

Judges 1A

- The Lord is Captain of His people
 - He leads us in a variety of ways and through a myriad of circumstances
 - Sometimes He leads in dramatic ways, as a pillar of fire in the desert
 - Sometimes, He leads through a simple instruction like "Go to a place I will show you"
 - Today He leads us by His Word and by His Spirit living in each of us
 - And in a day to come, the Lord returns to lead His people in person in His kingdom on earth
 - But there is one common denominator in every case: the Lord elevates men to participate with Him in leading His people
 - The patriarchs were called to lead families and tribes
 - Moses and Joshua were called to lead the nation
 - Elders are called to lead the church
 - And the Church will be called to lead the nations during the Kingdom
 - All these leaders operate under the authority of the Lord, of course
 - Nevertheless, they share in the ruling
- Today, we begin a new study of God leading His people, the nation of Israel, in an important period of their history through a collection of people
 - The book of Judges covers a period of about 300 years in Israel's history
 - The book moves us away from the period of Moses and Joshua, when Israel was moving out of Egypt and into the Promised Land
 - And the book of Judges (along with Ruth) looks forward to the arrival of Israel's kings
 - In that way, Judges serves as a transition book

- It is an epilogue to the times of Israel's desert wanderings and conquest of Canaan
- And it's prologue to the period of Jewish monