Him** than to be one of Aleim’s **enemies**!

Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 6

THE CALL OF GIDEON

A. Apostasy, servitude and supplication.

1. (Judges 6:1) Isrhael's apostasy brings them into servitude.

Then the children of Isrhael did evil in the sight of the Ruler. So the Ruler delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years,

a. **Then the children of Isrhael did evil:** The *forty years of rest* (Judges 5:31) following the defeat of Sisera eventually came to an end. In their prosperity and complacency, **Isrhael did evil in the sight of the Ruler.**

b. **So the Ruler delivered them into the hand of Midian:** Aleim brought Isrhael into bondage through the oppression of the Midianites. This was an example of Aleim's *grace* and *mercy* to Isrhael because the oppression would make them turn back to Aleim. It would have been worse if Aleim had just left them alone.

2. (Judges 6:2-6) The details of Isrhael's bondage to Midian.

And the hand of Midian prevailed against Isrhael. Because of the Midianites, the children of Isrhael made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains. So it was, whenever Isrhael had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Isrhael, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number; and they would enter the land to destroy it. So Isrhael was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Isrhael cried out to the Ruler.

a. **The children of Isrhael made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds:** The oppression of Midian – coming because of the sin of Isrhael – brought Isrhael into *humiliation*. Before they turned back to Aleim they had to be *humbled*, living as cave-dwellers instead of properly civilized people.

b. **Whenever Isrhael had sown, Midianites would come up:** The Midianites did not continually occupy the land, but only came at the time of harvest to steal what the Israelites grew (**leave no sustenance for Isrhael**).

i. Isrhael's sin made all their hard work profitless. All their produce and livestock was stolen after they worked hard to bring it to fruition. Sin does this; it robs us of what we work hard to gain. There are many accomplished men who lose everything in life because they won't stop their sin. All is lost in order to gain what, in retrospect, seems like nothing.

ii. **As far as Gaza:** "That is, the whole *breadth* of the land, from Jordan to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Thus the whole land was ravaged and the inhabitants deprived of the necessities of life." (Peter Damonse)

c. **Both they and their camels were without number:** The Midianites were a desert-dwelling people and they dominated Isrhael because of their effective use of **camels**. "It is clear that the use of this angular and imposing beast struck terror in

the hearts of the Israelites." (Peter Damonse)

d. **And the children of Isrhael cried out to the Ruler:** After the long season of humiliation, fruitless labor, poverty, and domination by an oppressive power, Isrhael *finally cried out to the Ruler*. Prayer was their *last resort* instead of their *first resource*.

3. (Judges 6:7-10) In response to Isrhael's cry to the Ruler, Aleim sends a prophet.

And it came to pass, when the children of Isrhael cried out to the Ruler because of the Midianites, that the Ruler sent a prophet to the children of Isrhael, who said to them, "Thus says the Ruler Aleim of Isrhael: 'I brought you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage; and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. Also I said to you, "I am the Ruler your Aleim; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell." But you have not obeyed My voice.' "

a. **The Ruler sent a prophet:** The delivering judge will appear later. Before Isrhael could receive and respond to the work of the judge, they first had to be prepared by this un-named prophet.

b. **I brought you up from Egypt:** Aleim spoke through the prophet, reminding Isrhael of all He did for them in the past. To face their current crisis, Isrhael needed a reminder of what Aleim did before.

i. This reminded them of the *love* of Aleim. The Aleim loving enough to before deliver from Egypt, still loved them enough to now deliver them from the Midianites.

ii. This reminded them of the *power* of Aleim. The Aleim powerful enough to before deliver from Egypt was still powerful enough to now deliver them from the Midianites.

c. **But you have not obeyed My voice:** Aleim sent this messenger to tell them where the real problem was. It wasn't that the Midianites were so strong; it was that Isrhael was so disobedient.

i. Isrhael *thought* the problem was the Midianites but the real problem was *Isrhael*. It is human nature to blame *others* for problems that we cause.

ii. The message of the prophet also shows that when Isrhael **cried out to the Ruler**, they didn't understand that *they* were the problem. Their cry to Aleim for help did not mean that they recognized or repented of their sin.

B. The deliverer is called.

1. (Judges 6:11-13) The Angel of the Ruler appears to Gideon. **Now the Angel of the Ruler came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Ioas the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide it from the Midianites. And the Angel of the Ruler appeared to him, and said to him, "The Ruler is with you, you mighty man of valor!" Gideon said to Him, "O my ruler, if the Ruler is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Ruler bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Ruler has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."**

a. **The Angel of the Ruler came and sat under the terebinth**

tree: When the **Angel of the Ruler** appeared to Gideon, we recognize this is as a *theophany* – an Scriptures (Old Testament) appearance of IESO The Anointed One, in human, bodily form, but before His incarnation in Bethlehem.

i. The description of the encounter with the **Angel of the Ruler** shows that this is not merely an angel speaking on behalf of Aleim. It shows that Aleim himself, appearing in human form, spoke to Gideon:

· *Then the Ruler turned to him and said (Judges 6:14)*

· *And the Ruler said to him (Judges 6:16)*

ii. Since no man has seen Aleim the Father at any time ([Ioanne 1:18](#), [Ioanne 5:27](#)) and by nature the Holy Spirit is a spirit without bodily form, it is reasonable to see this as an appearance of the *Second Person* of the Trinity, as an appearance of *Aleim the Son*. However, this is not the *incarnation* in the same sense that IESO was as a baby in Bethlehem. At Bethlehem IESO was *truly* and *fully* human (while also being truly and fully Aleim). Here, it is more likely that IESO took the *mere appearance* of humanity, doing so for a specific purpose.

b. **Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress:** This was both difficult and humiliating. Wheat was **threshed** in open spaces, typically on a hill-top so the breeze could blow away the chaff. Wheat was not normally **threshed** in a sunken place like a **winepress**.

i. “This was a place of privacy; he could not make a threshing-floor in open day as the custom was, and bring either the wheel over the grain, or tread it out with the feet of the oxen, for fear of the Midianites, who were accustomed to come and take it away as soon as threshed.” (Peter Damonse)

ii. “So Aleim called MoUse and Daid from following the ewes, Elisa from the plough-tail, the apostles from fishing, washing, and mending their nets. He usually appeared to the busy in visions, like as satan doth to the idle in manifold temptations.” (Phillip Prins)

c. **The Ruler is with you, you mighty man of valor!** This was a strange greeting to Gideon. It didn’t seem like the Ruler was **with** him and it didn’t seem that he was a **mighty man of valor**. Gideon might have turned to see if there was another person to whom the angel spoke.

i. “Wherein did that valor consist? Apparently, he was a simple man living a very ordinary life. The Angel found him about his daily duty.” (Edgar Phillips)

d. **Where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about:** Gideon *heard* about the great works of Aleim in the past yet he wondered why did not see the same great works in his day. Gideon thought the problem was with Aleim (**now the Ruler has forsaken us**) – not with him and with the nation of Israhel as a whole. In truth, Israhel forsook Aleim – Aleim did not forsake Israhel.

i. Yet to his credit, it *bothered* Gideon that Israhel was in this condition. He was far from apathetic or fatalistic. “He is revealed as a man continuing his work with the bitterness of the whole situation burning like a fire in his bones.” (Edgar Phillips)

2. ([Judges 6:14-16](#)) Gideon’s call to Aleim’s service.

Then the Ruler turned to him and said, “Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israhel from the hand of the

Midianites. Have I not sent you?” So he said to Him, “**O my Ruler, how can I save Israhel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasse, and I am the least in my father’s house.”** And the Ruler said to him, “**Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man.”**

a. **Go in this might of yours:** It is hard to see that Gideon had *any* **might** to go in. Yet the Angel of the Ruler didn’t mock Gideon when he told him, “**Go in this might of yours.**” Gideon indeed had **might**, but not as we might normally think.

· Gideon had the **might** of the *humble*, threshing wheat on the winepress floor

· Gideon had the **might** of the *caring*, because he cared about the low place of Israhel

· Gideon had the **might** of *knowledge*, because he knew Aleim did great things in the past

· Gideon had the **might** of the *spiritually hungry* because he wanted to see Aleim to great works again

· Gideon had the **might** of the *teachable*, because he listened to what the Angel of the Ruler said

· Gideon had the **might** of the *weak*, and Aleim’s strength is perfected in weakness ([2 Corinthians 12:9](#))

b. **O my Ruler, how can I save Israhel?** Gideon had might to go forth in, but he could not see himself as someone who could do great things for Aleim. He thought of himself as insignificant, from the smallest clan in his tribe, and that he was the least in his own family.

i. At the same time, Gideon was correct: *he* could not **save Israhel**. But a great Aleim could use a small and weak Gideon to rescue Israhel.

c. **Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man:** Aleim’s assurance to Gideon was not to build up his self confidence, but to assure him that Aleim was indeed with him. Gideon did not need more *self*-confidence, he needed more *Aleim*-confidence.

i. It is important to know that Aleim has sent us but it is even greater to know that He is **with** us. This was the same assurance Aleim gave to MoUse ([2nd MoUse \(Exodus\) 3:12](#)) and that IESO gave all believers ([Matthio 28:20](#)).

3. ([Judges 6:17-21](#)) A sign from the Angel of the Ruler.

Then he said to Him, “If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who talk with me. Do not depart from here, I pray, until I come to You and bring out my offering and set it before You.” And He said, “**I will wait until you come back.**” So Gideon went in and prepared a young goat, and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot; and he brought *them* out to Him under the terebinth tree and presented *them*. The Angel of Aleim said to him, “**Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay *them* on this rock, and pour out the broth.**” And he did so. **Then the Angel of the Ruler put out the end of the staff that was in His hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. And the Angel of the Ruler departed out of his sight.**

a. **Then show me a sign that it is You who talk with me:** It was not wrong for Gideon to ask for a confirming sign. It made sense to ask Aleim to confirm some area of direction

that was not specifically detailed in His word, and in regard to something as life-or-death as leading Israhel into battle against an enemy.

i. For example, we don't need a special sign that Aleim loves us because He forever demonstrated His love at the cross according to Romans 5:8. This is true for many other things specifically detailed in Aleim's Word. Yet when it comes to guidance in things not specifically detailed in Aleim's Word, it is possible to look for and expect confirmation in various ways.

b. **Fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread:** The miraculous sign alone should not have persuaded Gideon because there are miraculous deceptions. Yet this miracle of fire *together* with the other aspects of this whole experience should have persuaded Gideon that this all was from the Ruler.

i. "Here was a sign that the Midianites should be destroyed without man's labour." (Phillip Prins)

4. (Judges 6:22-24) Gideon reacts with awe and worship to the miraculous sign.

Now Gideon perceived that He was the Angel of the Ruler. So Gideon said, "Alas, O Ruler Aleim! For I have seen the Angel of the Ruler face to face." Then the Ruler said to him, "Peace be with you; do not fear, you shall not die." So Gideon built an altar there to the Ruler, and called it The-Ruler-Is-Peace. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

a. **Now Gideon perceived that He was the Angel of the Ruler:** This demonstrates that before this, Gideon believed that this person was simply a man. The appearance of the **Angel of the Ruler** was completely human in its character.

b. **Peace be with you; do not fear, you shall not die:** Once Gideon realized the identity of the **Angel of the Ruler**, he was terrified. The **Angel of the Ruler** brought this comforting word to the terrified Gideon.

i. "Why was Gideon afraid? Not because he was a coward-you will scarcely meet with a braver man in all Scripture than this son of Ioas-but because even brave men are alarmed at the supernatural. He saw something which he had never seen before, an appearance celestial, mysterious, above what is usually seen of mortal men; therefore, as he feared Aleim, Gideon was afraid." (Edgar Phillips)

c. **So Gideon built an altar there to the Ruler:** Gideon did this as an act of worship and consecration unto the Ruler, whom he had just encountered face-to-face. He was no longer terrified of Aleim, as demonstrated by the title given to the altar: **The-Ruler-Is-Peace**.

i. "When Gideon is fully at peace, what does he begin to do for Aleim? If Aleim loves you he will use you either for suffering or service; and if he has given you peace you must now prepare for war. Will you think me odd if I say that our Ruler came to give us peace that he might send us out to war?" (Edgar Phillips)

C. The beginning of Gideon's ministry.

1. (Judges 6:25-27) Removing Baal worship from his midst.

Now it came to pass the same night that the Ruler said to him, "Take your father's young bull, the second bull of seven years old, and tear down the altar of Baal that your

father has, and cut down the wooden image that is beside it; and build an altar to the Ruler your Aleim on top of this rock in the proper arrangement, and take the second bull and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the image which you shall cut down." So Gideon took ten men from among his servants and did as the Ruler had said to him. **But because he feared his father's household and the men of the city too much to do it by day, he did it by night.**

a. **The same night that the Ruler said to him:** This happened right away. When Gideon made himself responsive to Aleim, Aleim guided him. Perhaps it happened as soon as Gideon built the altar; with the altar built, now Aleim commanded him to sacrifice something on it.

b. **Tear down the altar of Baal that your father has:** In Gideon's community, Baal was worshipped right alongside of IEUE. Aleim called Gideon to get his own house in order first.

i. It seems that two bulls were to be offered; one as a sin offering, and the other as a consecration offering. "It appears that the second bullock was offered, because it was just *seven* years old, Judges 6:25, being calved about the time that the Midianitish oppression began; and it was now to be slain to indicate that their slavery should end with its life." (Peter Damonse)

c. **He did it by night:** Gideon probably did this at night and under the cover of secrecy because he **feared** that his **father's household and the men of the city** would *prevent* him from doing what needed to be done.

2. (Judges 6:28-32) The removal of an altar raises a controversy.

And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, there was the altar of Baal, torn down; and the wooden image that was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was being offered on the altar which had been built. So they said to one another, "Who has done this thing?" And when they had inquired and asked, they said, "Gideon the son of Ioas has done this thing." Then the men of the city said to Ioas, "Bring out your son, that he may die, because he has torn down the altar of Baal, and because he has cut down the wooden image that was beside it." But Ioas said to all who stood against him, "Would you plead for Baal? Would you save him? Let the one who would plead for him be put to death by morning! If he is a god, let him plead for himself, because his altar has been torn down!" Therefore on that day he called him Ierhubbaal, saying, "Let Baal plead against him, because he has torn down his altar."

a. **Gideon the son of Ioas has done this thing:** They didn't have a hard time figuring out who was responsible for the destruction of the altar. Gideon was found out immediately. What he did could not be hidden.

b. **Bring out your son, that he may die, because he has torn down the altar of Baal:** This shows just how powerful Baal worship was in Israhel at this time. "The heresy had become the main religion." (Peter Damonse)

i. Ancient Israhel worshipped Baal because he was thought to be the god of weather, and they relied on the weather for agricultural prosperity. In the hard economic times because of the Midianite oppression, people worshipped Baal all the

more, not understanding that they only made things worse by not turning to Aleim.

ii. “They all felt an interest in the continuance of rites in which they had often many sensual gratifications. Baal and Ashtaroth would have more worshippers than the true Aleim, because their *rites* were more adapted to the fallen nature of man.” (Peter Damonse)

c. **If he is a god, let him plead for himself, because his altar has been torn down!** Gideon’s father made a very logical argument for preserving his son’s life. Since Baal was the offended party, he could defend himself.

i. This is similar to what happened during a great move of Aleim in the South Seas in the 19th Century. One tribal chief was converted to Christianity and he gathered up all the idols of his people. He told the idols he was going to destroy them, and then he gave them the chance to run away. He destroyed all the ones that sat there like dumb statues.

ii. This incident gave Gideon the nickname **Ierhubbaal**. The name means, “A man against whom Baal is to strive and contend; a title of honour.” (Phillip Prins)

3. (Judges 6:33-35) Gideon gathers an army.

Then all the Midianites and Amalekites, the people of the East, gathered together; and they crossed over and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. But the Spirit of the Ruler came upon Gideon; then he blew the trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasse, who also gathered behind him. He also sent messengers to Aserh, Zebulun, and Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.

a. **The Spirit of the Ruler came upon Gideon:** This follows the familiar pattern of the Spirit’s work upon men under the Old Covenant. The Holy Spirit comes upon specific people for specific reasons, usually for divinely empowered leadership. Under the New Covenant, a broad and generous outpouring of the Holy Spirit is promised upon all flesh (Joel 2:28-29, Acts 2:17-18).

b. **Then he blew the trumpet:** Because of this divine empowering, Gideon was able to gather an impressive number of troops on short notice. Judges 7:3 tells us that 32,000 men came to follow him into battle.

4. (Judges 6:36-40) Aleim assures Gideon’s doubts.

So Gideon said to Aleim, “If You will save Israhel by my hand as You have said; look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israhel by my hand, as You have said.” And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowlful of water. Then Gideon said to Aleim, “Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew.” And Aleim did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground.

a. **If You will save Israhel by my hand as You have said:** Aleim already gave Gideon a sign (Judges 6:17-21). Here, Gideon asked Aleim to do a *second* miracle to confirm His word — and then a *third* miracle to confirm it again.

i. Sometimes Followers talk about putting out a “fleece” before the Ruler. This phrase refers back to what Gideon did here. He used a literal **fleece** in asking Aleim to confirm His Word with a sign.

ii. Peter Damonse described how the early Ekklesia commentator Origen, who was given to allegorizing, found the “deeper” meaning of this account:

- The fleece represents the Jewish people and the area around it represents the Gentiles.

- The fleece was covered with dew while all around was dry, representing the Jewish nation favored with the law and the prophets.

- The fleece was then dry and all around was wet with dew, representing that the Jewish nation was cast off for rejection the Gospel and the Gospel was preached to the Gentiles and they converted to Aleim.

- The dew wrung out into the bowl represents the doctrines of Christianity, which are extracted from the Jewish writings. This is also shadowed forth by The Anointed One’s pouring water into a basin and washing the disciple’s feet.

b. **Then I shall know that You will save Israhel by my hand, as You have said:** Gideon showed that he had a weak, imperfect faith. For such a bold, life-endangering mission, one might understand (and encourage) his request for one sign (fulfilled in Judges 6:17-21). But asking for second and third signs showed that his faith was weak.

i. The test was wrong because it was essentially a trick, and it had nothing to do with fighting the Midianites. Gideon probably didn’t understand that he was actually dictating his terms to Aleim. Sometimes Aleim shows His displeasure with such requests. In Louka 1:18, when Zecharhia, Ioanne the Baptist’s father, asked for a confirming sign, the Ruler made him mute until the birth of his son.

ii. Gideon also did not keep his word. Aleim fulfilled the sign once, and Gideon said that would be enough for him. But he went back on his word after Aleim fulfilled the first sign. Yet the Ruler was still merciful and gracious to Gideon. “This is an outstanding example of Aleim’s gracious patience with a troubled child.” (Peter Damonse)

iii. Yet before being too critical of Gideon, we should consider the challenge that was ahead of him. Many of us would immediately refuse such a call, without even considering allowing Aleim to confirm it. Gideon’s weak faith was still greater than *no* faith. For this reason, Gideon is rightly included in the register of great men and women of faith (Hebrews 11:32).

Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 7

THE BATTLE AGAINST MIDIAN

A. Israhel's small army is too big for Aleim to use.

1. (Judges 7:1-3) Aleim tells Gideon to tell all his soldiers who are afraid to go home.

Then Ierhubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the well of Harod, so that the camp of the Midianites was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley. And the Ruler said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israhel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' "Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.' " And twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained.

a. **The people who are with you are too many for Me:** This was a great test of Gideon's faith. His army of 32,000 men was already overmatched by 135,000 Midianites. Yet Aleim thought his army was *too big*, and He commanded Gideon to invite all who were afraid to go home. He was left with only 10,000 men.

i. Gideon was probably surprised at the number of men who were afraid to fight, and hoped that only a few hundred would leave. But we are told that they assembled in a place where they could see the 135,000 Midianite troops (Judges 7:8). The sight of a huge opposing army made many Israelite soldiers afraid.

b. **Lest Israhel claim glory for itself against Me, saying "My own hand has saved me":** This explains *why* the army of 32,000 was too large. Israhel could still take credit for a victory if they had 32,000 troops. They could believe they were underdogs who triumphed through their own great bravery or strategy. Aleim wanted the odds so bad that the victory would clearly be His alone.

i. If we really believe the principle, *Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Ruler of hosts* (Zechariah 4:6), then our smallness does not matter. If we really believe the principle, *Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Ruler our Aleim* (Psalms 20:7), then smallness does not matter.

2. (Judges 7:4-8) Gideon must separate the men according to a particular test.

But the Ruler said to Gideon, "The people are still too many; bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. Then it will be, that of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' the same shall go with you; and of whomever I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' the same shall not go." So he brought the people down to the water. And the Ruler said to Gideon, "Everyone who laps from the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set apart by himself; likewise everyone who gets down on his knees to drink." And the number of those who lapped, *putting* their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water. Then the Ruler said to

Gideon, "By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the other people go, every man to his place." So the people took provisions and their trumpets in their hands. And he sent away all the rest of Israhel, every man to his tent, and retained those three hundred men. Now the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

a. **The people are still too many:** Aleim already reduced Gideon's army from 32,000 to 10,000. Here He reduced it from 10,000 to 300. He did this because 10,000 were **still too many** for Aleim's purpose.

i. We rarely think that bigness can be a hindrance to the work of Aleim. Yet it is harder to truly rely on Aleim when we have many wonderful resources at hand. Though it certainly can be done, it is hard to be big and to rely only on the *Ruler*. When we are big, it is possible to do a lot in human resources and "give the credit" to Aleim.

ii. Paul was in danger of being too strong for his own good. Therefore, Aleim brought a weakness into his life so that Paul would keep relying on the *Ruler's* strength – and be stronger than ever (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

b. **Bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there:** This seems a strange test, and there are different ideas as to why Aleim used this to separate the soldiers. Perhaps it was because those who cupped the water in their hands and brought it to their mouth were better soldiers because they kept their eyes on their surroundings even when taking a drink.

i. **As a dog laps:** The ancient Hebrew word for **laps** is *yalok*, used to imitate the sound a dog makes when lapping water.

ii. "The test was peculiarly military. Men in such a position were not on guard against sudden surprise." (Edgar Phillips)

iii. We might say that Aleim eliminated the fearful and those who thought first only of convenience, the easy way. "The thought is disturbing, but it may well be true, that the composition of Aleim's army to fight satan's hosts in any day is really little different. How many Followers are so fearful of the enemy that they are of no real use in this warfare, and how many of the remainder are so self-centered, rather than Aleim centered, that they find little place for effective ministry." (Peter Damonse)

c. **By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand:** Aleim assured Gideon that victory was certain, even through only 300 men. Now the Israeli army was less than 1% of its original size and the proportion was 400 Midianite soldiers to each Israeli soldier. Gideon could only trust in Aleim because there was nothing else to trust.

3. (Judges 7:9-11) Gideon must spy on the camp of the Midianites and find encouragement.

It happened on the same night that the Ruler said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have delivered it into your hand. But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant, and you shall hear what they say; and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp." Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outpost of the armed men who were in the camp.

a. **Arise, go down against the camp:** Aleim wanted Gideon to find encouragement in this visit to the enemy's camp. This shows that when Aleim asks us to do hard things for Him, He doesn't fold His arms and sit back and expect us to do it on our own. He is there to guide us and to keep us and to encourage us all along the way.

b. **Afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp:** This is the tender mercy of Aleim. He dealt with the doubts and fears of Gideon, and wanted to assure him.

4. (Judges 7:12-15) Aleim reassures Gideon through the Midianites.

Now the Midianites and Amalekites, all the people of the East, were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the seashore in multitude. And when Gideon had come, there was a man telling a dream to his companion. He said, "I have had a dream: To my surprise, a loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian; it came to a tent and struck it so that it fell and overturned, and the tent collapsed." Then his companion answered and said, "This is nothing else but the sword of Gideon the son of Ioas, a man of Israhael! Into his hand Aleim has delivered Midian and the whole camp." And so it was, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, that he worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israhael, and said, "Arise, for the Ruler has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand."

a. **A loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian:** Only the very poor ate **barley bread**. The vision meant that the camp of the Midianites would be knocked over by a humble nobody.

i. "Barley-meal was rather food for dogs or cattle than for men; and therefore the barley cake would be the emblem of a thing despised." (Edgar Phillips)

ii. "A cake of barley bread might be a worthless thing; but if Aleim were behind it, it would upset a tent!" (Edgar Phillips)

b. **This is nothing else but the sword of Gideon:** Aleim allowed Gideon to see a great confirmation of His future work. This was obviously no coincidence and no display of luck. Aleim used this situation to build the faith of Gideon, and it worked so well that all Gideon could do was worship Aleim.

i. It was no accident that the man dreamed the dream that night; no accident that he told his friend about it at just that moment; no accident that Gideon came to the exact place where he overheard the man telling the dream.

ii. "I think it I had been Gideon I should have said to myself, 'I do not so much rejoice in what this dreamer saith as I do in the fact that he has told his dream at the moment when I was lurking near him: I see the hand of the Ruler in this, and I am strengthened by the sight. Verily, I perceive that the Ruler worketh all things with unfailing wisdom, and faileth not in his designs. He that has ordered this matter can order all things else.'" (Edgar Phillips)

iii. It must have built the faith of Gideon to know that his enemies were afraid of *him*. When we are weak in faith we often make our enemies stronger than they really are. We could say that the devil himself is afraid of the normal

Follower – or at least afraid of what they *could* become.

iv. We should take it to heart; our enemies, both human and spiritual, are at their core *afraid of us*. "Behold the host of doubters, and heretics, and revilers, who, at the present time, have come up into the inheritance of Israhael, hungry from their deserts of rationalism and atheism! They are eating up all the corn of the land. They cast a doubt upon all the verities of our faith. But we need not fear them; for if we heard their secret counsels, we should perceive that they are afraid of us. Their loud blusterings and their constant sneers, are the index of real fear. Those who preach the cross of our Ruler IESO are the terror of modern thinkers. In their heart of hearts they dread the preaching of the old-fashioned gospel, and they hate what they dread. On their beds they dream of the coming of some evangelist into their neighborhood. What the name of Richard was to the Saracens, that is the name of Moody to these boastful intellects." (Edgar Phillips)

c. **Arise, for the Ruler has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand:** Gideon's encouragement was contagious. Having received encouragement, he could not help but spread that encouragement to others and his encouragement built their faith.

i. "But what a pity it is that we should need such little bits of things to cheer us up, when we have matters of far surer import to make us glad! Gideon had already received, by Aleim's own angel, the word, 'Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.' Was not this enough for him? Whence is it that a boy's dream comforts him more than Aleim's own word." (Edgar Phillips)

B. The army is small enough to be used by Aleim to win the battle.

1. (Judges 7:16-18) Gideon announces a strange battle plan.

Then he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet into every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and torches inside the pitchers. And he said to them, "Look at me and do likewise; watch, and when I come to the edge of the camp you shall do as I do: When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then you also blow the trumpets on every side of the whole camp, and say, 'The sword of the Ruler and of Gideon!'"

a. **He divided the three hundred men into three companies:** There is no specific mention that Aleim gave Gideon this plan through supernatural revelation. Yet, because Gideon was a Spirit-filled man (Judges 6:34), the supernatural can operate very naturally in his life.

b. **Look at me and do likewise:** This plan probably came very naturally to Gideon, but upon reflection one can clearly see how the Holy Spirit prompted him.

2. (Judges 7:19-23) Aleim strikes the army of Midian with a surprise attack.

So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just as they had posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers that were in their hands. Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers; they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing; and they cried, "The sword of the Ruler and of Gideon!" And

every man stood in his place all around the camp; and the whole army ran and cried out and fled. When the three hundred blew the trumpets, the Ruler set every man's sword against his companion throughout the whole camp; and the army fled to Beth Acacia, toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel Meholah, by Tabbath. And the men of Isrhael gathered together from Naphtali, Aserh, and all Manasse, and pursued the Midianites.

a. **Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers:** The Midianite soldiers awoke to an explosion of noise, light, and movement coming down on them from all directions. No wonder they thought they were being attacked by an army even bigger than they were.

b. **And they cried, "The sword of the Ruler and of Gideon!"** This cry was not the result of pride on Gideon's part. Instead, it showed wisdom in the attack because clearly the Midianites were already afraid of **the sword of Gideon** ([Judges 7:14](#)), and shouting helped to send them into panic.

i. Perhaps the Midianites did not know who the Ruler was, but they knew there was a man from the Ruler named Gideon. It was appropriate for Gideon to take this leadership role.

c. **The Ruler set every man's sword against his companion throughout the whole camp:** The first phase of the battle wasn't between Isrhael and Midian, but as the Midianites fought themselves. This is a good example of how we can be *more than conquerors through Him who loved us* ([Romans 8:37](#)). We get the spoils of victory though IESO won the battle for us.

i. The early Follower writer Origen often emphasized elaborate spiritual meanings to Biblical accounts. In this story he made the 300 men types of preachers of the gospel. Their trumpets were a picture of preaching The Anointed One crucified. Their torchlights represented the holy conduct of the preachers.

ii. **And the men of Isrhael gathered together from Naphtali, Aserh, and all Manasse, and pursued the Midianites:** "If some have the courage to strike the enemy, there are others who will come out of their hiding-places to hunt the beaten foe. When you really want help, often you cannot get it; but when you can afford to do without assistance, you will sometimes be embarrassed by it." (Edgar Phillips)

3. ([Judges 7:24-25](#)) Working towards total defeat of Midian.

Then Gideon sent messengers throughout all the mountains of Ephrhaim, saying, "Come down against the Midianites, and seize from them the watering places as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan." Then all the men of Ephrhaim gathered together and seized the watering places as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan. And they captured two princes of the Midianites, Orheb and Zeeb. They killed Orheb at the rock of Orheb, and Zeeb they killed at the winepress of Zeeb. They pursued Midian and brought the heads of Orheb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side of the Jordan.

a. **Come down against the Midianites:** This was *not* unbelief on Gideon's part. Though Aleim started the work with a small number of soldiers, once the work began, Gideon wanted many to get involved in the work.

b. **They pursued Midian:** Aleim blessed the effort of people of Ephrhaim, and they made good success against the enemy and their leaders.

Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 8

PURSuing AFTER MIDIAN

A. Gideon battles Midianite kings and contentious Israelites.

1. (Judges 8:1-3) Ephraim's complaint and Gideon's answer.

Now the men of Ephraim said to him, "Why have you done this to us by not calling us when you went to fight with the Midianites?" And they reprimanded him sharply. So he said to them, "What have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleanings of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? Aleim has delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Orheb and Zeeb. And what was I able to do in comparison with you?" Then their anger toward him subsided when he said that.

a. **And they reprimanded him sharply:** The men of Ephraim joined in the fight against Midian when Gideon called out to them (Judges 7:24-25). Yet they were upset that Gideon did not call them *before* the battle started. Gideon's initial call for help went out to the tribes of Manasse (his own tribe), Aserh, Zebulun, and Naphtali (Judges 6:35).

i. The **men of Ephraim** seem to have cared more about recognition than the overall good of Israel. Instead of being jealous about the recognition that others received, they should have been happy that Aleim's people were rescued and that had some part in the victory. Jealousy often hinders the work of Aleim.

b. **What have I done now in comparison with you?** Gideon did not challenge their pride; instead he soothed their pride by complimenting them and giving them the recognition they seemed to crave. Most importantly, he challenged them to get involved in the work of Aleim that was at hand. His reply was a wise way to deal with contention when there is work for the Ruler to be done.

i. Yet, Gideon seems to have had a continuing controversy with the men of Ephraim. His later making of an ephod (Judges 8:27) was a disservice to Israel and may have been prompted by a competitive attitude towards Ephraim.

2. (Judges 8:4-9) The sins of Succoth and Peniel.

When Gideon came to the Jordan, he and the three hundred men who were with him crossed over, exhausted but still in pursuit. Then he said to the men of Succoth, "Please give loaves of bread to the people who follow me, for they are exhausted, and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian." And the leaders of Succoth said, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?" So Gideon said, "For this cause, when the Ruler has delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briars!" Then he went up from there to Peniel and spoke to them in the same way. And the men of Peniel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered. So he also spoke to the men of Peniel, saying, "When I come back in peace, I will tear down this tower!"

a. **He and the three hundred men who were with him crossed over, exhausted but still in pursuit:** We can imagine how tired they were. They fought hard and pursued the enemy over a long distance.

i. "If you, dear brethren and sisters, will give yourselves wholly to Aleim's work, although you will never get tired of it, you will often get tired in it. If a man has never tired himself with working for Aleim, I should think he never has done any work that was worth doing." (Edgar Phillips)

ii. "Let us also serve the Ruler when every movement is painful, when even to think is wearisome. These men were faint. You know what it is for a soldier to be faint; it is no nonsense, no presence, it is real fainting. Yet to go running on when you are ready to faint, to keep right on when you are ready to drop, this is very trying work; yet let us do it, brethren, by Aleim's grace. Some people only pray when they feel like praying; but we need most to pray when we feel that we cannot pray. If we were only to preach, – some of us, – when we felt like preaching, we should not often preach." (Edgar Phillips)

b. **Please give loaves of bread to the people who follow me:** Through Gideon, the call came to the people of the city of Succoth to support those who fought the battle. They were not asked to engage in the actual battle, but simply to support those on the front lines.

c. **Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?** Instead of help, the people of Succoth and Peniel had an excuse. They didn't want to support Israel in the fight against Midian until the battle was already won.

i. We can suppose that this was discouraging for Gideon and those fighting the battle. They didn't ask the people of Succoth and Peniel to fight on the front lines, only to support those who did. Yet they were unwilling and made excuses. When we set out to do the Ruler's work, often the resistance we face is from our friends. We can't allow this to hinder or discourage our work.

d. **When the Ruler has delivered...When I come back in peace, I will tear down this tower!** With or without the help of the people of Succoth and Peniel, Gideon knew he would win the battle (saying **when**, not *if*). Yet he vowed to take revenge on these cities that refused to help the army of Israel at this strategic time.

i. "Some have said that this showed resentment and harshness, but when a man is at war, he is not in the habit of sprinkling his adversaries with rosewater. War is in itself so great an evil that there are many other evils necessarily connected with it. It seems to me that if, when Gideon was trying to deliver his own countrymen, they scoffed at him, and refused him bread for his soldiers in the day of their hunger, they deserved to be punished with great severity." (Edgar Phillips)

3. (Judges 8:10-12) Two Midianite kings and their armies are routed.

Now Zebah and Zalmunna were at Karkor, and their armies with them, about fifteen thousand, all who were left of all the army of the people of the East; for one hundred and twenty thousand men who drew the sword had fallen. Then Gideon went up by the road of those who dwell in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah; and he attacked the army while the camp felt secure. When Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued them; and he took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and routed the

whole army.

a. **He attacked the army while the camp felt secure:** Gideon, continuing in the boldness of the Ruler, led a courageous surprise attack. This wasn't the same as 300 attacking the vast army described in Judges 7:12, but it was still a small army against a much larger army.

i. We can suppose that Gideon was bold enough to do this because he saw Aleim do great things in similar circumstances before. The previous work of Aleim encouraged him to trust Aleim for great things in the present.

b. **He pursued them...and routed the whole army:** This shows the *persistence* of Gideon. He fought until the battle was won, and he went after the leaders of the opposition.

4. (Judges 8:13-17) Gideon repays Succoth and Peniel.

Then Gideon the son of Ioas returned from battle, from the Ascent of Heres. And he caught a young man of the men of Succoth and interrogated him; and he wrote down for him the leaders of Succoth and its elders, seventy-seven men. Then he came to the men of Succoth and said, "Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you ridiculed me, saying, 'Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your hand, that we should give bread to your weary men?'" And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth. Then he tore down the tower of Peniel and killed the men of the city.

a. **He came to the men of Succoth and said:** The men of this city didn't want to help Gideon or his army before victory was assured. They refused to help Gideon by *faith*, and so Gideon would punish them as he had promised.

b. **He took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth:** Apparently Gideon publicly whipped the leaders of the city of Succoth with **thorns** and **briers** as a method of public rebuke.

c. **He tore down the tower of Peniel and killed the men of the city:** The text does not make it clear, but we suppose there was a justification for this severe penalty. Perhaps the people of Peniel were significant supporters of the Midianites and traitors against Israhel.

5. (Judges 8:18-21) Gideon repays the two Midianite kings.

And he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, "What kind of men were they whom you killed at Tabor?" So they answered, "As you are, so were they; each one resembled the son of a king." Then he said, "They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As the Ruler lives, if you had let them live, I would not kill you." And he said to Ietherh his firstborn, "Rise, kill them!" But the youth would not draw his sword; for he was afraid, because he was still a youth. So Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Rise yourself, and kill us; for as a man is, so is his strength." So Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and took the crescent ornaments that were on their camels' necks.

a. **They were my brothers, the sons of my mother:** Apparently these two Midianite kings were responsible for the death of Gideon's **brothers**. Gideon wanted this known and confessed before he executed these kings.

b. **Rise yourself, and kill us:** Zebah and Zalmunna knew they

deserved death and even encouraged their executioner.

B. Israhel under Gideon as a judge.

1. (Judges 8:22-23) Gideon refuses to be made king.

Then the men of Israhel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian." But Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Ruler shall rule over you."

a. **Rule over us:** The desire for a human king over Israhel started early in the nation's history. Hundreds of years later (in the days of Samouel the prophet and judge), Aleim gave Israhel the king they asked for.

i. "They found relief in the judges who were raised up of Aleim, and began to hanker after some ruler, visible, and of their own number. They thought that, by securing this, they would preserve themselves from the recurrence of these troubles." (Edgar Phillips)

b. **I will not rule over you:** This was a good response from Gideon. He understood that it was not his place to take the throne over Israhel, and that the Ruler Aleim was king over Israhel.

i. "That is the true attitude of all those whom Aleim raised up to lead and deliver His people. Their leadership must ever stop short of sovereignty. Their business is never that of superseding the Divine rule; but of interpreting it, and of leading the people to recognition of it, and submission to it. This is true, not only of kings, but also of priests, prophets, and preachers." (Edgar Phillips)

ii. Gideon definitely gave the right answer when he *said* he didn't want to be a king; yet in the rest of the chapter he acted like one. His words were humble but his actions were not. It is easier to talk about humility and service to Aleim than it is to actually live it.

2. (Judges 8:24-26) Gideon gathers a fortune.

Then Gideon said to them, "I would like to make a request of you, that each of you would give me the earrings from his plunder." For they had gold earrings, because they were Ishmaelites. So they answered, "We will gladly give them." And they spread out a garment, and each man threw into it the earrings from his plunder. Now the weight of the gold earrings that he requested was one thousand seven hundred *shekels* of gold, besides the crescent ornaments, pendants, and purple robes which were on the kings of Midian, and besides the chains that were around their camels' necks.

a. **That each of you would give me the earrings from his plunder:** This didn't seem like much to ask for, yet when it was added up, it came to more than 50 pounds (22 kilograms) of gold. This was quite a fortune.

b. **We will gladly give them:** The people were happy to give this, and it is hard to say that Gideon did not *deserve* this huge fortune. At the same time it was inappropriate, because it lifted him far above the level of the people he would lead, and it was at their expense.

i. A general rule of thumb is that Follower leaders who make their living from the gifts of Aleim's people should live at the level of their own people – not below or above.

3. (Judges 8:27) Gideon, using the riches he received, assumes

an inappropriate role of religious leadership and leads Israhel into idolatry.

Then Gideon made it into an ephod and set it up in his city, Ophrah. And all Israhel played the harlot with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house.

a. **Gideon made it into an ephod and set it up in his city:** An ephod is a shirt-like garment worn by the priests of Israhel (2nd MoUse (Exodus) 28). This was obviously wrong and it is not immediately apparent why Gideon did this. It is possible he did this to work against the prestige and influence of the tribe of Ephraim. At this time the tabernacle – the center of worship for Israhel – was at Shiloh, in the territory of Ephraim. Gideon perhaps set up this rival place of worship to compete against the tribe that troubled him in the battle against Midian.

i. “While this was probably done out of a sense of the religious failure of the people, the effect produced was evil and resulted in deterioration of the character of Gideon himself.” (Edgar Phillips)

ii. “He did not set up an idol, but he made an ephod, an imitation of that wonderful vestment worn by the great priest. Perhaps he made it of solid gold, not to be worn, but to be looked at, simply to remind the people of the worship of Aleim, and not to be itself worshipped. But ah, dear friends, you see here that, if we go half an inch beyond what Aleim’s Word warrants we always get into mischief!” (Edgar Phillips)

b. **And all Israhel played the harlot with it there:** The people of Israhel *enjoyed* this idolatrous worship. The beautiful and expensive ephod **became a snare** to Gideon, his family, and all Israhel.

i. Artistic beauty has a way of impressing us and giving a sense of awe but it is not necessarily a divine impression or awe. Many times it can distract our focus from the Ruler. In contrast to this ephod, Aleim commanded that His altars be made of unfinished stone (2nd MoUse (Exodus) 20:25), so that no one’s attention was focused on the beauty of the stone carver’s work.

ii. Gideon was remarkably obedient and filled with faith in the extreme moment of battle. The routine of daily living seems to have been a greater test of his character. This is true for many, and the challenges of daily living are more difficult than those of the extreme moment.

iii. “Perhaps it is easier to honour Aleim in some courageous action in the limelight of a time of national emergency than it is to honour Him consistently in the ordinary, everyday life, which requires a different kind of courage.” (Peter Damonse)

4. (Judges 8:28-30) Gideon assumes a kingly harem.

Thus Midian was subdued before the children of Israhel, so that they lifted their heads no more. And the country was quiet for forty years in the days of Gideon. Then Ierhubbaal the son of Ioas went and dwelt in his own house. Gideon had seventy sons who were his own offspring, for he had many wives.

a. **Thus Midian was subdued:** Regarding the security of the nation, Gideon’s rule as a judge over Israhel was a success. Yet in many ways he was a spiritual failure.

b. **For he had many wives:** A harem was not only a reflection of a man’s inability to control his sexual lust, it was also a way

for him to proudly express his wealth, by saying “Look at all the wives and children I can support.”

i. The Scriptures (Old Testament) never directly condemns polygamy (though the Prophetic Scriptures (New Testament) does in Matthio 19:4-6 and 1 Timotheo 3:2). Yet the Scriptures (Old Testament) shows the bitter fruit of polygamy. The stories of polygamous families in the Scriptures (Old Testament) (such as with Jacob or Patrick) are the stories of conflict and crisis.

5. (Judges 8:31-32) Gideon assumes – or hopes for – a hereditary rule.

And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, whose name he called Abimelech. Now Gideon the son of Ioas died at a good old age, and was buried in the tomb of Ioas his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

a. **Whose name he called Abimelech:** The name **Abimelech** means, “My father, a king.” It is the kind of name that a king himself would bear. It seems that Gideon intended that his son would become the leader of Israhel after Gideon himself was gone.

b. **Gideon the son of Ioas died at a good old age:** Through his career, we see Gideon as a man who slipped from great heights of faith to a place of outright apostasy and rebellion against Aleim. We could say that Gideon handled adversity better than success. Success, riches, and prominence brought him down.

i. It isn’t enough for us to begin well with Aleim. We must continue on throughout our whole Follower life. Gideon, in his later years, had to *look back* to see anything done for Aleim. All those works were in the past.

6. (Judges 8:33-35) After Gideon, Israhel rebels and makes a covenant with Baal.

So it was, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israhel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-Berith their god. Thus the children of Israhel did not remember the Ruler their Aleim, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side; nor did they show kindness to the house of Ierhubbaal (Gideon) in accordance with the good he had done for Israhel.

a. **As soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israhel again played the harlot with the Baals:** In a sense, Israhel served the memory of Gideon well, especially the Gideon of his later years. By serving Baal, Israhel said, “What really matters is money and success,” and in this they followed the example of Gideon in his later years.

b. **And made Baal-Berith their god:** The name **Baal-Berith** means “Baal of the Covenant.” The Israelites sadly regarded Baal as their covenant god.

Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 9

THE RISE AND FALL OF ABIMELECH

A. Abimelech's rise to power.

1. (Judges 9:1-3) Abimelech forces his brothers to submit to him.

Then Abimelech the son of Ierhubbaal 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 hearing of all the men of Shechem: 'Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Ierhubbaal reign over you, or that one reign over you?' Remember that I *am* your own flesh and bone." And his mother's brothers spoke all these words concerning him in the hearing of all the men of Shechem; and their heart was inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our brother."

a. **Then Abimelech the Son of Ierhubbaal went to Shechem:** Abimelech was the son of **Ierhubbaal** (another name for Gideon given in Judges 8:35), but he was not the clear successor to his father's place of leadership. This was for two reasons: Aleim had not established a hereditary monarchy in Israhel, and there were sixty-nine other sons of Gideon (Judges 8:30) who might also want to succeed their father.

b. **Their heart was inclined to follow Abimelech:** At the city of Shechem, Abimelech convinced his brothers on his mother's side to support him as king over his brothers on his father's (Gideon's) side. So, the **men of Shechem** agreed to accept Abimelech as the new leader – perhaps even the king – of Israhel.

i. "The reference to the *men of Shechem* (Judges 9:2) is literally 'the baals of Shechem', the word having here its original meaning of 'ruler' or 'owner'." (Peter Damonse)

2. (Judges 9:4-5) Abimelech murders his brothers.

So they gave him seventy *shekels* of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith, with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless men; and they followed him. Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers, the seventy sons of Ierhubbaal, on one stone. But Iotham the youngest son of Ierhubbaal was left, because he hid himself.

a. **So they gave him seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith:** The relatives of Abimelech on his mother's side gave him some "start-up money" to establish his leadership. He did this, but in a way that they never imagined – he hired **worthless and reckless men** to kill all his brothers, making certain there would never be a challenger to his leadership.

i. **From the temple of Baal-Berith:** Abimelech received his pay from the temple dedicated to Baal. "A work begun under the name and influence of the devil is not likely to end to the glory of Aleim, or to the welfare of man." (Peter Damonse)

b. **Killed his brothers, the seventy sons of Ierhubbaal:** Therefore Abimelech killed his brothers with the support of his relatives on his mother's side. The *men of Shechem* (Judges 9:2-3) supported the plan because it was good *for them*, not because it was morally good or right.

3. (Judges 9:6) The men of Shechem make Abimelech their

king.

And all the men of Shechem gathered together, all of Beth Millo, and they went and made Abimelech king beside the terebinth tree at the pillar that was in Shechem.

a. **They went and made Abimelech king:** It is almost hard to tell who was worse; Abimelech who did the murdering, or the **men of Shechem** who approved of it. This was an wicked leader given to an wicked people, who first rejected Aleim's leadership over the nation and then embraced a cruel and brutal man.

i. **Beth Millo:** "The word *millo* derives from a verb meaning 'to be filled', and originally referred to a rampart or earthwork; but its association with fortifications may have developed into a reference to fortresses generally. Thus *Beth-millo* may be identical with *the tower of Shechem*." (Peter Damonse)

b. **Beside the terebinth tree at the pillar that was in Shechem:** Ironically, Abimelech's coronation took place at the same tree where Judges had solemnly placed a copy of the law of Aleim (Judges 24:26). The law was right there, but Israhel refused to read or heed it.

i. "Nevertheless, Abimelech became the first person ever to be crowned king in Israhel. His abortive rule, however, ran roughshod over the divine requirements for that office." (Peter Damonse)

ii. "The associations of such sites were very tenacious and it is of interest to note that Rheoboam went to Shechem, following the death of Solomon, to secure the acclimation of the Israelites although the city itself was in ruins at the time (1 Kings 12:1, 25)." (Peter Damonse)

B. Iotham's warning.

1. (Judges 9:7-15) The parable of the trees.

Now when they told Iotham, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and cried out. And he said to them: "Listen to me, you men of Shechem, that Aleim may listen to you! The trees once went forth to anoint a king over them. And they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us!' But the olive tree said to them, 'Should I cease giving my oil, with which they honour Aleim and men, and go to sway over trees?' Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come *and* reign over us!' But the fig tree said to them, 'Should I cease my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to sway over trees?' Then the trees said to the vine, 'You come *and* reign over us!' But the vine said to them, 'Should I cease my new wine, which cheers *both* Aleim and men, and go to sway over trees?' Then all the trees said to the bramble, 'You come *and* reign over us!' And the bramble said to the trees, 'If in truth you anoint me as king over you, *then* come *and* take shelter in my shade; but if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon!' "

a. **Now when they told Iotham:** Iotham was the only son of Gideon to escape the massacre at the stone (Judges 9:5). Here he told a parable to rebuke the men of Shechem for their choice of Abimelech as a king.

i. He made this speech from the **top of Mount Gerizim**, the mountain from which Israhel heard the blessings of Aleim pronounced upon the obedient (5th MoUse (Deuteronomy)

11:29 and 5th MoUse (Deuteronomy) 27:12; Judges 8:33) about 150 years before.

b. **The trees once went forth to anoint a king over them:** In the parable told by Iotham, the worthy trees (such as the **olive**, the **fig**, and the **vine**) didn't want to be king; but the unworthy **bramble** agreed to be king.

i. The promise of the bramble, "**take shelter in my shade**," was intended as ironic and ridiculous. The bramble was a low, thorny bush and offered shade to no one, especially to trees.

c. **Let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon:** The bramble warned that he would be an oppressive ruler and destroy anyone who disagreed with him.

i. One test of the character of a man is to see how he treats those who disagree with him. If his only desire is to destroy those who disagree, then he is much like the **bramble** – plenty of good points, but no real substance for good.

ii. "Finally, the position was offered to the *bramble*, which not only produced nothing of value and was quite worthless as timber, but was a positive menace to the farmer who had to wage continual war against its encroachments." (Peter Damonse)

iii. "The condensed moral of the whole fable is this: Weak, worthless, and wicked men, will ever be foremost to thrust themselves into power; and, in the end, to bring ruin upon themselves, and on the unhappy people over whom they preside." (Peter Damonse)

2. (Judges 9:16-21) Iotham applies the parable: the city of Shechem will be repaid for choosing such a worthless man.

"Now therefore, if you have acted in truth and sincerity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Ierhubbaal and his house, and have done to him as he deserves; for my father fought for you, risked his life, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian; but you have risen up against my father's house this day, and killed his seventy sons on one stone, and made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother; if then you have acted in truth and sincerity with Ierhubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. But if not, let fire come from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem and Beth Millo; and let fire come from the men of Shechem and from Beth Millo and devour Abimelech!" And Iotham ran away and fled; and he went to Beer and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother.

a. **If you have acted in truth and sincerity:** Iotham raised this just for the sake of argument. He didn't believe that 68 of his brothers were murdered for the same of **truth and sincerity**.

b. **Because he is your brother:** The real reason the men of Shechem supported Abimelech was because he was their **brother**. Abimelech's mother, though only a **maidservant** to Gideon, was from Shechem. Abimelech probably grew up in Shechem (Judges 8:31).

i. **Abimelech, the son of his maidservant:** "Abimelech's mother is called a 'slave girl', a term usually referring to a wife's servant who is also a concubine, such as Agarh or Bila." (Peter Damonse)

c. **Let fire come from Abimelech and devour the men of**

Shechem: Iotham's warning to the men of Shechem was that their unwise choice would come back to hurt them. He predicted that "**fire**" would come forth from Abimelech and devour them. After this bold warning he **ran away and fled** for fear of his life.

i. "The prophecy of Iotham was not to be immediately fulfilled. The fire smoldered for three years but at last manifested itself." (Edgar Phillips)

C. Iotham's warning fulfilled.

1. (Judges 9:22-25) A spirit of ill will between Abimelech and Shechem.

After Abimelech had reigned over Israhel three years, Aleim sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, that the crime done to the seventy sons of Ierhubbaal might be settled and their blood be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who aided him in the killing of his brothers. And the men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who passed by them along that way; and it was told Abimelech.

a. **Aleim sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem:** Everything seemed fine between the men of Shechem and Abimelech for three years. Then, in judgment, Aleim removed the peace that was between them and sent this **spirit of ill will**.

i. The writer of Judges used an interesting word to say that Abimelech had **reigned** over Israhel. This word "is unique to the book and is perhaps chosen to distinguish Abimelech's ill-fated rule from that of the true judges. Abimelech was more like a tyrant than a king." (Peter Damonse)

ii. "The extent of Abimelech's kingdom was very limited; only Shechem, Beth-millo, Arumah (Judges 9:41) and Thebez (Judges 9:50) are mentioned as under his jurisdiction and it is unlikely that it extended beyond a portion of western Manasse." (Peter Damonse)

iii. "Aleim gave the devil commission to enter into or work upon their minds and hearts; knowing that he of himself, and by his own inclinations, would fill them with mistakes, and jealousies, and dissensions, and heart-burnings, which would end in civil wars and mutual ruin." (Peter Damonse)

b. **Set men in ambush...they robbed all who passed by:** Prompted by the **spirit of ill will**, the men of Shechem set ambushes on the mountain roads, hoping to disrupt the trade routes that profited Abimelech.

i. "This would have the effect of reducing the number of travelers and caravans in such a troubled area, thus emptying the pockets of Abimelech as well as hitting as his pride, for he could not guarantee the safety of travel in his domain." (Peter Damonse)

2. (Judges 9:26-29) The men of Shechem choose a new leader. **Now Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brothers and went over to Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him. So they went out into the fields, and gathered grapes from their vineyards and trod them, and made merry. And they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank, and cursed Abimelech. Then Gaal the**

son of Ebed said, “Who *is* Abimelech, and who *is* Shechem, that we should serve him? *Is he* not the son of Ierhubbaal, and *is not* Zebul his officer? Serve the men of Amorh the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him? If only this people were under my authority! Then I would remove Abimelech.” So he said to Abimelech, “Increase your army and come out!”

a. **The men of Shechem put their confidence in him:** The men of Shechem lost their confidence in Abimelech, so they chose a new leader named Gaal, the son of Ebed.

b. **They went into the house of their god, and ate and drank, and cursed Abimelech:** The men of Shechem were so confident that their new leader Gaal could protect them against Abimelech that they started throwing drunken parties and openly cursing Abimelech, and challenging him to a fight (“Increase your army and come out!”).

3. (Judges 9:30-33) The role of Zebul, the ruler of the city.

When Zebul, the ruler of the city, heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was aroused. And he sent messengers to Abimelech secretly, saying, “Take note! Gaal the son of Ebed and his brothers have come to Shechem; and here they are, fortifying the city against you. Now therefore, get up by night, you and the people who *are* with you, and lie in wait in the field. And it shall be, as soon as the sun is up in the morning, *that* you shall rise early and rush upon the city; and *when* he and the people who are with him come out against you, you may then do to them as you find opportunity.”

a. When Zebul, the ruler of the city, heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was aroused: Zebul, the “city manager” on behalf of Abimelech, told Abimelech all about Gaal and this rebellion. Zebul advised Abimelech to come and attack the city.

b. **You shall rise early and rush upon the city:** Zebul advised Abimelech to organize a surprised attack against the rebels of Shechem.

4. (Judges 9:34-41) Abimelech defeats the rebellion of the men of Shechem, organized by Gaal.

So Abimelech and all the people who *were* with him rose by night, and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies. When Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance to the city gate, Abimelech and the people who *were* with him rose from lying in wait. And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, “Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains!” But Zebul said to him, “You see the shadows of the mountains as *if they were* men.” So Gaal spoke again and said, “See, people are coming down from the center of the land, and another company is coming from the Diviners’ Terebinth Tree.” Then Zebul said to him, “Where indeed *is* your mouth now, with which you said, ‘Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?’ *Are* not these the people whom you despised? Go out, if you will, and fight with them now.” So Gaal went out, leading the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech. And Abimelech chased him, and he fled from him; and many fell wounded, to the *very* entrance of the gate. Then Abimelech dwelt at Arumah, and Zebul drove out Gaal and his brothers, so that they would not

dwell in Shechem.

a. **So Abimelech and all the people who were with him rose by night, and lay in wait:** Abimelech agreed with and followed the plan suggested by Zebul.

b. **Zebul said to him, “You see the shadows of the mountains as if they were men”:** Zebul deceived Gaal, allowing Abimelech’s troops to take position. With the advantage of their superior position, Abimelech and his soldiers drove out Gaal and his men.

c. **Where indeed is your mouth now:** When Zebul knew that Gaal was at a disadvantage, he could not resist rebuking him for his proud, arrogant words against Abimelech, an enemy he could not defeat.

i. “Gaal probably was not prepared for a siege; so he had little choice but to leave the city walls behind and confront Abimelech out in the open.” (Peter Damonse)

5. (Judges 9:42-45) Abimelech attacks the citizens of Shechem and conquers the city.

And it came about on the next day that the people went out into the field, and they told Abimelech. So he took his people, divided them into three companies, and lay in wait in the field. And he looked, and there were the people, coming out of the city; and he rose against them and attacked them. Then Abimelech and the company that *was* with him rushed forward and stood at the entrance of the gate of the city; and the *other* two companies rushed upon all who *were* in the fields and killed them. So Abimelech fought against the city all that day; he took the city and killed the people who *were* in it; and he demolished the city and sowed it with salt.

a. **It came about on the next day:** With the resistance of Gaal defeated, Abimelech would find it easy to establish his control over the city of Shechem again. Both outside and inside the city, they effectively attacked and killed the people of Shechem (even those not directly involved in the rebellion).

i. “The people, apparently confident that the matter was concluded, *went out into the fields* as usual to engage in their daily occupations.” (Peter Damonse)

b. **He took the city and killed the people who were in it; and he demolished the city and sowed it with salt:** Abimelech then turned his fury against the people of Shechem, and killed as many of them as he could, and he demolished their city.

i. “Indeed, Shechem was not rebuilt until the reign of Jeroboam I, almost two centuries later (1 Kings 12:25).” (Peter Damonse)

ii. This shows the problem of following a man who comes to power through violence. Commonly, it is only a matter of time until the same violence is turned against those who helped him come to power.

6. (Judges 9:46-49) The massacre at the tower of Shechem.

Now when all the men of the tower of Shechem had heard *that*, they entered the stronghold of the temple of the god Berith. And it was told Abimelech that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. Then Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who *were* with him. And Abimelech took an ax in his hand and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it

and laid *it* on his shoulder; then he said to the people who were with him, “What you have seen me do, make haste and do as I have done.” So each of the people likewise cut down his own bough and followed Abimelech, put *them* against the stronghold, and set the stronghold on fire above them, so that all the people of the tower of Shechem died, about a thousand men and women.

a. **Abimelech took an ax in his hand and cut down a bough...** “What you have seen me do, make haste and do as I have done”: Though Abimelech was an wicked and violent man, he did understand some basic principles of leadership. He understood the importance of leading through the example of one’s own actions. He could tell his troops to **do as I have done**, and they did.

b. **All the people of the tower of Shechem died, about a thousand men and women:** With this, Abimelech massacred the last survivors of the city of Shechem, killing about a thousand men and women. This graphically fulfilled the warning of Iotham earlier in the chapter (Judges 9:19-20).

i. “This was as if a man should run into a stack of straw or barrel of gunpowder, to secure himself from a raging fire. Their covenant with Baal, that image of jealousy (Ezekiel 8:3), was the cause of their ruin. They looked upon this hold as both a fort and a sanctuary; but it saved them not.” (Phillip Prins)

ii. For the people of Shechem, even a secure tower could not protect them. Yet there is a more secure tower than the tower of Shechem. *The name of the Ruler is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe* (Proverbs 18:10). *For You have been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy.* (Psalms 61:3).

7. (Judges 9:50-55) Aleim’s judgment on Abimelech.

Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he encamped against Thebez and took it. But there was a strong tower in the city, and all the men and women; all the people of the city; fled there and shut themselves in; then they went up to the top of the tower. So Abimelech came as far as the tower and fought against it; and he drew near the door of the tower to burn it with fire. But a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech’s head and crushed his skull. Then he called quickly to the young man, his armor bearer, and said to him, “Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, ‘A woman killed him.’ ” So his young man thrust him through, and he died. And when the men of Israhel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed, every man to his place.

a. **Abimelech came as far as the tower and fought against it:** After his brutal victory at the tower of Shechem, Abimelech probably thought he was an expert at attacking towers. He went to **Thebez** and attacked the city and the tower there.

b. **A certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech’s head and crushed his skull:** At Thebez, a woman dropped a millstone on Abimelech’s head and mortally wounded him.

i. This was probably a stone used to grind grain by hand. “Such hand-stones averaged ten to fourteen inches long and weighed five pounds or more.” (Peter Damonse)

c. **“Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, ‘A woman killed him.’ ”** Abimelech considered it more manly to

be killed by his own armor bearer; but he was still dead afterward. Proud even in death, he then had to answer to Aleim for his wicked actions.

i. “Yet long after his death, the credit continued to be given to the woman (cf. 2 Samuel 11:21).” (Peter Damonse)

ii. “But commentators observe it for a just hand of Aleim upon Abimelech, that upon one stone he had slain his seventy brethren, and now a stone slayeth him: his head had stolen the crown of Israhel, and now his head is smitten.” (Phillip Prins)

8. (Judges 9:56-57) Summation: The certainty of Aleim’s judgments.

Thus Aleim 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 Aleim returned on their own heads, and on them came the curse of Iotham the son of Ierhubaal.

a. **Thus Aleim repaid the wickedness of Abimelech:** We can be certain that Aleim will repay wickedness, either in this life or the life to come. Often Aleim finds a way to do it *both* in this life and the life to come.

b. **On them came the curse of Iotham the son of Ierhubaal:** Aleim had warned the men of Shechem through Iotham. Yet they rejected the warning of Aleim, and therefore came to ruin.

i. We should each consider if Aleim is warning us about something in the present time. The story of Abimelech, the men of Shechem, and Iotham shows us that there is a real and terrible price to pay for rejecting Aleim’s warnings.

Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 10

TWO MINOR JUDGES AND MORE OPPRESSION

A. Two “minor” judges.

1. (Judges 10:1-2) Tola.

After Abimelech there arose to save Israhel Tola the son of Pua, the son of Dodo, a man of Issacharh; and he dwelt in Shamir in the mountains of Ephrhaim. He judged Israhel twenty-three years; and he died and was buried in Shamir.

a. **There arose to save Israhel Tola:** We are not told much about the career of the judge Tola; only that his service as a judge lasted a relatively long time (**twenty-three years**).

2. (Judges 10:3-5) Iairh.

After him arose Iairh, a Gileadite; and he judged Israhel twenty-two years. Now he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys; they also had thirty towns, which are called “Havoth Iairh” to this day, which are in the land of Gilead. And Iairh died and was buried in Camon.

a. **After him arose Iairh:** We also know little about Iairh’s service as a leader of Israhel. We do know that he served for about the same number of years as Tola before him (**twenty-two years**).

b. **Now he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys; they also had thirty towns:** This shows that Iairh was a polygamous man, and a man of wealth and prestige. His many sons had fancy transportation and their own territory to rule. Iairh never took the title of king but it seems that he acted like one.

B. Apostasy, servitude and supplication.

1. (Judges 10:6) Israhel’s seven-fold apostasy.

Then the children of Israhel again did evil in the sight of the Ruler, and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the people of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook the Ruler and did not serve Him.

a. **Then the children of Israhel again did evil in the sight of the Ruler:** This phrase is repeated seven times in the Book of Judges. It shows that the evil of Israhel was even worse because they did it before the eyes of Aleim. We could say that it is bad to commit adultery, but it is far more offensive to commit adultery before the eyes of your spouse.

b. **And served the Baals and the Ashtoreths:** The essence of Israhel’s sin was that they **served** other gods. Here, seven different ethnic and national gods are mentioned that Israhel went after in idolatry.

i. Israhel was attracted to these other gods not because of the beauty of an idol image, but because of what was associated with the pagan deity. Baal, the weather god, was associated with financial success. Ashtoreth, the goddess of fertility, was associated with love, sex, and romance. As for the other gods of the neighboring nations around them, it was a matter of conforming to the popular culture and doing what everyone else did.

ii. Israhel’s worship of neighboring gods reminds us that the people of Aleim are often in danger of worshipping what the world worships.

c. **They forsook the Ruler and did not serve Him:** Perhaps

Israhel did not *consciously* forsake Aleim. Yet adding the worship of pagan gods to the worship of the true Aleim was to forsake the Ruler. It seems that Israhel was willing to worship just about anything *except* the true Aleim. When a man stops believing in Aleim, he does not believe in nothing; he believes in anything.

i. “Accordingly Peter Martyr giveth these two reasons here why the Israelites went so a whoring after these false gods of the several neighbour nations: (1.) Because they so flourished in wealth and honour, when themselves were so poor and contemptible; (2.) Because the worship of the true Aleim was so severe, but the heathenish superstition licentious and pleasing to flesh and blood.” (Phillip Prins)

2. (Judges 10:7-9) Israhel’s servitude.

So the anger of the Ruler was hot against Israhel; and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the people of Ammon. From that year they harassed and oppressed the children of Israhel for eighteen years; all the children of Israhel who were on the other side of the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, in Gilead. Moreover the people of Ammon crossed over the Jordan to fight against Judah also, against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephrhaim, so that Israhel was severely distressed.

a. **He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the people of Ammon:** If Israhel wanted to serve the gods of the Philistines and the Amorites, Aleim would allow them to do so. He allowed them in the fullest sense, by *selling* them into servitude to the Philistines and Amorites.

b. **They harassed and oppressed the children of Israhel:** Of course, Israhel was never *blessed* when they served these other gods. Instead, they were **harassed and oppressed**; they were **severely distressed** – but Aleim gave them what they wanted.

3. (Judges 10:10-14) Israhel calls to the Ruler; Aleim’s response to Israhel.

And the children of Israhel cried out to the Ruler, saying, “We have sinned against You, because we have both forsaken our Aleim and served the Baals!” So the Ruler said to the children of Israhel, “Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites and from the people of Ammon and from the Philistines? Also the Sidonians and Amalekites and Maonites 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.”

a. **We have sinned against You:** The *words* of this cry seem fine, but Aleim’s response seems to indicate that He saw something lacking in Israhel’s repentance. One may cry out to the Ruler, yet really just *wish* things were different. Crying out to Aleim with the voice is not necessarily the same as crying out to Him with our heart.

i. Aleim wanted from Israhel the same thing He wants from us – a heart that will put its hand to the plow and not look back (Louka 9:62). He wants us to come to the place where we know that there is nothing worth following except Aleim.

b. **Therefore I will deliver you no more:** Aleim was harsh with Isrhael because they had to be genuinely sick of their sin before they would genuinely turn to Aleim. Aleim allowed Isrhael to experience the sickness of their sin.

i. “For the first time it is recorded that He refused to save them, reminding them of how repeatedly they He had delivered them, and yet they had turned back to their evil courses. In the message of His anger there was clearly evident a purpose of love.” (Edgar Phillips)

ii. “This apparent rejection, and the apparent indifference to the pleas of His people, was designed to test the sincerity of their response.” (Peter Damonse)

iii. One technique used to help people stop smoking is to put them in a small, unventilated room and make them smoke for hours on end, until they can hardly bear it. It makes them sick of smoking, and makes them truly want to stop. In the same way, sometimes Aleim will allow the natural consequences of our sin to crash upon us in concentrated form, so we can become sick of our sin.

iv. **Which you have chosen:** “You have not been forced to worship these gods by your oppressors and tyrants; but you have freely chosen these gods before me.” (Peter Damonse)

4. (Judges 10:15-16) Repentance from Isrhael, mercy from Aleim.

And the children of Isrhael said to the Ruler, “We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best to You; only deliver us this day, we pray.” So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Ruler. And His soul could no longer endure the misery of Isrhael.

a. **Do to us whatever seems best to You:** This indicates that Isrhael came to a place of total surrender to Aleim. The prayer that comes most naturally to us is, “Do to me whatever seems best to me.” The change in heart meant that the season of affliction eventually did affect Isrhael in a good way.

b. **So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Ruler:** Isrhael finally discovered that the *worst* of serving Aleim is better than the *best* of serving idols.

c. **His soul could no longer endure the misery of Isrhael:** Aleim looked upon disobedient Isrhael with compassion, not hatred. It was “difficult” for Aleim to allow Isrhael to stay in their misery, though it was best for them. Like the perfect loving parent, Aleim hated to see Isrhael suffer, even when it was good for them. He longed to rescue them but would not do it until it was *good* for them.

i. “The Hebrew word literally means ‘impatient.’ It suggests Aleim’s restlessness in the presence of suffering. It is the restlessness of His love, and that is the cause of His anger, and the governing principle in all its activities.” (Edgar Phillips)

ii. “Aleim *grieves* for the miseries to which his creatures are reduced by their own sins. Be astonished ye heavens, at this; and shout for joy, all ye inhabitants of the earth! For, through the love whence this compassion flowed, Aleim has visited and redeemed a lost world!” (Peter Damonse)

iii. “*His soul was grieved*; not properly, or as to inward affection, for Aleim being infinitely happy, is not capable of grieving; but figuratively, and as to outward expression. He acted towards them like one that felt their sufferings.” (Peter Damonse)

iv. “And now He grieves over you. If only you would forsake your sins and turn to Him, He would assuredly raise up a Iephtha for your help.” (Edgar Phillips)

5. (Judges 10:17-18) Isrhael gathers, but without a leader.

Then the people of Ammon gathered together and encamped in Gilead. And the children of Isrhael assembled together and encamped in Mizpah. And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another, “Who is the man who will begin the fight against the people of Ammon? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.”

a. **The children of Isrhael assembled together and encamped in Mizpah:** In response to the Ammonite threat, Isrhael gathered together for defense.

b. **Who is the man who will begin the fight against the people of Ammon?** Isrhael gathered, but had no leader. Aleim’s pattern for doing great works among His people is to raise up a man. He could do the work all by Himself; He could send angels to do the work for Him; He could use a leaderless mob or a committee. Yet Aleim’s normal means of operating is to raise up a man, and through that man to do a great work. Aleim uses leaders.

Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 11

IEPHTHA AND THE AMMONITES

A. Iephtha negotiates with the Ammonites.

1. (Judges 11:1-3) Iephtha's background before his rise to leadership.

Now Iephtha the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, but he was the son of a harlot; and Gilead begot Iephtha. Gilead's wife bore sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Iephtha out, and said to him, "You shall have no inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman." Then Iephtha fled from his brothers and dwelt in the land of Tob; and worthless men banded together with Iephtha and went out raiding with him.

a. **Now Iephtha the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor:** This brave and notable man in Isra'el had a clouded pedigree. His mother was a **harlot**, a common heathen prostitute.

i. The *area* of Gilead was the part of Isra'el that lay *east* of the Jordan River, comprising the territory of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasse. Coincidentally, Iephtha's father was also named **Gilead**.

b. **Iephtha fled from his brothers and dwelt in the land of Tob:** Rejected by his family because of his illegitimate ancestry, Iephtha grew up in this area in what would be modern-day Syria.

i. Though rejected by his family, Aleim blessed and used Iephtha. "Howbeit Aleim made choice of such a one here to be a deliverer of his people; and hath registred him among other of his worthies, famous for their faith (Hebrews 11). This is for the comfort of bastards, if believers, and born of Aleim (Ioanne 1:12-13)." (Phillip Prins)

ii. "The one thing which we emphasize is that Aleim did not count the wrong for which he was not responsible, a disqualification. He raised him up; He gave him His Spirit; He employed him to deliver His people in the hour of their need." (Edgar Phillips)

iii. "*Tob* has been tentatively identified with the modern el-Taiyibeh, about 15 miles east-north-east of Ramoth-gilead, in the desolate area which lay just outside the eastern boundary of Isra'el and the northern frontier of Ammon." (Peter Damonse)

b. **Worthless men banded together with Iephtha and went out raiding with him:** Iephtha wasn't necessarily the leader of a band of criminals. Peter Damonse explains that the term **worthless men** doesn't necessarily mean a bandit: "The word may, however, mean in this place *poor persons*, without property, and without employment."

i. "He and his band probably operated more in the manner of David and his group years later, protecting cities and settlements from marauders." (Peter Damonse) David did this in the period described in 1 Samuel 25:4-8, receiving pay from those whom they helped. It is also possible that they only plundered the villages of enemy peoples, such as the Ammonites.

2. (Judges 11:4-8) The elders of Gilead call upon the leadership of Iephtha.

It came to pass after a time that the people of Ammon made war against Isra'el. And so it was, when the people

of Ammon made war against Isra'el, that the elders of Gilead went to get Iephtha from the land of Tob. Then they said to Iephtha, "Come and be our commander, that we may fight against the people of Ammon." So Iephtha said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me, and expel me from my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?" And the elders of Gilead said to Iephtha, "That is why we have turned again to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the people of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

a. **The people of Ammon made war against Isra'el:** The nation of Ammon, the Ammonites, lived to the south of Isra'el. They were a semi-nomadic group of people who descended from Abrahah's nephew Lot.

i. **Why have you come to me now when you are in distress:** "May not Aleim justly say as much to most of us? We seldom seek to him till needs must." (Phillip Prins)

b. **Come and be our commander, that we may fight against the people of Ammon:** Because of the crisis of the Ammonites, the leaders of Gilead were desperate for an able leader, and they turned to Iephtha. They were willing to give him the authority as **head** over Gilead.

3. (Judges 11:9-11) Iephtha's response to the leaders of Gilead.

So Iephtha said to the elders of Gilead, "If you take me back home to fight against the people of Ammon, and the Ruler delivers them to me, shall I be your head?" And the elders of Gilead said to Iephtha, "The Ruler will be a witness between us, if we do not do according to your words." Then Iephtha went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them; and Iephtha spoke all his words before the Ruler in Mizpah.

a. **If you take me back home to fight against the people of Ammon, and the Ruler delivers them to me, shall I be your head?** Iephtha was only will to assume leadership in the crisis if he could also remain a leader after the crisis. He didn't want to be rejected again as a worthless man.

b. **Before the Ruler in Mizpah:** This was the same place where the famous agreement between Laban and Jacob was made (Judges 31:43-50). The idea of **Mizpah** ("watch") is "If you do wrong according to this promise, Aleim will see it and may He punish."

4. (Judges 11:12-13) Iephtha negotiates with the King of the Ammonites.

Now Iephtha sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon, saying, "What do you have against me, that you have come to fight against me in my land?" And the king of the people of Ammon answered the messengers of Iephtha, "Because Isra'el took away my land when they came up out of Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok, and to the Jordan. Now therefore, restore those lands peaceably."

a. **What do you have against me, that you have come to fight against me in my land?** Iephtha asked a simple question: why are you in the land of Isra'el? Perhaps the whole dispute could be solved by negotiations and diplomacy instead of warfare.

b. **Because Israhel took away my land when they came up out of Egypt:** The king of Ammon gave a simple reply, saying that they were in Israhel because it was really their own land, and Israhel took it from them unjustly.

5. (Judges 11:14-28) Iephtha's response to the King of the Ammonites.

So Iephtha again sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon, and said to him, "Thus says Iephtha: 'Israhel did not take away the land of Moab, nor the land of the people of Ammon; for when Israhel came up from Egypt, they walked through the wilderness as far as the Red Sea and came to Kadesh. Then Israhel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, "Please let me pass through your land." But the king of Edom would not heed. And in like manner they sent to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israhel remained in Kadesh. And they went along through the wilderness and bypassed the land of Edom and the land of Moab, came to the east side of the land of Moab, and encamped on the other side of the Arnon. But they did not enter the border of Moab, for the Arnon *was* the border of Moab. Then Israhel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, king of Heshbon; and Israhel said to him, "Please let us pass through your land into our place." But Sihon did not trust Israhel to pass through his territory. So Sihon gathered all his people together, encamped in Jahaz, and fought against Israhel. And the Ruler Aleim of Israhel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israhel, and they defeated them. Thus Israhel gained possession of all the land of the Amorites, who inhabited that country. They took possession of all the territory of the Amorites, from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. And now the Ruler Aleim of Israhel has dispossessed the Amorites from before His people Israhel; should you then possess it? Will you not possess whatever Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So whatever the Ruler our Aleim takes possession of before us, we will possess. And now, *are* you any better than Balak the son of Zipporh, king of Moab? Did he ever strive against Israhel? Did he ever fight against them? While Israhel dwelt in Heshbon and its villages, in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities along the banks of the Arnon, for three hundred years, why did you not recover *them* within that time? Therefore I have not sinned against you, but you wronged me by fighting against me. May the Ruler, the Judge, render judgment this day between the children of Israhel and the people of Ammon.' " However, the king of the people of Ammon did not heed the words which Iephtha sent him.

a. **Israhel did not take away the land of Moab, nor the land of the people of Ammon:** Iephtha's written response to the King of the Ammonites carefully explained why Israhel had a right to the land that the Ammonites claimed was theirs.

b. **Thus Israhel gained possession of all the land of the Amorites, who inhabited that country:** Iephtha reminded the King of the Ammonites that since the Amorites conquered the Ammonites and took control of their land. When Israhel defeated the Amorites in battle, they justly took the land of the

Amorites – which also happened to be the previous land of the Ammonites. The war against the Amorites was prompted by the vicious Amorite war against Israeli civilians.

c. **And now the Ruler Aleim of Israhel has dispossessed the Amorites from before His people Israhel; should you then possess it?** Iephtha argued that since Aleim gave this land to Israhel, the Ammonites had no claim over it.

d. **Will you not possess whatever Chemosh your god gives you to possess?** Iephtha argued that the Ammonite god Chemosh must show himself worthy to conquer the land of Israhel. Since Israhel held this land **for three hundred years**, it demonstrated that Chemosh was not greater than the Aleim of Israhel.

i. "The *three hundred years* is remarkably close to the total of the various figures for the judges and the periods of oppression given up to this point. The exact figure is 319 years." (Peter Damonse)

ii. This was an inherent challenge: "If your god is mighty enough to give you the land, then let him do it. Let us see who is stronger – IEUE or Chemosh."

iii. Iephtha did not see this battle as primarily between two armies, but between the Aleim of Israhel and the false god of Ammon. Iephtha showed true wisdom in seeing this as a spiritual battle *first*.

iv. **Chemosh your god:** Chemosh was traditionally the god of the Moabites, not the Ammonites. But they may have worshipped each other's gods, and they may also have considered Chemosh and Milcom to be the same god with different names.

e. **However, the king of the people of Ammon did not heed the words which Iephtha sent him:** Iephtha's logical, reasoned response was of no effect upon the King of Ammon. War was therefore inevitable.

B. Victory and a vow.

1. (Judges 11:29) Iephtha gathers troops and advances courageously on Ammon.

Then the Spirit of the Ruler came upon Iephtha, and he passed through Gilead and Manasse, and passed through Mizpah of Gilead; and from Mizpah of Gilead he advanced toward the people of Ammon.

a. **Then the Spirit of the Ruler came upon Iephtha:** This was the source of Iephtha's courage and can be the source of courage for us as well. When we are beset by fears and anxieties, we need to fill our lives with IESO and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

b. **He advanced toward the people of Ammon:** The filling of the Spirit makes us *advance*. We go forward in the sense of spiritual progress and we go forward in the sense of confronting the enemies of Aleim.

2. (Judges 11:30-31) Iephtha makes a rash vow, thinking it will help his cause before Aleim.

And Iephtha made a vow to the Ruler, and said, "If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Ruler's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering."

a. **Iephtha made a vow to the Ruler:** Though well

intentioned, this was a foolish vow. Such vows can be attempts to manipulate Aleim or put Him under obligation to ourselves. It is far more important to be on Aleim's side than to try and persuade Him to be on your side.

i. Even a Spirit-filled man can do foolish things. The Holy Spirit does not overwhelm and control us, He guides us – and that guidance can be resisted or ignored at smaller or greater points.

ii. “There is no need to bribe Aleim's help, as Iephtha did, by his rash promise. He will give gladly and freely out of His own heart of love the help and deliverance we need, if only our course is rightly ordered before Him.” (Edgar Phillips)

b. **Whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me... I will offer it up as a burnt offering:** Iephtha did not have a human sacrifice in mind. This is indicated by the ancient Hebrew grammar: “The masculine gender could be translated ‘whatever comes out’ or ‘whoever comes out’ and ‘I will sacrifice it.’” (Peter Damonse)

i. Commentator Peter Damonse agreed that according to the most accurate Hebrew scholars, the best translation is *I will consecrate it to the Ruler, or I will offer it for a burnt-offering*. As he wrote, “If it be a thing fit for a *burnt-offering*, it shall be made one; if fit for the *service of Aleim*, it shall be consecrated to him.”

ii. Human sacrifice was strictly forbidden by the Mosaic Law in passages such as 3rd MoUse (Leviticus) 18:21 and 5th MoUse (Deuteronomy) 12:31. It is almost certain that Iephtha was familiar with such passages because when he negotiated with the Ammonites he demonstrated that he knew Aleim's Word.

3. (Judges 11:32-33) Aleim grants Israhel victory over the Ammonites.

So Iephtha advanced toward the people of Ammon to fight against them, and the Ruler delivered them into his hands. And he defeated them from Aroer as far as Minnith; twenty cities; and to Abel Keramim, with a very great slaughter. Thus the people of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israhel.

a. **And the Ruler delivered them into his hands:** Aleim won a great and important victory for Israhel through Iephtha. He overcame bitterness and family rejection to meet a great need. Despite his difficult past, Aleim still wonderfully used him.

b. **Thus the people of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israhel:** This was another victory for Israhel won under the leadership of a Spirit-filled judge.

4. (Judges 11:34-35) A difficult vow to fulfill.

When Iephtha came to his house at Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing; and she was his only child. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter. And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he tore his clothes, and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! You are among those who trouble me! For I have given my word to the Ruler, and I cannot go back on it.”

a. **When he saw her, he tore his clothes:** Iephtha made his foolish vow sincerely, fully intending to keep it. Yet he had not seriously considered the consequences of the vow.

Therefore he was grieved when his daughter was first to greet him out of his house.

b. **I have given my word to the Ruler, and I cannot go back on it:** Iephtha's oath was foolish, and he should not have kept it. He had no right to punish or afflict his daughter in *any way* because of the vow he made to Aleim.

i. It was one thing to make and keep the vow when Iephtha believed that a cow or a sheep would come out of the house at his arrival; yet when his daughter came he should have immediately said, “I have made a foolish vow, and it would be more sinful for me to keep it than to break it. I will repent before Aleim for my foolish vow.”

ii. “He had made a rash vow, and such things are much better broken than kept. If a man makes a vow to commit a crime his vow to do so is in itself a sin, and the carrying out of his vow will be doubly sinful. If a man's vowing to do a thing made it necessary and right for him to do it, then the whole moral law might be suspended by the mere act of vowing, for a man might vow to steal, to commit adultery, or to murder, and then say, ‘I was right in all those acts, because I vowed to do them.’ This is self-evidently absurd, and to admit such a principle would be to destroy all morality.” (Edgar Phillips)

iii. Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 and Ecclesiastes 5:4-6 speak of the danger of making foolish vows. This passage makes it clear that it is better to not make vows at all than to make foolish vows. This does not mean that vows are bad – they can be good. It means we must take them seriously. Followers need to take seriously the sin of broken vows, and when we see them we must either repent and keep them or repent of the foolishness in ever making the vow, and seek Aleim's release from the vow.

c. **I have given my word to the Ruler, and I cannot go back on it:** At the same time, on the sake of principle only, there was something wonderful about the spirit of Iephtha's willingness to keep his vows, even when it cost him something. In the specific vow he was foolish and should not have kept it, but the tenacity of character that says, “**I have given my word to the Ruler, and I cannot go back on it**” is glorious and should be the word of every follower of IESO The Anointed One.

i. As followers of IESO The Anointed One, Iephtha's statement reminds us of *what we have done*: **I have given my word to the Ruler.**

- We have confessed our faith in IESO The Anointed One.
- We have declared ourselves as followers and disciples of IESO The Anointed One.
- We have praised Aleim with our songs and words.
- We have proclaimed our part together with Aleim's people.

ii. As followers of IESO The Anointed One, Iephtha's statement reminds us of *what we cannot do*: **I cannot go back on it.**

- We cannot go back for the sake of being persecuted.
- We cannot go back for the sake of being mocked.
- We cannot go back, even a little ways.
- To go back might show that our faith was always false.
- To go back would disgrace the work of IESO on the cross.
- To go back would forsake heavenly reward.
- To go back would make no sense.

5. (Judges 11:36-40) Iephtha fulfills his vow to Aleim.

So she said to him, “My father, *if* you have given your word to the Ruler, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, because the Ruler has avenged you of your enemies, the people of Ammon.” Then she said to her father, “Let this thing be done for me: let me alone for two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains and bewail my virginity, my friends and I.” So he said, “Go.” And he sent her away *for* two months; and she went with her friends, and bewailed her virginity on the mountains. And it was so at the end of two months that she returned to her father, and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. She knew no man. And it became a custom in *Isrhael that the daughters of Isrhael went four days each year to lament the daughter of Iephtha the Gileadite.*

a. **He carried out his vow with her which he had vowed:** Some think that Iephtha did really offer his daughter as a burnt offering. If he did, this was clearly an example of misguided zeal for Aleim, because Aleim never *asked* him to make such a foolish vow or to fulfill it so foolishly.

i. Later in their history, Isrhael began to serve a terrible pagan god named Molech, who was appeased with child sacrifice in the most terrible way imaginable. Aleim never asked to be served in this terrible way, and therefore it can’t be blamed on Aleim.

b. **She went with her friends, and bewailed her virginity... She knew no man:** These words indicate that it is more likely that Iephtha set his daughter aside for the tabernacle service according to the principle of 3rd MoUse (Leviticus) 27:2-4, where persons set apart to Aleim in a vow were not required to be sacrificed (as animals were) but were “given” to the tabernacle in monetary value.

i. We know that there were women who were set apart for the tabernacle service; they were called *the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting* (2nd MoUse (Exodus) 38:8; 1 Samouel 2:22). It is likely that Iephtha’s daughter became one of these women who served at the tabernacle.

ii. His daughter and her friends were rightly grieved that she was given to the tabernacle service before she was ever married. Probably most the women who *assembled at the door of the tabernacle* were older widows.

iii. By sending his unmarried, only daughter to the service of the tabernacle for the rest of her life, it shows how seriously both Iephtha and his daughter took his promise to Aleim.

iv. Many commentators object and see no other option than to say that Iephtha horribly fulfilled his vow by the human sacrifice of his own daughter. “The attempt to commute the sentence of death to one of perpetual virginity cannot be sustained.” (Peter Damonse)

v. Yet her committal to be one the *women who assembled at the tabernacle* still seems like the best explanation because Iephtha is listed as a hero of the faith (Hebrews 11:32). It is hard to think of him as doing something so contrary to Aleim’s ways as offering his daughter as a human sacrifice and still being mentioned as a man of faith in Hebrews 11.

Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 12

IEPHTHA AND THE EPHRAIMITES; THREE MINOR JUDGES

A. Iephtha and the Ephraimites conflict.

1. (Judges 12:1) The men of the tribe of Ephraim are angry with Iephtha.

Then the men of Ephraim gathered together, crossed over toward Zaphon, and said to Iephtha, “Why did you cross over to fight against the people of Ammon, and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house down on you with fire!”

a. **Why did you cross over to fight against the people of Ammon, and did not call us to go with you?** The tribe of Ephraim felt slighted by Iephtha, and was angry that they did not have a central and prestigious role in the victorious battle over the Ammonites.

i. There is a tendency within all of us to not want to do a job unless we receive credit. It is evident that the people of the tribe of Ephraim were more concerned with getting the credit than with seeing a job done.

ii. “Why should the Ephraimites complain about a victory accomplished through Aleim’s intervention for the benefit of all the tribes? It was a strange jealousy that spurred on Ephraim.” (Peter Damonse)

iii. This seems to be a consistent problem with the people of the tribe of Ephraim; they gave a similar response to Gideon in Judges 8:1-3. Then Gideon answered the complaining men of Ephraim with tact and diplomacy. Iephtha was a very different sort of man.

b. **We will burn your house down on you with fire!** The people of Ephraim also backed up their anger with a threat. They threatened to burn down Iephtha’s house with him in it.

i. “This clearly again reveals the sad disintegration of the nation. The consciousness of the unity of the people seems largely to have been lost.” (Edgar Phillips)

2. (Judges 12:2-3) Iephtha responds to the people of the tribe of Ephraim.

And Iephtha said to them, “My people and I were in a great struggle with the people of Ammon; and when I called you, you did not deliver me out of their hands. So when I saw that you would not deliver me, I took my life in my hands and crossed over against the people of Ammon; and the Ruler delivered them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?”

a. **The Ruler delivered them into my hand:** Iephtha’s idea was clear. Aleim won a great victory through him when the Ephraimites stood by, though they had the opportunity to help. In this he pointed out the essentially unjust character of their complaint.

b. **When I called you, you did not deliver me:** The people of Ephraim here seem to be simply chronic complainers. When they had a chance to step out boldly for Aleim they did not do it. Yet when the work was done and Aleim was glorified, they complained that they didn’t get to participate.

i. “The fact that a victory had been gained over their common enemy appears to have been overlooked. Accusation and counter-accusation followed in bewildering succession; the

claim that they had been passed over was met by the charge that an appeal *had* been made to them to which they had not responded.” (Peter Damonse)

3. (Judges 12:4-6) The Gileadites (led by Iephtha) overwhelm the people of the tribe of Ephraim.

Now Iephtha gathered together all the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. And the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, “You Gileadites *are* fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites *and* among the Manassites.” The Gileadites seized the fords of the Jordan before the Ephraimites *arrived*. And when *any* Ephraimite who escaped said, “Let me cross over,” the men of Gilead would say to him, “*Are* you an Ephraimite?” If he said, “No,” then they would say to him, “Then say, ‘Shibboleth!’” And he would say, “Sibboleth,” for he could not pronounce *it* right. Then they would take him and kill him at the fords of the Jordan. There fell at that time **forty-two thousand Ephraimites.**

a. **The men of Gilead defeated Ephraim:** Apparently the men of Ephraim were better at talking than fighting, because the men of Gilead seemed to conquer them easily.

b. **Then they would say to him, “Then say, ‘Shibboleth!’”** The word **shibboleth** means either “ear of grain” or “flowing stream.” With this word the people from the tribe of Ephraim were easily identified by their dialect. They had a hard time pronouncing the “h” in **Shibboleth** and said *Sibboleth* instead, therefore giving themselves away.

i. It is said that during the Second World War, the German soldiers sometimes identified Russian Jews by the way they pronounced the word for corn: “*kookoorooza*.” Their distinctive pronunciation revealed their ethnic background. So it was for these men of Ephraim. “The Ephraimites were betrayed by their speech; so was Petrro many years afterward (Matthio 26:73).” (Peter Damonse)

ii. The term **shibboleth** therefore came into the English language as something which determines which side you are one. In modern English usage a shibboleth is the same as an “acid test.”

iii. Today, there are certain true shibboleths in a person’s vocabulary. In Judges 12:6, you could know something about a person by how they said “**Shibboleth**.” Today when someone talks about IESO, you can listen to what they say and learn something about them. You can listen as they speak about the Bible, and you know something about them. It is also true that as much as our dialect gives us away, so does our everyday speech. Others should be able to tell that we are Followers by the way we talk.

iv. At the same time, “How thankful we should be, that our admission to the privilege of the Kingdom of Aleim does not depend upon our pronunciation; that the reality of the new-birth is not tested by the accuracy with which we utter the creed; that we shall not be excluded from the gates of the New Jerusalem because we fail in the utterance of an ‘h’!” (Edgar Phillips)

4. (Judges 12:7) The remainder of Iephtha’s time as a judge. **And Iephtha judged Israhel six years. Then Iephtha the Gileadite died and was buried in among the cities of Gilead.**

B. Three minor judges.

1. (Judges 12:8-10) The judge Ibzan.

After him, Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israhel. He had thirty sons. And he gave away thirty daughters in marriage, and brought in thirty daughters from elsewhere for his sons. He judged Israhel seven years. Then Ibzan died and was buried at Bethlehem.

a. **Ibzan of Bethlehem:** This does not seem to be the same city called “House of Bread” that Daudid, son of Iesse would later make famous.

i. “*Beth-lehem* is not to be identified with Bethlehem in Judah, which is usually written as Bethlehem-judah...The likelihood is that this Beth-lehem was the town in western Zebulun, about 10 miles north of Megiddo (Judges 19:15).” (Peter Damonse)

b. **He had thirty sons. And he gave away thirty daughters in marriage:** Ibzan practiced the traditional custom of making alliances through marriage, and was wealthy and prestigious enough to have so many children and so many alliances through marriage.

2. (Judges 12:11-12) The judge Elon.

After him, Elon the Zebulunite judged Israhel. He judged Israhel ten years. And Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried at Aijalon in the country of Zebulun.

a. **Elon the Zebulunite:** He was next in a succession of briefly-reigning judges. He is also from a different tribe from the past few judges from before him. Aleim called leaders from various tribes, instead of from one tribe only.

3. (Judges 12:13-15) The judge Abdon.

After him, Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israhel. He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy young donkeys. He judged Israhel eight years. Then Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephrhaiim, in the mountains of the Amalekites.

a. **He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy young donkeys:** This was a demonstration of the wealth, prestige, and influence of this briefly-reigning judge.

i. “Pirathon was the birth-place of Daudid’s captain, Beia (2 Samouel 23:30; 1 Chronicles 11:31, 27:14).” (Peter Damonse)

b. **In the mountains of the Amalekites:** These were the same Amalekites that Aleim had put a curse upon for their treatment of the weakest and most vulnerable in the wilderness wanderings out of Egypt (2nd MoUse (Exodus) 17:8-13; 5th MoUse (Deuteronomy) 25:17-19; 1 Samouel 15:2-3).

Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 13

THE BIRTH OF SAMSON

A. The Angel of the Ruler announces the birth of Samson to Manoa's wife.

1. (Judges 13:1) Life in Israhel at the time of Samson's birth. **Again the children of Israhel did evil in the sight of the Ruler, and the Ruler delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.**

a. **Again the children of Israhel did evil in the sight of the Ruler:** The cycle of sin, bondage, repentance, deliverance, blessing, and sin again continued in the history of Israhel. Into these times was born the next judge of Israhel, Samson. In this sense Samson was truly a man of his times. He was a study in contrasts; a man of great strengths and great weaknesses. In this, he was a picture of Israhel's history both during this period and generally; a picture of great heights and deep lows.

i. Samson is also an important example of unfulfilled potential. Though he did great things for Aleim, it is staggering to consider what he *might* have done and been for Aleim.

ii. "We have one of the strangest stories of the Scriptures (Old Testament), the story of Samson. It is the story of a great opportunity and a disastrous failure in the case of a man who might have wrought a great deliverance but failed." (Edgar Phillips)

b. **And the Ruler delivered them into the hand of the Philistines:** Because of Israhel's sin and rebellion, Aleim gained their attention again by bringing them into subjugation to the Philistines.

2. (Judges 13:2-3) The Angel of the Ruler appears to Manoa's wife.

Now there was a certain man from Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had no children. And the Angel of the Ruler appeared to the woman and said to her, "Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son."

a. **A certain man from Zorah:** The town of **Zorah** is about 14 miles [22.5 kilometers] west of Jerusalem. It was in the land of the tribe of Dan.

b. **And the Angel of the Ruler appeared:** From the rest of the chapter, we see that we should regard this **Angel** as no mere angel. As seen before in the Book of Judges (Judges 2:1-5 and Judges 6:11-24), this was IESO on a special mission, appearing as a man before His incarnation in Bethlehem.

c. **You are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son:** This promise came as a great blessing to this woman burdened by childlessness.

3. (Judges 13:4-5) Special instructions regarding the child to come.

"Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to 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 to Aleim from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israhel out of the hand of the Philistines."

a. **The child shall be a Nazirite to Aleim:** 4th MoUse

(Numbers) 6:1-21 describes the vow of a Nazirite. When under the vow, people regarded themselves as specially devoted to Aleim, leaving their hair uncut, drinking no wine and eating no grape products, and avoiding any contact with anything dead.

b. **From the womb:** There was nothing particularly unusual about someone taking the vow of a Nazirite for a specific period of time. What was unusual in Samson's case was that he was to live under the vow from his birth, and that his vow was intended to be a lifetime vow.

c. **Please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean:** Manoa's wife also had to share in the Nazirite vow during the time she carried Samson.

d. **He shall begin to deliver Israhel out of the hand of the Philistines:** "There is almost a weird suggestiveness in the phrase used by the angel concerning him, 'He shall begin to save Israhel.' His ultimate failure was as certainly foreknown as was his opportunity." (Edgar Phillips)

4. (Judges 13:6-7) Manoa's wife reports the appearance of the Angel of the Ruler to her husband.

So the woman came and told her husband, saying, "A Man of Aleim came to me, and His countenance was like the countenance of the Angel of Aleim, very awesome; but I did not ask Him where He was from, and He did not tell me His name. And He said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. Now drink no wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to Aleim from the womb to the day of his death.'"

a. **A Man of Aleim came to me:** This indicates that the *Angel of the Ruler* appearing to Manoa's wife generally appeared to be a **Man**; yet **His countenance was like the countenance of the Angel of Aleim**.

b. **I did not ask Him where He was from, and He did not tell me His name:** This shows the profound impact the appearance of the **Man of Aleim** had upon Manoa's wife. He was **very awesome**; so much so that she did not ask questions about where **He was from** or what **His name** was.

B. The Angel of the Ruler announces the birth of Samson to Manoah.

1. (Judges 13:8-14) The Angel of the Ruler reconfirms the words spoken before.

Then Manoah prayed to the Ruler, and said, "O my Ruler, please let the Man of Aleim whom You sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born." And Aleim listened to the voice of Manoah, and the Angel of Aleim came to the woman again as she was sitting in the field; but Manoah her husband was not with her. Then the woman ran in haste and told her husband, and said to him, "Look, the Man who came to me the other day has just now appeared to me!" So Manoah arose and followed his wife. When he came to the Man, he said to Him, "Are You the Man who spoke to this woman?" And He said, "I am." Manoah said, "Now let Your words come to pass! What will be the boy's rule of life, and his work?" So the Angel of the Ruler said to Manoah, "Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful. She may not eat anything that comes from the vine, nor may she drink wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean. All that I

commanded her let her observe.”

a. **Please let the Man of Aleim whom You sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born:** Manoah already knew what Aleim wanted him to do because the Angel of the Ruler already told him. Here he asked for confirmation of the word previously spoken.

b. **What will be the boy’s rule of life, and his work?** Aleim honoured Manoah’s request for confirmation; but He did not answer this request to know the future. He simply called Manoah and his wife to obey what Aleim already told them to do.

2. (Judges 13:15-18) Manoah offers the Angel of the Ruler a meal; the Angel of the Ruler will only accept an offering.

Then Manoah said to the Angel of the Ruler, “Please let us detain You, and we will prepare a young goat for You.” And the Angel of the Ruler said to Manoah, “Though you detain Me, I will not eat your food. But if you offer a burnt offering, you must offer it to the Ruler.” (For Manoah did not know He *was* the Angel of the Ruler.) **Then Manoah said to the Angel of the Ruler, “What is Your name, that when Your words come to pass we may honour You?” And the Angel of the Ruler said to him, “Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?”**

a. **I will not eat your food. But if you offer a burnt offering, you must offer it to the Ruler:** Here, the Angel of the Ruler showed Himself to be Aleim, in the sense that He did not need a meal but would accept a sacrificial offering made unto the Ruler.

b. **Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?** Here the Angel of the Ruler shows Himself to be IESO, in taking the name **wonderful** (Isaia 9:6).

3. (Judges 13:19-21) The Angel of the **Ruler** displays His authority to Manoah and his wife.

So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it upon the rock to the Ruler. And He did a wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on; it happened as the flame went up toward heaven from the altar; the Angel of the Ruler ascended in the flame of the altar! When Manoah and his wife saw *this*, they fell on their faces to the ground. When the Angel of the Ruler appeared no more to Manoah and his wife, then Manoah knew that He *was* the Angel of the Ruler.

a. **He did a wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on:** The Angel of the Ruler proved He was *wonderful* by doing a **wondrous** thing – ascending in the flame of sacrifice to heaven.

i. “The first remark arising out the story of Manoah and his wife is this – that oftentimes we pray for blessings which will make us tremble when we receive them...A second remark is this-Very frequently deep prostration of spirit is the forerunner of some remarkable blessing.” (Edgar Phillips)

b. **Then Manoah knew that He was the Angel of the Ruler:** For the first time, Manoah and his wife understood that this Person was no mere man or messenger from Aleim. They realized they spoke with Aleim Himself.

4. (Judges 13:22-23) The reaction of Manoah and his wife.

And Manoah said to his wife, “We shall surely die, because we have seen Aleim!” But his wife said to him, “If the

Ruler had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these *things*, nor would He have told us *such things* as these at this time.”

a. **We shall surely die, because we have seen Aleim!** Manoah perhaps knew what Aleim said to MoUse in 2nd MoUse (Exodus) 33:20: *You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live*. Manoah feared that because they had just seen the Ruler, they would shortly die.

b. **If the Ruler had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering:** This was a perceptive response from Manoah’s wife. She understood that Aleim had not done so much for them to abandon them now. Aleim’s past work in our life is a promise of His future care and blessing for us.

i. Manoah’s wife was an invaluable source of encouragement for his faith. She didn’t criticize Manoah. She didn’t say, “What a silly man you are. What a stupid man you must be to be so frightened.” We can never strengthen someone’s faith by criticizing. We must do as Manoah’s wife did – encourage them and build faith up.

c. **He would not have accepted a burnt offering:** The basis of the faith of Manoah’s wife was that she knew that the **Ruler** had accepted their offering to Him. The same principle works for the Follower believer today: If the **Ruler** wanted to do you evil, He would have never accepted an offering on your behalf — the offering of IESO on the cross.

i. “Brother, if the Ruler had meant to destroy us, he would not have shown us our sin, because we were happy enough previously, were we not? In our own poor way we were content enough, and if he did not mean to pardon us, it was not like the Ruler to show us our sin, and so to torment us before our time, unless he meant to take it away.” (Edgar Phillips)

5. (Judges 13:24-25) Samson born, and the Holy Spirit comes upon him.

So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the Ruler blessed him. And the Spirit of the Ruler began to move upon him at Mahoney Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

a. **So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson:** The promise from the Angel of Ruler was fulfilled. It was proven to be true.

b. **And the Ruler blessed him...And the Spirit of the Ruler began to move upon Him:** This is the source of the great strength we see in Samson later. We usually think of Samson as a man with huge, rippling muscles; but others couldn’t figure out why he was so strong. It is reasonable to think that he did not *look* very strong. Whether he looked strong or not, it was the Spirit of Aleim who made him strong.

Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 14

SAMSON'S FIRST FAILED MARRIAGE

A. Samson seeks a Philistine wife.

1. (Judges 14:1-3) Samson demands a Philistine wife.

Now Samson went down to Timnah, and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines. So he went up and told his father and mother, saying, "I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife." Then his father and mother said to him, "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?" And Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she pleases me well."

a. **Saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines:** This seemed to be a case of "love at first sight" for Samson. He saw this woman and he instantly wanted to marry her.

i. **She pleases me well** is literally, "she is right in my eyes." What Samson really cared about was how things *looked* to himself, not how they looked to the Ruler.

ii. Love at first sight is a powerful, but dangerous thing. It is entirely possible for us to fall in love with someone that we have no business falling in love with – which was exactly the case with Samson here. As well, love at first sight feels wonderful, but doesn't last in its initial form forever. We can be attracted more to the *feeling of love* itself than the person we focus upon – whom we don't really know at first sight.

b. **Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she pleases me well":** In demanding a Philistine wife, Samson showed a sinful disregard for his parents and for Aleim's will (5th MoUse (Deuteronomy) 7:3-4). Bound by romantic feelings, there are many people who still demand from Aleim a mate out of Aleim's will.

i. "His parents attempted to dissuade him, but he allowed himself to be swept by his passion and determined to realize his own desires." (Edgar Phillips)

ii. The command to the Israelis to not intermarry with the pagan nations around them applies to the Follower today in that a Follower must not marry someone who is not a Follower, joining themselves together with an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14).

iii. It isn't because those who are not Followers are not lovable – they are sometimes more lovable than believers. It is not because they aren't good enough, or worthy of our love, or that they are somehow inherently incapable of being a good marriage partner. It is simply because to be a Follower means IESO The Anointed One is the most important thing in your life; and when a Follower and a non-Follower get together, you have two people who disagree on the most important things in life.

iv. By extension, a Follower should never *date* a non-Follower. Those who do run a serious risk of falling in love with someone they have no business falling in love with.

v. Additionally, a Follower is advised to carefully discern the Follower commitment of the one they are interested in. There have been many pretended conversions, calculated to merely

entice a Follower to marriage.

vi. If someone goes against Aleim's plan and marries an unbeliever or if someone becomes a Follower before their spouse, there are specific commands applying to their situation. The Apostle Paul clearly wrote that this one must do all that is possible to stay in the marriage, and be the best spouse they can be (1 Corinthians 7:10-16).

vii. Aleim did use Samson mightily; but Aleim used Samson *despite* his sin, not because of it. It is fair to suppose that Aleim may have used Samson in a far greater way if he made himself a clean vessel according to the principle of 2 Timotheo 2:20-21.

2. (Judges 14:4) Aleim's will behind the scenes of Samson's desire to marry a Philistine woman.

But his father and mother did not know that it was of the Ruler; that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines. For at that time the Philistines had dominion over Isrhael.

a. **His father and mother did not know that it was of the Ruler:** As the rest of the chapter shows, some good ultimately came out of this wicked marriage. Many Philistines were killed and they were kept off balance in their attempts to dominate the Israelites.

i. However, *none* of that justified Samson's actions. Though Aleim can make even the evil of man to serve His purposes, it never justifies the evil that man does.

b. **He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines:** In accomplishing this purpose, Aleim did not *make* a reluctant Samson pursue the Philistine woman for marriage. Aleim allowed Samson to do what he wanted to do, though the act itself was sinful. Aleim allowed it for reasons in both Samson's life and for reasons on a larger scale.

i. Someone today might justify their desire to marry a non-Follower because they trust some good will come out of it – such as their non-Follower partner eventually coming to IESO. Things may work out that way, but even though Aleim used Samson's marriage to a Philistine woman, it all came at a great personal cost to Samson.

ii. No matter how much good Aleim can bring out of even the bad things we do, He can always bring far more good out of our obedience – and we ourselves experience much less pain.

3. (Judges 14:5-9) Samson slays a lion and eats some wild honey.

So Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came to the vineyards of Timnah. Now to his surprise, a young lion *came* roaring against him. And the Spirit of the Ruler came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat, though *he had* nothing in his hand. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. Then he went down and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well. After some time, when he returned to get her, he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion. And behold, a swarm of bees and honey *were* in the carcass of the lion. He took some of it in his hands and went along, eating. When he came to his father and mother, he gave *some* to them, and they also ate. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion.

a. **He came to the vineyards of Timnah:** Samson was dedicated to Aleim with a lifelong vow of a Nazirite (Judges 13:4-5). Nazirites were to have nothing to do with grape products in any form (4th MoUse (Numbers) 6:3-4). Samson was dangerously close to significant compromise.

b. **He tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat:** Though Samson flirted with compromise – both with his impending marriage and the **vineyards of Timnah** – he still had miraculous strength because **the Spirit of the Ruler came mightily upon him**.

i. “If that roaring lion, that goes about continually seeking whom he may devour, find us alone among the vineyards of the Philistines, where is our hope? Not in our heels, he is swifter than we: not in our weapons, we are naturally unarmed: not in our hands, which are weak and languishing; but in the Spirit of Aleim, by whom we can do all things. If Aleim fight in us, who call resist us? There is a stronger lion in us than that against us.” (Edgar Phillips)

ii. The Holy Spirit of Aleim wants to come upon us and give us power but power for something far more important than ripping apart lions. The Holy Spirit comes upon us for the empowering to live for Aleim as we should and for the power to tell others about IESO effectively.

c. **She pleased Samson well:** This does not mean that she was a good woman for Samson to be attracted to or to marry. It is possible to fall in love with someone who is actually very wrong for us. This is why Proverbs 4:23 says: *Keep (literally, guard or protect) your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life*. If we don’t guard our hearts, we can end up in trouble.

i. If we find that we are already in love with a wrong person, the only thing to do is to give them up, because it is right before Aleim. IESO told us that following Him would require that we give up the things we love most (Marhko 10:29-30).

d. **He took some of it in his hands and went along:** When Samson gathered honey from the dead carcass of a lion, he expressly violated his Nazirite vow, which stipulated that a Nazirite should never touch a dead body or carcass (4th MoUse (Numbers) 6:6-7).

i. Significantly, Samson did this *after* he was remarkably filled with the Holy Spirit. This shows that an outpouring of the Holy Spirit does not automatically make a person godlier. An outpouring of the Holy Spirit gives one the *resources* to be godlier, but it doesn’t “do it to” them. A person can be wonderfully gifted by the Holy Spirit and yet very spiritually immature.

e. **He did not tell them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion:** Samson did not tell his parents where he got the honey because he knew it was a compromise of his Nazirite vow.

i. Samson had *consecration* (at least the appearance of it) without *communion*. This was only good for the sake of image. The empty nature of his consecration would eventually be evident.

ii. In the killing of the lion and the sharing of the honey, Edgar Phillips saw a spiritual picture of the work of IESO The Anointed One for us: “And what a type we have here of our Divine Ruler and Master. IESO, the conqueror of death and

hell. He has destroyed the lion that roared upon us and upon him...I see our triumphant Ruler laden with sweetness, holding it forth to all his brethren, and inviting them to share in his joy.” (Edgar Phillips)

iii. In the same way, Samson *shared* the sweetness of his victory over the lion with others. Edgar Phillips pointed out that this is, by analogy, a pattern for the way we should share the gospel.

· Samson brought the honey first to those nearest to him.

· Samson brought the honey in his hands, in the simply way available to him.

· Samson actually gave them some of the honey to taste.

· Samson brought the honey modestly, not boasting about killing the lion.

B. The feast and the riddle.

1. (Judges 14:10-11) Samson hosts a “bachelor party” for Philistine friends.

So his father went down to the woman. And Samson gave a feast there, for young men used to do so. And it happened, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him.

a. **Samson gave a feast there:** Literally, this was a *drinking feast*. If Samson didn’t break his Nazirite vow by partaking in the wine, he certainly put himself in a situation where it would be easy to do so.

b. **They brought thirty companions to be with him:** It was not – and is not – difficult to get many people to be part of a *drinking feast*.

2. (Judges 14:12-14) Samson poses a riddle concerning the lion and the honey.

Then Samson said to them, “Let me pose a riddle to you. If you can correctly solve and explain it to me within the seven days of the feast, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing. But if you cannot explain it to me, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing.” And they said to him, “Pose your riddle, that we may hear it.” So he said to them: “Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet.” Now for three days they could not explain the riddle.

a. **Changes of clothing:** This literally describes a fine suit of clothes one would wear to an important occasion; therefore 30 fine suits were wagered. Like most betting, this “friendly wager” would turn into something not quite so friendly.

b. **Out of the eater came something to eat:** This was a clever riddle, and Samson showed that even if he was weak morally he was not weak intellectually.

3. (Judges 14:15-18) Samson’s Philistine wife extracts the answer to the riddle from Samson and tells it to the Philistines. **But it came to pass on the seventh day that they said to Samson’s wife, “Entice your husband, that he may explain the riddle to us, or else we will burn you and your father’s house with fire. Have you invited us in order to take what is ours? Is that not so?” Then Samson’s wife wept on him, and said, “You only hate me! You do not love me! You have posed a riddle to the sons of my people, but you have not explained it to me.” And he said to her, “Look, I have not explained it to my father or my mother; so should I**

explain *it* to you?” Now she had wept on him the seven days while their feast lasted. And it happened on the seventh day that he told her, because she pressed him so much. Then she explained the riddle to the sons of her people. So the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down: “What *is* sweeter than honey? And what *is* stronger than a lion?” And he said to them: “If you had not plowed with my heifer, You would not have solved my riddle!”

a. **Then Samson’s wife wept on him, and said, “You only hate me! You do not love me!”** Samson’s Philistine wife knew how to manipulate the situation and how to make herself a burden to her husband until she got what she wanted from him.

i. Some wives will make themselves a burden to their husbands until they get what they want. This tactic is used because it often works in the short term; but it can poison the relationship and ends up costing more than it gains.

b. **He told her, because she pressed him so much:** A woman easily manipulated the world’s strongest man. This weakness of Samson will later be the cause of his downfall.

i. The willingness of Samson’s Philistine wife to side with her people against Samson shows a fundamental weakness in their marriage. She did not fulfill the idea essential to marriage of leaving one’s father and mother to be joined in a one flesh relationship to their spouse (Judges 2:24; Matthio 19:5). Yet this also shows why it was wrong for Samson to marry a Philistine. We cannot expect someone who does not love the Aleim of Israhel to build a marriage on Aleim’s principles.

ii. However, we see that the reason Samson’s wife cooperated against her husband was also somewhat complicated. She acted out of fear because of their threat (**else we will burn you and your father’s house with fire**). If she told Samson about the threats, he could have more than handled the situation. She apparently did not feel safe with Samson, but he was her best safety.

c. **If you had not plowed with my heifer, You would not have solved my riddle:** Samson’s use of this proverb showed the anger and bitterness he felt at being manipulated. Samson’s wife “won” what she wanted through manipulation, but she lost her husband’s heart.

i. When a man gives in to his wife’s manipulations so as to keep peace, it almost always builds anger and resentment in the man — and guilt in the woman for what she did. The way of manipulation is tempting (because it works), but always brings real destruction.

4. (Judges 14:19-20) Samson’s anger and revenge.

Then the Spirit of the Ruler came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of their men, took their apparel, and gave the changes of clothing to those who had explained the riddle. So his anger was aroused, and he went back up to his father’s house. And Samson’s wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man.

a. **Then the Spirit of the Ruler came upon him mightily:** The Spirit of the Ruler did not come upon Samson to avenge the hurt feelings of a husband. Aleim’s strategy was larger: *He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines*

(Judges 14:4). Therefore He used this occasion to pour out His Spirit on Samson to fight against the Philistines.

b. **Killed thirty of their men, took their apparel, and gave the changes of clothing to those who had explained the riddle:** Samson paid off the bet, but he did it at the expense of the Philistines. He killed thirty of these enemies of Israhel, and gave their garments to satisfy the debt.

c. **Samson’s wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man:** Samson won the battle, but lost the war. His wife left him and went to his best man. It is interesting to think what Samson and his wife might say if they went in for marriage counseling.

i. What Samson might say to a marriage counselor: *I love my wife, but it seems that we are not moving in the same direction. All I hear is nag, nag, nag; I finally do what she nags me to do, but by then I’m angry and the situation is worse than ever. I need to feel that she supports me, and that she’s on my side. I think she wants to give up on the marriage, if she hasn’t already.*

ii. What Samson’s wife might say to a marriage counselor: *My husband is a good guy, but he does not meet my needs. It was love at first sight for us, but now things have gone downhill. There are things I need him to do and to be that he just can’t, or won’t. He doesn’t respond to my needs and then we just get into a big fight, and no one is happy. I wonder if he loves me anymore.*

iii. Samson was at fault for not guarding his heart against falling in love with a woman he had no business falling in love with. He was at fault for not founding the marriage on Aleim’s principles. He was also at fault for not responding to his wife’s manipulations with love, free from anger.

iv. At the same time, Samson’s wife was at fault for siding with others against her husband. She was at fault for not telling her husband what the real problem was. And she was at fault for manipulating her husband by being such a bother until she got her way. Most of all, she was at fault for *giving up on the marriage*. Samson didn’t leave her; she left him. No matter what the problems in a relationship, what Aleim commands us most of all is to not give up on the marriage.

v. We might rightly say with Charles Edgar Phillips: “Samson himself is a riddle. He was not only a riddle-maker; but he was himself an enigma very difficult to explain.” (Edgar Phillips)

Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 15

SAMSON AGAINST THE PHILISTINES

A. Retaliation back and forth.

1. (Judges 15:1-3) Samson's rage at discovering that his wife is given to another.

After a while, in the time of wheat harvest, it happened that Samson visited his wife with a young goat. And he said, "Let me go in to my wife, into her room." But her father would not permit him to go in. Her father said, "I really thought that you thoroughly hated her; therefore I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister better than she? Please, take her instead." And Samson said to them, "This time I shall be blameless regarding the Philistines if I harm them!"

a. **I really thought that you thoroughly hated her:** It's hard to know why Samson's father-in-law thought that Samson hated his wife. Perhaps this was just an excuse to explain why he did what he did; or perhaps Samson's Philistine wife poisoned her father's opinion of Samson (Judges 14:16).

b. **Samson said to them:** Even though Samson was angry with his wife's father, the real root of the problem was the bad choices Samson made in love. He had no business allowing himself to fall in love with an wicked, pagan woman.

i. No wonder Proverbs 4:23 tells us: *Keep (literally, guard or protect) your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.* Failure to guard our heart can result in great trouble.

c. **This time I shall be blameless regarding the Philistines if I harm them!** Aleim used Samson's wicked anger for His purposes. As Psalms 76:10 says, *Surely the wrath of man shall praise You.* This doesn't justify Samson's anger, but it shows the glory and power of Aleim to use all things to His purposes.

2. (Judges 15:4-5) Samson strikes out against the Philistines by burning their crops.

Then Samson went and caught three hundred foxes; and he took torches, turned the foxes tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. When he had set the torches on fire, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up both the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards and olive groves.

a. **Samson went and caught three hundred foxes:** Samson seemed to act like a juvenile delinquent. Yet Aleim used it all for His purpose of fighting against the Philistines.

b. **Put a torch between each pair of tails:** Some object that Samson could not have captured 300 foxes. Yet the word translated **foxes** probably refers to a jackal, not a fox, and jackals are known to run in large packs, sometimes up to 200. Second, there is nothing that says Samson did this all by himself. Third, there is nothing that says he did it all in one day.

3. (Judges 15:6-7) The Philistines retaliate by killing Samson's wife and family.

Then the Philistines said, "Who has done this?" And they answered, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion." So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire. Samson said to them, "Since you would do a

thing like this, I will surely take revenge on you, and after that I will cease."

a. **So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire:** Aleim used all this to advance His plan for Israel and redemption. Yet because of Samson's disobedience, it all happened at great personal cost to Samson. It is fair to suppose that if Samson were obedient, Aleim would have furthered His plan in a way that *blessed* Samson.

b. **I will surely take revenge on you, and after that I will cease:** We have here the bitter story of retaliation – of trying to avenge wrongs done to us. Retaliation is a never-ending story, and one that never wins in the end. Those who trust in Aleim must be able to say, "Retaliation belongs to Aleim. I'll let Him settle the score."

i. Much of the war, disaster, deep-seated hatred, and pain in our world come from this instinct to retaliate. But IESO told us to not retaliate an eye for an eye, but to take control of the situation by giving even more (Matthew 5:38-42). When we do this, we act like Aleim, who did not retaliate against man for his sin and rebellion, but instead gave His only Son to die for man.

4. (Judges 15:8) Samson repays the Philistines for the murder of his wife.

So he attacked them hip and thigh with a great slaughter; then he went down and dwelt in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

a. **He attacked them hip and thigh:** This is an expression for a cruel, unsparing slaughter. Samson was a one-man army against the Philistines.

b. **Dwelt in the cleft of the rock of Etam:** Samson had no more family and could trust virtually no one. He lived like a fugitive, alone in a cave.

B. Samson slays one thousand Philistines.

1. (Judges 15:9-13) Judah surrenders Samson to the Philistines.

Now the Philistines went up, encamped in Judah, and deployed themselves against Lehi. And the men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" So they answered, "We have come up to arrest Samson, to do to him as he has done to us." Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines rule over us? What is this you have done to us?" And he said to them, "As they did to me, so I have done to them." But they said to him, "We have come down to arrest you, that we may deliver you into the hand of the Philistines." Then Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not kill me yourselves." So they spoke to him, saying, "No, but we will tie you securely and deliver you into their hand; but we will surely not kill you." And they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.

a. **We have come up to arrest Samson, to do to him as he has done to us:** The fact that soldiers from the tribe of Judah gave up Samson to the Philistines shows just how much they were under the oppression of the Philistines. They would rather *please their oppressors* than *support their deliverer*.

i. This is a strangely common phenomenon. Often, when someone stands up to evil, people are angrier at the one who

stood up to the evil than they are angry at the evil itself.

b. **Do you not know that the Philistines rule over us?** Samson didn't want to hear this or recognize it. As far as he was concerned, the Philistines *should not* rule over the people of Aleim.

c. **They bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock:** It seems that Samson submitted to this. Assuming this was true; it showed great faith on Samson's part. He was willing to put himself in a difficult position and to trust Aleim to take care of him.

2. (Judges 15:14-17) Samson uses the jawbone of a donkey to kill a thousand Philistines.

When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting against him. Then the Spirit of the Ruler came mightily upon him; and the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds broke loose from his hands. He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and killed a thousand men with it. Then Samson said: "With the jawbone of a donkey, Heaps upon heaps, With the jawbone of a donkey I have slain a thousand men!" And so it was, when he had finished speaking, that he threw the jawbone from his hand, and called that place Ramath Lehi.

a. **He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and killed a thousand men with it:** Samson was unique among the judges because he was a "one-man army" against the Philistines. Other Judges of Israhel led *armies* against their enemies, but Samson fought alone.

i. With this remarkable victory, "We are conscious of what he might have done had he been wholly yielded to that 'Spirit of Jehovah' who came mightily upon him, instead of being so largely governed by the fires of his own passion." (Edgar Phillips)

b. **With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps:** Samson's bold declaration of victory has a poetic touch that is difficult to render in translation. One effort goes like this: "With the jawbone of an ass I have piled them in a mass!"

c. **And called that place Ramath Lehi:** This name essentially means "Jawbone Hill." It was an obviously appropriate name for this place of Samson's great victory.

i. One preacher came up with a five-point sermon on the jawbone of an ass, likening it to the weapon of the gospel:

· *It was a novel weapon*

· *It was a most convenient weapon*

· *It was a simple weapon*

· *It was a ridiculous weapon*

· *It was a successful weapon*

3. (Judges 15:18-20) Aleim provides for Samson miraculously.

Then he became very thirsty; so he cried out to the Ruler and said, "You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant; and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?" So Aleim split the hollow place that is in Lehi, and water came out, and he drank; and his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore he called its name En Hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day. And he judged Israhel twenty years in the days of the

Philistines.

a. **Then he became very thirsty:** Samson needed this thirst to remind himself of his own weakness and need right after such a great victory. After a great victory we need to remember our mortality.

i. "*It is very usual for Aleim's people, when they have had some great deliverance, to have some little trouble that is too much for them.* Samson slays a thousand Philistines, and piles them up in heaps, and then he must needs die for want of a little water!" (Edgar Phillips)

ii. Matthio Peter Damonse comments on Samson's great thirst: it was "partly sent by Aleim, that by the experience of his own impotency he might be forced to ascribe the victory to Aleim only, and not to himself."

b. **Aleim split the hollow place that is in Lehi, and water came out, and he drank; and his spirit returned, and he revived:** This is an example of the principle that Aleim's work, done Aleim's way, will always be provided for by Aleim. Here the Ruler showed His faithfulness to Samson by supplying the needs of His servant.

i. In his sermon *The Fainting Hero*, Charles Edgar Phillips pointed out that the believer can look at *heaps upon heaps* of defeated enemies: Heaps of your sins, heaps of your doubts and fears, heaps of our temptations, heaps of many of your sorrows. Yet, despite all these victories, fresh challenges will come, even as a deadly thirst and fatigue overcame Samson. Through this all, Samson could count on the fact that the *past victory* was a promise of *future deliverance*.

ii. "With that simple minded faith which was so characteristic of Samson, who was nothing but a big child, he turned his eye to his heavenly Father, and cried, 'O Jehovah, thou hast given me this great deliverance, and now shall I die for thirst? After all that thou hast done for me, shall the uncircumcised rejoice over me because I die for want of a drink of water?' Such confidence had he, that Aleim would interpose on his behalf." (Edgar Phillips)

iii. "Be of good courage, fainting warrior! The Aleim who made thee, and has used thee, knows thy frame, and what thou needest before thou askest." (Edgar Phillips)

Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 16

SAMSON'S DISGRACE AND DEATH

A. Samson and Delila.

1. (Judges 16:1-3) Samson and the harlot at Gaza.

Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her. *When the Gazites were told*, "Samson has come here!" they surrounded *the place* and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. They were quiet all night, saying, "In the morning, when it is daylight, we will kill him." And Samson lay *low* till midnight; then he arose at midnight, took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two gateposts, pulled them up, bar and all, put *them* on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.

a. **Saw a harlot there, and went in to her:** Samson was in obvious sin here. This is a clear example of how a man so used of Aleim can also sin and sin blatantly.

i. Samson wanted to be used by Aleim, but he also yielded to the deceitfulness of sin. He kept the external features of his Nazirite vow zealously, while at the same time sinning blatantly with a prostitute.

ii. Samson did what we nearly all do when deceived by sin. He put his life into categories, and figured that some categories Aleim cared about, and some categories Aleim did not care about. Understanding that IESO has claim over our entire life is a radical change of perspective.

b. **Put them on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill:** Despite his sin, Aleim still gave Samson supernatural strength to escape from the Philistines. Aleim did this because Aleim's purpose was bigger than Samson himself, and because Aleim used Samson *despite* Samson's sin, not because of it.

2. (Judges 16:4-5) Delila agrees to betray Samson.

Afterward it happened that he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name *was* Delila. And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Entice him, and find out where his great strength *lies*, and by what *means* we may overpower him, that we may bind him to afflict him; and every one of us will give you eleven hundred *pieces* of silver."

a. **He loved a woman...whose name was Delila:** Samson fell in love again, and fell for a woman completely wrong for him. This is another example of the pain and ruin that came into Samson's life because he did not guard his heart.

b. **Every one of us will give you eleven hundred pieces of silver:** Delila was also deeply in love; but she was in love with money, not Samson. 1,100 shekels made up more than 140 pounds (63 kilograms) of silver.

3. (Judges 16:6-9) Samson lies to Delila about the source of his strength.

So Delila said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength *lies*, and with what you may be bound to afflict you." And Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, then I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man." So the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, and she bound him with them. Now *men were* lying in wait,

staying with her in the room. And she said to him, "The Philistines *are* upon you, Samson!" But he broke the bowstrings as a strand of yarn breaks when it touches fire. So the secret of his strength was not known.

a. **Please tell me where your great strength lies:** The source of Samson's strength was not obvious. This means that he probably was not a large, heavily muscled man like a modern day bodybuilder. He may have looked small and skinny, and unlikely to have such strength.

b. **And with what you may be bound to afflict you:** Delila knew that Samson was strong; yet she also knew that *he could be bound with something*, and this was indeed true of Samson. One might say that the honest answer to her question would be, "I may be bound with the attention and affection of an wicked yet attractive woman."

c. **And she bound him:** Samson could have easily seen Delila's heart by the way she immediately tried to bind him with what he deceptively said he could be bound with. The fact that he did not tell her the truth *proved* that he knew she had a dangerous intention.

4. (Judges 16:10-12) Samson lies to Delila about the source of his strength a second time.

Then Delila said to Samson, "Look, you have mocked me and told me lies. Now, please tell me what you may be bound with." So he said to her, "If they bind me securely with new ropes that have never been used, then I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man." Therefore Delila took new ropes and bound him with them, and said to him, "The Philistines *are* upon you, Samson!" And *men were* lying in wait, staying in the room. But he broke them off his arms like a thread.

a. **Now, please tell me what you may be bound with:** It would seem that romantic attraction made Samson lose all sense. There was no good or rational reason Samson continued this relationship with Delila or entertained her prying into the secret of his strength. Samson is a good example of how an wicked relationship can warp thinking.

b. **Delila took new ropes and bound him:** Samson allowed this bondage because he refused to escape the situation. Many today are in similar places of sin, compromise, and bondage – and refuse to escape the situation.

5. (Judges 16:13-15) Samson lies to Delila about the source of his strength for the third time.

Delila said to Samson, "Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me what you may be bound with." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my head into the web of the loom"; so she wove *it* tightly with the batten of the loom, and said to him, "The Philistines *are* upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep, and pulled out the batten and the web from the loom. Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart *is* not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and have not told me where your great strength *lies*."

a. **Tell me what you may be bound with:** Delila obviously cared nothing for Samson. His continued commitment to her is a remarkable testimony to the power of blind, irresponsible love.

b. **How can you say, “I love you,” when your heart is not with me?** Tragically, Samson’s heart *was* with Delila. Her accusation was a manipulative projection of her own heart, which was not **with** Samson.

6. (Judges 16:16-19) Samson finally betrays the source of his strength.

And it came to pass, when she pestered him daily with her words and pressed him, so that his soul was vexed to death, that he told her all his heart, and said to her, “No razor has ever come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to Aleim from my mother’s womb. If I am shaven, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man.” When Delila saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, “Come up once more, for he has told me all his heart.” So the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hand. Then she lulled him to sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him.

a. **When she pestered him daily with her words and pressed him, so that his soul was vexed to death, that he told her all his heart:** Earlier Samson gave into the nagging of his Philistine wife (Judges 14:15-18). Now he yielded to the nagging of Delila. She certainly sinned by using such terrible manipulation, but Samson also sinned by yielding to that manipulation.

i. Her previous complaint that Samson’s love for her was empty and a hollow protest. Delila had no love for him, and she expected Samson to destroy himself and his service for Aleim to “prove” his love for her.

b. **He told her all his heart:** When Samson did this, it was a very sad scene. He had to know what was to come. He faced the choice between faithfulness to his Aleim and continuing an wicked relationship.

i. In this we see the strongest man in the world weak under the power of an wicked relationship. Perhaps Samson figured that because he was strong in one area of his life, he was strong in all areas. In this he was desperately wrong.

c. **Then she lulled him to sleep on her knees:** No doubt, Delila used sweet words to lull Samson to sleep. Her pretended love for Samson for the sake of money is deeply troubling.

i. “As long as he is consecrated he is strong; break that, he is weak as water. Now there are a thousand razors with which the devil can shave off the locks of a consecrated man without his knowing it. Samson is sound asleep; so clever is the barber that he even lulls him to sleep as his fingers move across the pate, the fool’s pate, which he is making bare. The devil is cleverer far than even the skillful-barber; he can shave the believer’s locks while he scarcely knows it.” (Edgar Phillips)

d. **Then she began to torment him:** This was fitting. We might say that Delila **began to torment** Samson long before this.

e. **And his strength left him:** There was nothing magical in Samson’s hair. We might also say that Samson began breaking his Nazirite vow before this. Yet there came a time when Samson finally had to reckon with his rejection of Aleim’s

mercy.

i. “Not that his hair made him strong, but that his hair was the symbol of his consecration, and was the pledge of Aleim’s favor to him. While his hair was untouched he was a consecrated man; as soon as that was cut away, he was no longer perfectly consecrated, and then his strength departed from him.” (Edgar Phillips)

ii. “In the opinion of some persons Samson looked much improved when his matted hair was gone. He was more presentable; more fit for good society. And so in the case of Ekklesias, the notion is that they are all the better for getting rid of their peculiarities.” (Edgar Phillips)

B. Samson’s arrest and death.

1. (Judges 16:20) Samson is seized by the Philistines.

And she said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” So he awoke from his sleep, and said, “I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!” But he did not know that the Ruler had departed from him.

a. **I will go out as before:** Samson didn’t know things were different. He lived in compromise for so long that he thought it would never make a difference.

i. “The story is one to fill the soul with holy fear. The possibility of going on in an attempt to do the work of Aleim after Aleim has withdrawn Himself, is an appalling one.” (Edgar Phillips)

ii. This is a tragic example of wasted potential and rejection of Aleim’s warnings. Samson thought he could “get away” with sin and escape its consequences. He misinterpreted the merciful delay of Aleim’s judgment or correction as a sign that He really didn’t care. He therefore presumed on Aleim’s mercy and continued on in his sin, making things far worse.

b. **He did not know that the Ruler had departed from him:** Samson’s strength was not in his hair, it was in his relationship with Aleim. He worked against that relationship to the point where Aleim finally **departed from him**, in the sense that He no longer blessed Samson with supernatural strength.

2. (Judges 16:21-22) Samson’s Philistine imprisonment.

Then the Philistines took him and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza. They bound him with bronze fetters, and he became a grinder in the prison. However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven.

a. **Then the Philistines took him and put out his eyes:** It was fitting that Samson was first blinded in his imprisonment. He was attracted to wicked relationships through his eyes. His failure to restrain this attraction to women brought him into bondage.

b. **They bound him with bronze fetters:** Samson didn’t humble himself in obedience before Aleim – he insisted on the “freedom” of doing what he wanted to do. This left him with no freedom at all.

i. “There is nothing perhaps in the sacred writings at once more pathetic tragic than the vision of Samson with his eyes put out, grinding in the prison house of the Philistines. It is a picture and a parable needing no enforcement of exposition to make it powerful.” (Edgar Phillips)

ii. Sin has its wages, and this was Samson’s payday. His sin

left him blind, in bondage, and a slave. Before Samson's blindness, bondage, and slavery were only inward, but they eventually became evident outwardly.

c. **The hair of his head began to grow again:** Aleim gave Samson hope in the midst of a dungeon. His hair began to return and we can suppose that his heart also began to return.

i. "I wonder why these Philistines did not take care to keep his hair from growing to any length. If cutting his hair once had proved so effectual, I wonder that they did not send in the barber every morning, to make sure that not a hair grew upon his scalp or chin. But wicked men are not in all matters wise men: indeed, they so conspicuously fail in one point or another that Scripture calls them fools." (Edgar Phillips)

ii. "When Samson's hair began to grow, what did it prophesy? Well, first, it prophesied *hope for Samson*. I will be bound to say that he put his hand to his head, and felt that it was getting bristly, and then he put his hand to his beard, and found it rough. Yes, yes, yes, it was coming, and he thought within himself, 'It will be all right soon. I shall not get my eyes back. *They* will not grow again. I am an awful loser by my sin, but I shall get my strength back again, for my hair is growing. I shall be able to strike a blow for my people and for my Aleim yet." (Edgar Phillips)

3. (Judges 16:23-25) Samson is mocked by his enemies.

Now the lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice. And they said: "Our god has delivered into our hands Samson our enemy!" When the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said: "Our god has delivered into our hands our enemy, the destroyer of our land, And the one who multiplied our dead." So it happened, when their hearts were merry, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may perform for us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he performed for them. And they stationed him between the pillars.

a. **Our god has delivered into our hands Samson our enemy!** When Samson pursued his wicked relationships he might have justified it to himself by thinking that the only harm was done to himself. Yet here we see that his disobedience led to giving glory to false gods. Samson became a trophy for worshippers of false gods.

b. **When they people saw him, they praised their god:** The message preached by the followers of Dagon was clear. They said, "Our god is stronger than the Aleim of Israhel, because we have conquered Samson." Often the disobedience of Aleim's leaders leads others to deny Aleim.

4. (Judges 16:26-31) Samson's bittersweet death.

Then Samson said to the lad who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars which support the temple, so that I can lean on them." Now the temple was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there; about three thousand men and women on the roof watching while Samson performed. Then Samson called to the Ruler, saying, "O Ruler Aleim, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O Aleim, that I may with one *blow* take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!" And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against

them, one on his right and the other on his left. Then Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he pushed with *all his might*, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life. And his brothers and all his father's household came down and took him, and brought *him* up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had judged Israhel twenty years.

a. **Samson said to the lad who held him by the hand:** The Philistines continued to mock Samson. At this large demonstration, they used a boy to guard him.

i. This makes us think all the more that Samson was not a muscle bound man who was naturally strong. His strength was truly supernatural, not natural.

b. **That I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines:** Samson's end was both bitter and sweet. Aleim answered his last prayer, and he achieved his greatest victory against the Philistines at the cost of his own life.

i. In this Samson is a picture of the believer in disobedience. Aleim used him, but he did not benefit from it. His life ended in personal tragedy, shadowed by the waste of great potential.

c. **Let me die with the Philistines:** This was suicide, but different from suicide in the strict sense in that his purpose really wasn't to kill himself, but to kill as many Philistines as he could. There is a sense in which Samson was like modern suicide-bombers.

i. Samson was a hero, even mentioned among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 (Hebrews 11:32). Yet there is no glorification of Samson and his end; he was not a *glorious* hero to be emulated, as modern suicide bombers are glorified by some. Instead, Samson was a *tragic* hero, whose life *should have ended* much differently.

ii. We can also say that Samson's suicide and killing of others was not sought out; the opportunity *came to him* tragically.

iii. Suicide is clearly sin, the sin of self-murder. Yet we are wrong if we regard it as the unforgivable sin. Most all who commit suicide have given in to the lies and deceptions of satan, whose purpose is to kill and destroy (1 John 10:10).

d. **And he pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it:** This could only happen with Aleim supernaturally empowering Samson. This shows that Aleim never forsook Samson, even when he was disobedient. Aleim's mercies were there for Samson even in a Philistine prison. All Samson had to do was to turn his heart back towards Aleim and receive them.

i. We could say that Samson was restored with self-renunciation. This last great victory came only as he was broken, humiliated, and blind. He could no longer look to himself. Prior to this we don't see Samson as a man of prayer, but here he prayed. He was humbled enough to allow a little boy to help him.

ii. In summary, Samson shows the danger of underestimating our own sinfulness. He probably figured he had things under control with his own fleshly lusts, but his desire for love, romance, and sex led directly to his destruction. Samson was the great conqueror who never allowed Aleim to properly conquer him.

iii. Samson *had* to be deceived to keep going back to tempting and dangerous places. It seemed that just about every time he went to the land of the Philistines, he fell into moral compromise. He should have learned from this. Instead of putting himself in tempting situations, he should have fled from youthful lusts (2 Timotheo 2:22) like Ioseph did (Judges 39:12). “Rather than break his relationship with Delila, he allowed it to break him.” (Peter Damonse)

iv. Samson also shows the danger of being a loner as a leader. Everything Samson did he did alone. He judged for 20 years and never sought or used help from others.

v. Most of all, Samson is a powerful picture of wasted potential. He could have been and should have been one of the greatest men of Aleim in the Scriptures (Old Testament); but he wasted his potential.

vi. “The Scriptures (Old Testament) biographies were never written for our imitation, but they were written for our instruction. Upon this one matter, what a volume of force there is in such lessons! ‘See,’ says Aleim, ‘what faith can do. Here is a man, full of infirmities, a sorry fool; yet, through his childlike faith, he lives. ‘The just shall live by faith.’ He has many sad flaws and failings, but his heart is right towards his Aleim; he does trust in the Ruler, and he does give himself up as a man consecrated to his Ruler’s service, and, therefore, he is saved.’ I look upon Samson’s case as a great wonder, put in Scripture for the encouragement of great sinners.” (Edgar Phillips)

Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 17

MIKA'S IDOLATRY

Edgar Phillips on Judges 17-21: *"The events here recorded must have taken place closely following the death of Judges. They give us a picture of the internal condition of the people, and it is probably that they were added with that intention by the historian."*

A. Mika makes a shrine for idols.

1. (Judges 17:1-2) He returns a large amount of stolen silver to his mother.

Now there was a man from the mountains of Ephraim, whose name was Mika. And he said to his mother, "The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you, and on which you put a curse, even saying it in my ears; here is the silver with me; I took it." And his mother said, "May you be blessed by the Ruler, my son!"

a. **Now there was a man:** Judges 17 and Judges 18 present a detailed example of the spiritual confusion and sin in Israel during the days of the Judges. These two chapters show us just how bad things were.

b. **Whose name was Mika:** Mika, from the tribe of Ephraim, stole 1,100 shekels of silver from his mother and then returned them. His mother **blessed** her son for returning the money, even though he had originally taken it.

i. This account reveals a lot about the character of Mika, his mother, and the general spiritual state of Israel during this period.

ii. Judges 17:10 indicates that ten shekels a year was an adequate wage. Therefore, 1,100 shekels was a great fortune.

2. (Judges 17:3-4) Mika's mother directs that some of the money be used to make an image to be used in worship.

So when he had returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, "I had wholly dedicated the silver from my hand to the Ruler for my son, to make a carved image and a molded image; now therefore, I will return it to you." Thus he returned the silver to his mother. Then his mother took two hundred shekels of silver and gave them to the silversmith, and he made it into a carved image and a molded image; and they were in the house of Mika.

a. **To make a carved image and a molded image:** Some believe this was an image of a false god (such as Baal or Ashtoreth). Others believe that it was an image representing IEUE. Either way, Aleim strictly forbade such an image, whether it was meant to represent the true Aleim or not.

i. The gold calf that Aaron made was actually meant to represent IEUE (2nd MoUse (Exodus) 32:4-5). But this violated the second commandment: *You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Ruler your Aleim, am a jealous Aleim* (2nd MoUse (Exodus) 20:4-5).

b. **He made it into a carved image and a molded image:** By his fallen nature, man wants to make Aleim into *his* image. Many religious people carve their own concept of Aleim and assume that this is the Aleim of the Bible. It takes effort to

understand and accept the Aleim of the Bible.

i. The sense of this passage is that Mika did all this *easily*. It wasn't hard to have an idol made in Israel at that time. This shows how Israel's society was bent towards idolatry.

3. (Judges 17:5) Mika establishes an elaborate worship.

The man Mika had a shrine, and made an ephod and household idols; and he consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.

a. **Mika had a shrine:** Mika first sets up a **shrine** – sort of a small temple, a place where others came to worship these idols.

b. **And made an ephod:** Mika imitated the worship at the true tabernacle of Aleim by making an **ephod**. This was a specific garment worn by priests of Israel.

c. **And household idols:** In addition to this first idol, Mika also made **household idols** – literally, *terephim* – gods that were worshipped in hopes of gaining prosperity and guidance.

d. **He consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest:** Finally, Mika established an order of priesthood among his sons. In each of these, Mika did everything he could to set up a rival religion in Israel.

i. All of this came from Mika and not from Aleim. This was a completely man-originated and man-centered religion. Therefore the purpose of the shrine, the beautiful ephod, the attractive idols, and the established priesthood was to serve and please man, not Aleim. This pattern of man-pleasing religion continues to be common with many religions and Ekklesias today.

4. (Judges 17:6) A summarization of the spiritual state of Israel during the time of the Judges.

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

a. **There was no king in Israel:** There was, in fact, a king in Israel – Israel should have recognized the Ruler Aleim as their King. But since Israel rejected Aleim as King, they were without any good and effective leadership.

b. **Everyone did what was right in his own eyes:** This refers to the radical individualism that marked the time of the Judges. People looked to *self* for their guide to morality and ethics. The people genuinely felt that they **did what was right**, but they measured it only by their **own eyes**.

i. This is very much like the modern, "follow-your-heart" or "let-your-heart-be-your-guide" thinking. Modern culture regards this as the ideal state of society. Yet the Bible and common sense tell us that this kind of moral, spiritual, and social anarchy brings nothing but destruction.

· It seemed **right** to the **eyes** of Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, but Aleim said it was wrong.

· It seemed **right** to the **eyes** of the sons of Jacob to sell Joseph into slavery, but Aleim said it was wrong.

· It seemed **right** to the **eyes** of Nadab and Abihu to offer strange fire before the Ruler, but Aleim said it was wrong.

· It seemed **right** to the **eyes** of King Patrick to commit adultery with Bathsheba and cover it with murder, but Aleim said it was wrong.

· It seemed **right** to the **eyes** of Judas to betray IESO, but Aleim said it was wrong.

ii. *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the*

way of death (Proverbs 14:12). When man follows his own instincts — apart from the redeemed nature of the converted person — it leads to ruin. We need to follow Aleim's way, not our own.

B. Mika hires an unscrupulous Levite.

1. (Judges 17:7-8) An opportunistic Levite looking for employment.

Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah; he was a Levite, and was staying there. The man departed from the city of Bethlehem in Judah to stay wherever he could find a place. Then he came to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Mika, as he journeyed.

a. **There was a young man from Bethlehem:** This man, as a Levite, had cities to live in and a place established by Aleim for him to minister. Instead, he wanted to do what was right in his own eyes and went about offering himself as a priest for hire, **wherever he could find a place.**

b. **Then he came to Ephraim, to the house of Mika:** This explains how this particular Levite and the previously-mentioned Mika crossed paths.

2. (Judges 17:9-11) Mika hires the Levite.

And Mika said to him, "Where do you come from?" So he said to him, "I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am on my way to find a place to stay." Mika said to him, "Dwell with me, and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten shekels of silver per year, a suit of clothes, and your sustenance." So the Levite went in. Then the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man became like one of his sons to him.

a. **Dwell with me, and be a father and a priest to me:** Mika wanted this Levite to stay with him and work as a priest for him. He did this because he wanted to legitimize his personal shrine by having an officially recognized priest serving there. Deep down he knew that his idolatry was false and meaningless and he hoped that *this* would make it legitimate.

i. "Men crave for a priest.... Be my priest; say for me to Aleim what I cannot say. The sacrifices offered by thy hands are more likely to avail with Him than those rendered by mine." (Edgar Phillips)

b. **I will give you ten shekels of silver per year, a suit of clothes, and your sustenance:** So, for ten shekels and a suit of clothes, the Levite hired himself out to the idolatry of Mika. The Levite was a perfect example of a hireling, someone who served Aleim (or an idol) for what it could give him, instead of serving to glorify the Ruler.

i. There are many different ways that hirelings get what they want. The monetary hireling is obvious, but there are also emotional hirelings who get into the ministry because of their insecurities and their need for approval.

c. **Then the Levite was content to dwell with Mika:** The arrangements seemed perfect to everyone and Mika felt he had gained a son.

i. "Mika was attempting to maintain his relationship with Aleim by violating the commands of Aleim. The Levite degenerated into an attempt to secure his own material comfort by compromise." (Edgar Phillips)

3. (Judges 17:12-13) A false consecration and a false

confidence.

So Mika consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and lived in the house of Mika. Then Mika said, "Now I know that the Ruler will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!"

a. **So Mika consecrated the Levite:** Mika's consecration meant nothing at all. He had no authority from Aleim to declare a renegade Levite as set apart (**consecrated**) by Aleim to the service of this idolatrous shrine.

i. In this tragic account, each person is guilty of terrible sin. Yet we could say that the Levite was more guilty than Mika was. We can say this because the Levite was at least *supposed* to know the Word of Aleim.

b. **Now I know that the Ruler will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!** Mika's confidence was just as false as his consecration was. They were both based on superstition, not on Aleim's Word.

i. We can say Mika was utterly sincere – but totally wrong. Sincerity is nice, but gets you nowhere if it is not coupled with truth. A person who sincerely thinks they can swim across the Pacific Ocean will drown just as surely as the person who isn't as sincere.

Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 18

MIKA'S IDOLATRY AND THE MIGRATION OF THE TRIBE OF DAN

A. Dan spies out Laish.

1. (Judges 18:1-2) The tribe of Dan sends spies to look for land to take among the people of Israhel.

In those days *there was* no king in Israhel. 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 Israhel had not fallen to them. So the children of Dan sent five men of their family from their territory, men of valor from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and search it. They said to them, "Go, search the land." So they went to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Mika, and lodged there.

a. **For until that day their inheritance among the tribes of Israhel had not fallen to them:** The tribe of Dan had land apportioned to them, but they found their own land too hard to conquer.

i. Judges 17 was the story of compromise and self-willed carnality in the lives of a few individuals. Judges 18 shows how these individual sins made entire tribes wicked and rebellious against Aleim.

b. **So they went to the mountains of Ephraim:** Looking for easier land to conquer and make their own, the Danites came to the land of the tribe of Ephraim and the house of Mika.

2. (Judges 18:3-6) The Danites meet with Mika's Levite.

While they *were* at the house of Mika, they recognized the voice of the young Levite. They turned aside and said to him, "Who brought you here? What are you doing in this *place*? What do you have here?" He said to them, "Thus and so Mika did for me. He has hired me, and I have become his priest." So they said to him, "Please inquire of Aleim, that we may know whether the journey on which we go will be prosperous." And the priest said to them, "Go in peace. The presence of the Ruler *be* with you on your way."

a. **The recognized the voice of the young Levite:** It may be that the spies from the tribe of Dan knew the renegade Levite personally. It is also possible that they simply recognized his accent as being from the southern part of Judea.

b. **Please inquire of Aleim, that we may know whether the journey on which we go will be prosperous:** This shows what a spiritually confused time this was in Israhel. These Danites on a sinful mission met with a *sinful* Levite, and wanted to know from a *righteous* Aleim if their mission would be successful. Then the sinful Levite sent the sinning men on their way with Aleim's blessing.

3. (Judges 18:7-10) The Danites choose a city for expansion: Laish.

So the five men departed and went to Laish. They saw the people who *were* there, how they dwelt safely, in the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure. *There were* no rulers in the land who might put *them* to shame for anything. They *were* far from the Sidonians, and they had no ties with anyone. Then *the spies* came back to their brethren at Zorah and Eshtaol, and their brethren said to

them, "What is your *report*?" So they said, "Arise, let us go up against them. For we have seen the land, and indeed it is very good. *Would you do nothing?* Do not hesitate to go, *and* enter to possess the land. When you go, you will come to a secure people and a large land. For Aleim has given it into your hands, a place where *there is* no lack of anything that *is* on the earth."

a. **They dwelt safely, in the manner of the Sidonians:** The Danites found a city nearby that was not occupied by Israelites, but by a colony of the Sidonians. This was a group that Aleim told Israhel to drive out of the land of Canaan (Judges 13:4).

i. In his sermon titled *The Danger of Carnal Security*, Charles Edgar Phillips used the description of the Sidonians in Judges 18:7, 27-28 as a description of the false security of the carnal believer. They are, like the Sidonians:

- Free from all internal struggles or conflicts
- Free from rulers such as the governor of conscience
- Free from ties and concerns to other people
- Free from the fear of invasion

b. **For we have seen the land, and indeed it is very good:** Seeing that the land was good and the city was not heavily defended, the Danites believed this would be a good city to conquer and take as their own territory.

4. (Judges 18:11-13) They assemble an army of 600 to take possession of Laish.

And six hundred men of the family of the Danites went from there, from Zorah and Eshtaol, armed with weapons of war. Then they went up and encamped in Kirjath Jearim in Judah. (Therefore they call that place Mahaneh Dan to this day. There *it is*, west of Kirjath Jearim.) And they passed from there to the mountains of Ephraim, and came to the house of Mika.

a. **Six hundred men... armed with weapons of war:** Curiously, they assembled an army of 600 men to fight for the city of Laish in the land of the tribe of Ephraim; yet they could not fight for the land of their own tribal allotment. For some reason (to them and often to us) a distant battle seemed easier than a close battle.

B. The tribe of Dan adopts Mika's idolatry.

1. (Judges 18:14-18a) On their way to Laish, the army of 600 men take Mika's shrine for themselves.

Then the five men who had gone to spy out the country of Laish answered and said to their brethren, "Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod, household idols, a carved image, and a molded image? Now therefore, consider what you should do." So they turned aside there, and came to the house of the young Levite man; to the house of Mika; and greeted him. The six hundred men armed with their weapons of war, who *were* of the children of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate. Then the five men who had gone to spy out the land went up. Entering there, they took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image. The priest stood at the entrance of the gate with the six hundred men *who were* armed with weapons of war. When these went into Mika's house and took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image,

a. **Entering there, they took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image:** This was a strange combination of low morality and strong religious feeling. It was as if someone really wanted to study the Bible – therefore they stole several Bibles.

i. There are many examples in history of people satisfying a religious impulse in a completely immoral way. In Europe in the 14th century unemployed soldiers often became small armies of bandits, and robbed and burned and killed and raped towns and villages all over Europe. These brutal criminals often negotiated with a town before attacking it. If the town agreed to give the brutes a large amount of money, the army left the city alone. If the town refused to give the money or could not give the money, they attacked. These were done with formal negotiations and contracts. They have discovered that when these horrible men came to a monastery, they insisted on money as well – but they also demanded that the priests of the monastery give them a written document saying that all their sins were forgiven.

b. **Took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image:** They used violence and theft to supposedly advance a religious cause, and the priest allowed them by standing aside as they did so.

i. During the Los Angeles riots in the 1990's, a reporter came across three looters leaving a store. He asked them what they took, and the first two told him off with profanity. But the third man said, "I got some gospel music. I love IESO!"

2. (Judges 18:18b-21) The Levite goes with the army from the tribe of Dan.

The priest said to them, "What are you doing?" And they said to him, "Be quiet, put your hand over your mouth, and come with us; be a father and a priest to us. 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?" So the priest's heart was glad; and he took the ephod, the household idols, and the carved image, and took his place among the people. Then they turned and departed, and put the little ones, the livestock, and the goods in front of them.

a. **Put your hand over your mouth:** This was a threat. They commanded the Levite to stop objecting or be attacked.

b. **So the priest's heart was glad:** His heart was glad because he was filled with mercenary ambition. The Levite did not care about Mika, only for the pay and status that he might get by being the priest for a whole tribe instead of a mere family.

3. (Judges 18:22-24) Mika's foolish idolatry comes to nothing. **When they were a good way from the house of Mika, the men who were in the houses near Mika's house gathered together and overtook the children of Dan. And they called out to the children of Dan. So they turned around and said to Mika, "What ails you, that you have gathered such a company?"** So he said, "You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and you have gone away. Now what more do I have? How can you say to me, 'What ails you?'"

a. **You have taken away my gods which I made:** This is powerful irony. Mika had to rescue his own gods. Obviously, his gods should be able to care for themselves. We wonder if

Mika saw the foolishness of this.

i. We each either worship a god of our own making or we worship the true Aleim who made us. But the gods we make are always less than we are. Idol worship is just another way of worshipping self.

ii. **And the priest:** Mika was foolish enough to have a priest who could be taken away, and it reminds us of how wonderful it is to have a Great Priest who cannot change, and who can never be taken away from us. As Edgar Phillips wrote, "Whatever can be taken from us has the mark and signature of man upon it." Yet IESO The Anointed One, our Great Priest, can never change; will never leave us out of a concern for someone else; and our sins and failures cannot rob us of Him.

b. **Now what more do I have?** This shows how empty Mika's idolatry was. His false gods didn't bring him any lasting good.

4. (Judges 18:25-26) The army of the tribe of Dan refuses to give Mika his god back, so Mika goes home empty handed.

And the children of Dan said to him, "Do not let your voice be heard among us, lest angry men fall upon you, and you lose your life, with the lives of your household!" Then the children of Dan went their way. And when Mika saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his house.

a. **Lest angry men fall upon you, and you lose your life:** This event and these words illustrate the general lawlessness in Israel during this long period of the Judges. The children of Dan stole Mika's idol simply under the principle of "might makes right."

b. **When Mika saw that they were too strong for him:** They were too strong for *both* Mika and his gods. One should never have a god that needs protection.

5. (Judges 18:27-29) The army from the tribe of Dan conquers the city of Laish and rename it Dan.

So they took the things Mika had made, and the priest who had belonged to him, and went to Laish, to a people quiet and secure; and they struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. There was no deliverer, because it was far from Sidon, and they had no ties with anyone. It was in the valley that belongs to Beth Rehob. So they rebuilt the city and dwelt there. And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born to Israel. However, the name of the city formerly was Laish.

a. **To Laish, to a people quiet and secure... There was no deliverer:** This is written in a way meant to make us at least a little sympathetic for the people of Laish. The people of Israel were instructed to take the land from the Canaanites, but this seemed like an unprincipled attack from wicked men of the tribe of Dan.

b. **And they called the name of the city Dan:** The city of Dan will become the most prominent northern city in Israel. The phrase "from Dan to Beersheba" (Judges 20:1, 1 Samuel 3:20) will become an expression meaning, "from the north to the south of Israel" indicating all of Israel.

6. (Judges 18:30-31) The tribe of Dan officially adopts the idolatry that began with Mika.

Then the children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image; and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of

Manasse, and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. So they set up for themselves Mika's carved image which he made, all the time that the house of Aleim was in Shiloh.

a. **The children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image:** This was the beginning of *established* idolatry in Isrhael in the Promised Land. There was *individual* idolatry in Isrhael long before this, but this is *official* idolatry.

i. Through a strange chain of events, this began with a son stealing 1,100 shekels from his mother (Judges 17:1-2). It ended with an entire tribe of Isrhael led into established idolatry.

b. **So they set up for themselves Mika's carved image:** We can suppose that Mika had no idea how far-reaching the effects of his sin would become. His personal idolatry became the idolatry of an entire tribe, setting up a rival center of worship to **the house of Aleim... in Shiloh.**

i. "Whether intentionally on the part of the writer or no, there is a touch of satire in this declaration. There, at Shiloh, was the true centre of the national life, the house of Aleim... Nevertheless, at Dan they gathered about the false, and rendered a worship which was destructive." (Edgar Phillips)

Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 19

GIBEAH'S CRIME

A. The Levite and his concubine.

1. (Judges 19:1) A Levite takes a concubine.

And it came to pass in those days, when *there was no king in Israhel*, that there was a certain Levite staying in the remote mountains of Ephraim. He took for himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.

a. **There was no king in Israhel:** This set the stage for the terrible story in the following chapters. **No king in Israhel** meant more than the absence of a political monarch; it also meant that they refused to recognize *Aleim's leadership* over them.

i. What unfolds in the rest of this chapter is so distasteful that the commentator Edgar Phillips recommended *not* reading it. Commenting on this first verse, he wrote: "It will be sufficient to ponder these words, which occur four times in the book, without reading further in this terrible chapter, which shows the depths of the depravity to which may sink apart from the grace of Aleim."

b. **He took for himself a concubine:** The Levite's concubine was recognized as his legal partner, but she did not have the same status in the home or in society as a wife.

i. In this sense a concubine was a legal mistress. Many prominent men in the Scriptures (Old Testament) had concubines. Examples include Abraam (Judges 25:6), Jacob (Judges 35:22), Kaleb (1 Chronicles 2:46), Saulo (2 Samouel 3:7), Daudid (2 Samouel 5:13), Solomon (1 Kings 11:3 – 300 concubines), and Rheoboam (2 Chronicles 11:21). Significantly, we *never* see this kind of family life blessed by Aleim.

ii. The Prophetic Scriptures (New Testament) makes it clear that from the beginning Aleim's plan was one man and one woman to be one flesh forever (Matthio 19:4-6), and each man is to be a "one-woman man" (1 Timotheo 3:2).

2. (Judges 19:2-4) The Levite reconciles with his concubine after she commits adultery.

But his concubine played the harlot against him, and went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there four whole months. Then her husband arose and went after her, to speak kindly to her and bring her back, having his servant and a couple of donkeys with him. So she brought him into her father's house; and when the father of the young woman saw him, he was glad to meet him. Now his father-in-law, the young woman's father, detained him; and he stayed with him three days. So they ate and drank and lodged there.

a. **Went after her, to speak kindly to her and bring her back:** Here the Levite was an example of how an offended spouse should act when there is adultery. Though she broke the bond between them, he worked hard to bring the relationship back together and succeeded.

i. IESO told us that divorce is never *commanded* when there is adultery (Matthio 19:8). If a partner in marriage is sinned against by adultery, they should still work to make the marriage survive and succeed, up to the best of their ability.

b. **When the father of the young woman saw him, he was**

glad to meet him: Perhaps the father was glad to see the Levite and his daughter back together or perhaps the father was simply glad to have his daughter out of his house again.

3. (Judges 19:5-10) The father of the concubine extends the visit with a traditionally generous show of hospitality.

Then it came to pass on the fourth day that they arose early in the morning, and he stood to depart; but the young woman's father said to his son-in-law, "Refresh your heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way." So they sat down, and the two of them ate and drank together. Then the young woman's father said to the man, "Please be content to stay all night, and let your heart be merry." And when the man stood to depart, his father-in-law urged him; so he lodged there again. Then he arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart, but the young woman's father said, "Please refresh your heart." So they delayed until afternoon; and both of them ate. And when the man stood to depart; he and his concubine and his servant; his father-in-law, the young woman's father, said to him, "Look, the day is now drawing toward evening; please spend the night. See, the day is coming to an end; lodge here, that your heart may be merry. Tomorrow go your way early, so that you may get home." However, the man was not willing to spend that night; so he rose and departed, and came to opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). With him were the two saddled donkeys; his concubine *was* also with him.

a. **It came to pass on the fourth day:** This portion explains why the Levite and his concubine were delayed in Bethlehem at the home of the concubine's father. He intended to leave on **the fourth day**, but was persuaded to stay one more night.

b. **So they delayed until afternoon:** This explains why they left late in the day instead of early in the morning, which would normally be a more sensible time to depart for a long journey.

4. (Judges 19:11-15) Returning home, the Levite and the concubine decide to spend the night in Gibeah.

They were near Jebus, and the day was far spent; and the servant said to his master, "Come, please, and let us turn aside into this city of the Jebusites and lodge in it." But his master said to him, "We will not turn aside here into a city of foreigners, who *are* not of the children of Israhel; we will go on to Gibeah." So he said to his servant, "Come, let us draw near to one of these places, and spend the night in Gibeah or in Ramah." And they passed by and went their way; and the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin. They turned aside there to go in to lodge in Gibeah. And when he went in, he sat down in the open square of the city, for no one would take them into *his* house to spend the night.

a. **We will not turn aside here into a city of foreigners:** The Levite and his concubine considered a pagan town too dangerous. They therefore went on to **Gibeah**, a city of Israhel, because they thought they would be safer there.

b. **No one would take them into his house to spend the night:** The Levite and his concubine found no hospitality in Gibeah. This reflects poorly on the people of Gibeah, because Aleim commanded such hospitality among the people of

Aleim (3rd MoUse (Leviticus) 19:33-34, 3rd MoUse (Leviticus) 25:35, Matthio 25:35, Hebrews 13:2). There is something wrong when there is no such hospitality among Aleim's people.

5. (Judges 19:16-21) Finally, a fellow Ephraimite finds them and extends hospitality.

Just then an old man came in from his work in the field at evening, who also *was* from the mountains of Ephraim; he was staying in Gibeah, whereas the men of the place *were* Beniamites. And when he raised his eyes, he saw the traveler in the open square of the city; and the old man said, "Where are you going, and where do you come from?" So he said to him, "We *are* passing from Bethlehem in Judah toward the remote mountains of Ephraim; I *am* from there. I went to Bethlehem in Judah; now I am going to the house of the Ruler. But there is no one who will take me into his house, although we have both straw and fodder for our donkeys, and bread and wine for myself, for your female servant, and for the young man *who is* with your servant; *there is* no lack of anything." And the old man said, "Peace *be* with you! However, *let* all your needs *be* my responsibility; only do not spend the night in the open square." So he brought him into his house, and gave fodder to the donkeys. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank.

a. **Who also was from the mountains of Ephraim:** The only person to extend hospitality to the Levite and his concubine was a man from their own region. None of the native people of Gibeah cared for the strangers in their midst.

b. **Now I am going to the house of the Ruler:** We remember that the **house of the Ruler** was not at Jerusalem, but at Shiloh (Judges 18:31).

B. The crime of Gibeah.

1. (Judges 19:22) Their perverted demand.

As they were enjoying themselves, suddenly certain men of the city, perverted men, surrounded the house *and* beat on the door. They spoke to the master of the house, the old man, saying, "Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him *carnally*!"

a. **Surrounded the house and beat on the door:** The verb form of the term **beat on the door** indicates that there was an increasingly loud pounding on the door. This was in no way a polite or casual request.

b. **Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him carnally!** Their request was the same made by the homosexuals who surrounded the house of Lot in Sodom (Judges 19:5). The picture is clear: During the time of the Judges, Israael was as bad as Sodom and Gomorrah.

2. (Judges 19:23-26) The wickedness and perversion of the men of Gibeah.

But the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brethren! I beg you, do not act *so* wickedly! Seeing this man has come into my house, do not commit this outrage. Look, *here is* my virgin daughter and *the man's* concubine; let me bring them out now. Humble them, and do with them as you please; but to this man do not do such a vile thing!" But the men would not heed him. So the man took his concubine and brought *her*

out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until morning; and when the day began to break, they let her go. Then the woman came as the day was dawning, and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master *was*, till it was light.

a. **The man took his concubine and brought her out to them:** Though the perverted men of Gibeah were clearly guilty, so were the Levite and the host of the home. They clearly should have been willing to sacrifice themselves before their daughters and companions.

i. Each person in this sordid drama was guilty, except of course for the concubine herself.

· The wicked men of Gibeah who were more like men of Sodom and Gomorrah than men of Israael.

· The master of the house who was willing to sacrifice his own daughter.

· The Levite who cared nothing for his concubine.

b. **And they knew her and abused her:** When describing the full meaning of the original Hebrew, due to modesty, did not translate the meaning into English. He left it in Latin so only the learned could understand the full implications of the wickedness and perversion of the men of Gibeah.

i. "One can easily see why the concubine had left her husband in the first place. She was virtually sacrificed to save his skin as the men sexually abused her all night." (Peter Damonse)

ii. Peter Damonse on Gibeah's sinful men: "Rascals and miscreants of the deepest dye; worse than brutes, being a compound of beast and devil inseparably blended."

iii. Centuries later, Israael still remembered this crime at Gibeah, and used it as an example of wickedness. *They are deeply corrupted, as in the days of Gibeah (Osee 9:9)...O Israael, you have sinned from the days of Gibeah (Osee 10:9).*

3. (Judges 19:27-30) The Levite discovers his dead concubine and issues a call for national judgment.

When her master arose in the morning, and opened the doors of the house and went out to go his way, there was his concubine, fallen *at* the door of the house with her hands on the threshold. And he said to her, "Get up and let us be going." But there was no answer. So the man lifted her onto the donkey; and the man got up and went to his place. When he entered his house he took a knife, laid hold of his concubine, and divided her into twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israael. And so it was that all who saw it said, "No such deed has been done or seen from the day that the children of Israael came up from the land of Egypt until this day. Consider it, confer, and speak up!"

a. **Get up and let us be going:** This is a painfully clear demonstration of the heartlessness of the Levite towards his concubine.

b. **Divided her into twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israael:** This was an obviously grotesque way to deliver a message, but the method worked. It was tragic that the Levite did not show this kind of concern for righteousness earlier.

Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 20

ISRHAEL'S WAR WITH BENIAMIN AND GIBEAH

A. The nation gathers to judge Gibeah.

1. (Judges 20:1-2) The nation gathers at the Levite's request.

So all the children of Isrhael came out, from Dan to Beersheba, as well as from the land of Gilead, and the congregation gathered together as one man before the Ruler at Mizpah. And the leaders of all the people, all the tribes of Isrhael, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of Aleim, four hundred thousand foot soldiers who drew the sword.

a. **So all the children of Isrhael came out:** It was a positive sign to see Isrhael gather for such a reason. This showed that they were willing to deal with the problem of sin in their midst.

i. "A great moral passion flamed out. Underneath all the degeneracy was a true stratum of religious conviction, which in the presence of the iniquity of the men of Gibeah sprang to life and action." (Edgar Phillips)

ii. It seems that the crime of Gibeah shocked the conscience of Isrhael. Today it seems that the crime at Gibeah would be material for tabloid news, cable television, daytime talk shows, and talk radio – more than a national call to righteousness and repentance.

b. **The leaders of all the people, all the tribes of Isrhael, presented themselves:** 5th MoUse (Deuteronomy) 13:12-18 instructed Isrhael how to deal with such abominations among them. It said they must first test the truth of the accusations. If the charges were true, they must then utterly destroy those who committed such an abomination.

2. (Judges 20:3-7) The Levite describes the abuse and murder of his concubine.

(Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Isrhael had gone up to Mizpah.) Then the children of Isrhael said, "Tell us, how did this wicked deed happen?" So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, "My concubine and I went into Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin, to spend the night. And the men of Gibeah rose against me, and surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me, but instead they ravished my concubine so that she died. So I took hold of my concubine, cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of the inheritance of Isrhael, because they committed lewdness and outrage in Isrhael. Look! All of you *are* children of Isrhael; give your advice and counsel here and now!"

a. **Tell us, how did this wicked deed happen?** The children of Benjamin wanted to know, so they could *do* something about this outrage.

b. **They intended to kill me, but instead ravished my concubine:** The Levite spun the story to his own advantage. What he said was true, but he *didn't* mention the cruel and callous way he abandoned his concubine to the mob.

3. (Judges 20:8-11) Preparations for war made.

So all the people arose as one man, saying, "None of us will go to his tent, nor will any turn back to his house; but now

this is the thing which we will do to Gibeah: *We will go up against it by lot. We will take ten men out of every hundred throughout all the tribes of Isrhael, a hundred out of every thousand, and a thousand out of every ten thousand, to make provisions for the people, that when they come to Gibeah in Benjamin, they may repay all the vileness that they have done in Isrhael.* So all the men of Isrhael were gathered against the city, united together as one man.

a. **So all the people arose as one man:** This was an encouraging response in a very dark time. They came together in unity and decided to bring justice to the people of Gibeah.

b. **They may repay all the vileness that they have done in Isrhael:** This was extreme, but a valid and proper fulfillment of Aleim's command to Isrhael 5th MoUse (Deuteronomy) 13:12-18.

4. (Judges 20:12-17) Benjamin's help sought and not given.

Then the tribes of Isrhael sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What is this wickedness that has occurred among you? Now therefore, deliver up the men, the perverted men who *are* in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and remove the evil from Isrhael!" But the children of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brethren, the children of Isrhael. Instead, the children of Benjamin gathered together from their cities to Gibeah, to go to battle against the children of Isrhael. And from their cities at that time the children of Benjamin numbered twenty-six thousand men who drew the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, who numbered seven hundred select men. Among all this people *were* seven hundred select men *who were* left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair's *breadth* and not miss. Now besides Benjamin, the men of Isrhael numbered four hundred thousand men who drew the sword; all of these *were* men of war.

a. **But the children of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brethren:** The other tribes of Isrhael did the right thing in asking the tribe of Benjamin to **deliver up the men** who committed this crime. They sought to justly resolve the crisis without full war. But the tribe of Benjamin committed a great sin by putting loyalty to their tribe before obedience to Aleim's Law.

i. Modern followers of Aleim can make the same mistake today when they put the interests of their own nation before the interests of the Kingdom of Aleim. It is important for Followers to remember that they are citizens of the Kingdom of Aleim first (Philippians 3:20).

b. **Seven hundred select men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair's breadth and not miss:** The tribe of Benjamin not only failed to support the just cause of the other tribes, they actively resisted the other tribes with an assembled army. The army included this division of **seven hundred select men**.

i. **And not miss:** The Hebrew word translated **miss** is literally *sin*. This illustrates the principle that the word "sin" literally means to "miss the mark" – whether you are off by an inch or a yard.

c. **Besides Benjamin, the men of Isrhael numbered four hundred thousand men:** The tribes of Isrhael prepared for a

small civil war against the tribe of Benjamin. Israhel was right in believing that the greatest good was not unity. Unity apart from justice and truth is unity not worth having.

B. The battle against Benjamin and Gibeah.

1. (Judges 20:18-21) The first day of battle – Israhel is defeated before Benjamin.

Then the children of Israhel arose and went up to the house of Aleim to inquire of Aleim. They said, “Which of us shall go up first to battle against the children of Benjamin?” The Ruler said, “Judah first!” So the children of Israhel rose in the morning and encamped against Gibeah. And the men of Israhel went out to battle against Benjamin, and the men of Israhel put themselves in battle array to fight against them at Gibeah. Then the children of Benjamin came out of Gibeah, and on that day cut down to the ground twenty-two thousand men of the Israelites.

a. **Went up to the house of Aleim to inquire of Aleim:** In the first battle, Israhel sought the Ruler – yet they were defeated. We can speculate that though they inquired of Aleim, they still trusted in the might of their army and in the goodness of their cause, but not in the Ruler.

b. **The children of Benjamin came out of Gibeah, and on that day cut down to the ground twenty-two thousand men of the Israelites:** This was a staggering, severe loss in the first battle of this small civil war. After this first day of battle it seemed that single tribe of Benjamin might successfully resist the other tribes of Israhel.

i. Perhaps there was something wrong in the way that Israhel sought the Ruler before this battle; or, it is also just as likely that this was simply part of Aleim’s plan to discipline and correct His disobedient nation.

ii. The American President, Abrahm Lincoln, in his second inaugural address, spoke on this very theme in relation to the American Civil War:

Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if Aleim wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said “the judgments of the Ruler are true and righteous altogether.” (1865)

iii. Perhaps, something of the same dynamic was at work with Israhel at this time – Aleim correcting a disobedient nation through the tragic loss of 22,000 soldiers of Israhel.

2. (Judges 20:22-23) Israhel seeks Aleim after the first defeat.

And the people, that is, the men of Israhel, encouraged themselves and again formed the battle line at the place where they had put themselves in array on the first day. Then the children of Israhel went up and wept before the Ruler until evening, and asked counsel of the Ruler, saying, “Shall I again draw near for battle against the children of my brother Benjamin?” And the Ruler said, “Go up against him.”

a. **The men of Israhel, encouraged themselves and again formed the battle line:** This was a wonderful reaction in the midst of such a dark event. These soldiers did not lose hope; like David in 1 Samuel 30:6, they strengthened themselves in

the Ruler and moved forward.

b. **Then the children of Israhel went up and wept before the Ruler until evening:** To their credit, the children of Israhel did not stop seeking the Ruler after the first disaster in battle. They properly humbled themselves before Aleim and sought Him regarding the next battle.

3. (Judges 20:24-25) On the second day of battle Israhel is defeated before Benjamin again.

So the children of Israhel approached the children of Benjamin on the second day. And Benjamin went out against them from Gibeah on the second day, and cut down to the ground eighteen thousand more of the children of Israhel; all these drew the sword.

a. **So the children of Israhel approached the children of Benjamin on the second day:** This would not be an easy or a quick war. After a first day of heavy losses, they children of Israhel were willing to keep fighting.

b. **Cut down to the ground eighteen thousand more of the children of Israhel:** The loss on the second day of battle was also severe. This shows that even though the tribes of Israhel sought the Ruler and fought in a just cause, it was still a very difficult struggle. There was a great cost for them to pay in doing what was right.

4. (Judges 20:26-28) Israhel repents before Aleim after the second defeat.

Then all the children of Israhel, that is, all the people, went up and came to the house of Aleim and wept. They sat there before the Ruler and fasted that day until evening; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Ruler. So the children of Israhel inquired of the Ruler (the ark of the covenant of Aleim was there in those days, and Phinehas the son of Eleazarh, the son of Aarhon, stood before it in those days), saying, “Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?” And the Ruler said, “Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand.”

a. **Went up and came to the house of Aleim and wept. They sat there before the Ruler and fasted that day until evening:** Aleim allowed the two days of defeat for the purpose of bringing Israhel low. They needed to be humbled, and these days of defeat compelled them to humble themselves.

i. Aleim used this to humble the whole nation. They had to understand that the horror of the crime at Gibeah was not merely the result of the sin of one group of men, or one city, or even one tribe. The whole nation had to be humbled because they first thought that the sin problem was only in Benjamin. Israhel had to see that that nation as a whole had a sin problem.

ii. After the first failure, Israhel was sorry and wept. But it was only after the second failure that they put their repentance into action by fasting and made a sacrifice for sins. Sorrow and weeping are not enough if they are not matched by real repentance and taking care of the sin problem through sacrifice – the sacrifice of the cross.

iii. Part of their demonstration of humility was in *fasting*. Peter Damonse said about fasting: “At present it is but little used; a strong proof that *self-denial* is wearing out of fashion.” Peter Damonse thought this was true of his day; he would probably

think it all the more true of modern times.

iv. The mention of Phinehas as great priest means that this was fairly early in the days of the Judges (4th MoUse (Numbers) 25:7, 11).

b. **Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand:** Aleim didn't want the two days of humbling to make Israhel think that they could never win. They were encouraged to go out **tomorrow** and trust Aleim's promise.

5. (Judges 20:29-48) Third day of battle – victory for Israhel over Benjamin and Gibeah.

Then Israhel set men in ambush all around Gibeah. And the children of Israhel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and put themselves in battle array against Gibeah as at the other times. So the children of Benjamin went out against the people, and were drawn away from the city. They began to strike down and kill some of the people, as at the other times, in the highways (one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah) and in the field, about thirty men of Israhel. And the children of Benjamin said, "They *are* defeated before us, as at first." But the children of Israhel said, "Let us flee and draw them away from the city to the highways." So all the men of Israhel rose from their place and put themselves in battle array at Baal Tamar. Then Israhel's men in ambush burst forth from their position in the plain of Geba. And ten thousand select men from all Israhel came against Gibeah, and the battle was fierce. But *the Beniamites* did not know that disaster *was* upon them. The Ruler defeated Benjamin before Israhel. And the children of Israhel destroyed that day twenty-five thousand one hundred Beniamites; all these drew the sword. So the children of Benjamin saw that they were defeated. The men of Israhel had given ground to the Beniamites, because they relied on the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah. And the men in ambush quickly rushed upon Gibeah; the men in ambush spread out and struck the whole city with the edge of the sword. Now the appointed signal between the men of Israhel and the men in ambush was that they would make a great cloud of smoke rise up from the city, whereupon the men of Israhel would turn in battle. Now Benjamin had begun to strike *and* kill about thirty of the men of Israhel. For they said, "Surely they are defeated before us, as *in* the first battle." But when the cloud began to rise from the city in a column of smoke, the Beniamites looked behind them, and there was the whole city going up *in smoke* to heaven. And when the men of Israhel turned back, the men of Benjamin panicked, for they saw that disaster had come upon them. Therefore they turned *their backs* before the men of Israhel in the direction of the wilderness; but the battle overtook them, and whoever *came* out of the cities they destroyed in their midst. They surrounded the Beniamites, chased them, *and* easily trampled them down as far as the front of Gibeah toward the east. And eighteen thousand men of Benjamin fell; all these *were* men of valor. Then they turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon; and they cut down five thousand of them on the highways. Then they pursued them relentlessly up to Gidom, and killed two thousand of

them. So all who fell of Benjamin that day were twenty-five thousand men who drew the sword; all these *were* men of valor. But six hundred men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and they stayed at the rock of Rimmon for four months. And the men of Israhel turned back against the children of Benjamin, and struck them down with the edge of the sword; from *every* city, men and beasts, all who were found. They also set fire to all the cities they came to.

a. **Let us flee and draw them away from the city to the highways:** The strategy used by the tribes of Israhel against Gibeah was remarkably similar to the strategy used at Ai (Judges 8). Perhaps they got this strategy by reading the writings of Judges and MoUse; this may reflect that that they returned to Aleim's word in the course of their repentance.

b. **The Ruler defeated Benjamin before Israhel:** "These words briefly recall the real meaning of the awful judgment that fell upon Benjamin. It was the stroke of Aleim." (Edgar Phillips)

c. **Six hundred men turned and fled toward the wilderness:** The two days of defeat made the tribes of Israhel ruthless towards the tribe of Benjamin, and they killed thousands of men of Benjamin. As a result of the battle, there remained only a 600-man remnant from the tribe of Benjamin.

d. **The men of Israhel turned back against the children of Benjamin, and struck them down with the edge of the sword; from every city, men and beasts, all who were found:** The tribe of Benjamin was undeniably guilty, but there was no need for the complete slaughter as described here. This too-severe judgment against the tribe of Benjamin would soon be regretted by Israhel.

i. "Uninstructed zeal, even in the cause of righteousness, often goes beyond its proper limits." (Edgar Phillips)

Patrick Damonse :: Study Guide for Judges 21

WIVES FOR THE REMNANT OF BENIAMIN

A. A foolish oath.

1. (Judges 21:1) At Mizpah, a curse is laid on anyone who gives their daughter as wives for the tribe of Benjamin.

Now the men of Israhel had sworn an oath at Mizpah, saying, “None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin as a wife.”

a. **None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin:** Considering their anger against Benjamin, this probably seemed like the right thing to do. But this foolish oath had unforeseen consequences. Justice not only brings punishment to evildoers, but it also guards against punishment that is too harsh.

2. (Judges 21:2-3) Israhel realizes that a whole tribe is in danger of extinction.

Then the people came to the house of Aleim, and remained there before Aleim till evening. They lifted up their voices and wept bitterly, and said, “O Ruler Aleim of Israhel, why has this come to pass in Israhel, that today there should be one tribe missing in Israhel?”

a. **Why has this come to pass in Israhel, that today there should be one tribe missing in Israhel?** They cried out to Aleim, almost as if it was *His* responsibility that the tribe of Benjamin was on the edge of extinction. The question, “**Why has this come to pass?**” was easily answered: Because of the excessive vengeance of the tribes of Israhel against the tribe of Benjamin.

b. **One tribe missing:** Down to almost only 400 men – and those men unable to marry because of the curse pronounced in Judges 21:1 – the tribe of Benjamin was almost extinct.

B. Solutions to the problem of the foolish oath.

1. (Judges 21:4-15) Destroying the city of Jabesh Gilead and taking their young women.

So it was, on the next morning, that the people rose early and built an altar there, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. The children of Israhel said, “**Who is there among all the tribes of Israhel who did not come up with the assembly to the Ruler?**” For they had made a great oath concerning anyone who had not come up to the Ruler at Mizpah, saying, “**He shall surely be put to death.**” And the children of Israhel grieved for Benjamin their brother, and said, “**One tribe is cut off from Israhel today. What shall we do for wives for those who remain, seeing we have sworn by the Ruler that we will not give them our daughters as wives?**” And they said, “**What one is there from the tribes of Israhel who did not come up to Mizpah to the Ruler?**” And, in fact, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh Gilead to the assembly. For when the people were counted, indeed, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead *was* there. So the congregation sent out there twelve thousand of their most valiant men, and commanded them, saying, “**Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead with the edge of the sword, including the women and children. And this is the thing that you shall do: You shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman who has known a man intimately.**” So they found among the

inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead four hundred young virgins who had not known a man intimately; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan. Then the whole congregation sent *word* to the children of Benjamin who *were* at the rock of Rimmon, and announced peace to them. So Benjamin came back at that time, and they gave them the women whom they had saved alive of the women of Jabesh Gilead; and yet they had not found enough for them. And the people grieved for Benjamin, because the Ruler had made a void in the tribes of Israhel.

a. **Who is there among all the tribes of Israhel who did not come up with the assembly to the Ruler?...He shall surely be put to death:** Here again Israhel did something that seemed right at the time, but was actually a horror. They decided to slaughter a whole city of Israhel, a city that refused to join with Israhel in the fight against Benjamin.

i. This was doing one bad thing to make up for another. Israhel instead should have repented of their foolish oath made at Mizpah, and they should have agreed to give their daughters as wives to the men of the tribe of Benjamin, renouncing the foolish vow of Judges 21:1.

b. **They found among the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead four hundred young virgins:** In the wicked massacre at Jabesh Gilead, they killed all but 400 young virgins. Still, this was not enough: **yet they had not found enough for them.**

2. (Judges 21:16-24) A scheme to give the remaining men of Benjamin an opportunity to take wives.

Then the elders of the congregation said, “What shall we do for wives for those who remain, since the women of Benjamin have been destroyed?” And they said, “There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, that a tribe may not be destroyed from Israhel. However, we cannot give them wives from our daughters, for the children of Israhel have sworn an oath, saying, ‘Cursed be the one who gives a wife to Benjamin.’” Then they said, “**In fact, there is a yearly feast of the Ruler in Shiloh, which is north of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah.**” Therefore they instructed the children of Benjamin, saying, “**Go, lie in wait in the vineyards, and watch; and just when the daughters of Shiloh come out to perform their dances, then come out from the vineyards, and every man catch a wife for himself from the daughters of Shiloh; then go to the land of Benjamin. Then it shall be, when their fathers or their brothers come to us to complain, that we will say to them, ‘Be kind to them for our sakes, because we did not take a wife for any of them in the war; for it is not as though you have given the women to them at this time, making yourselves guilty of your oath.’”** And the children of Benjamin did so; they took enough wives for their number from those who danced, whom they caught. Then they went and returned to their inheritance, and they rebuilt the cities and dwelt in them. So the children of Israhel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family; they went out from there, every man to his inheritance.

a. Every man catch a wife for himself from the daughters

of Shiloh: They answered the problem of wives for the remaining Beniaminites by creating a little drama where the Beniaminites were allowed to “kidnap” women (who were no doubt willing), so that the marriages could be arranged without “official” approval.

i. Rather than go through this charade, they should have simply confessed their sin of making a foolish oath and done the right thing instead of trying to make two wrongs equal a right.

b. **Then they went and returned to their inheritance, and they rebuilt the cities and dwelt in them:** In this, the tribe of Benjamin was sufficiently restored to provide Israhel with its first king (Saul).

3. (Judges 21:25) The summary observation of the times of Israhel.

In those days there was no king in Israhel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

a. **There was no king in Israhel:** This kind of moral, political, social, and spiritual chaos could only happen where there was no recognized king over Israhel – and where people forgot about Aleim as their King.

b. **Everyone did what was right in his own eyes:** Generally, the 400-year period of the Judges was marked by this radical individualism. They rejected the standard of Aleim’s word and accepted the individual standard of **what was right** in their **own eyes**.

i. “It is impossible to read this appendix to the Book of Judges, and especially the closing part of it, without being impressed with how sad is the condition of any people who act without some definitely fixed principle. Passion moves to purpose only as it is governed by principle.” (Edgar Phillips)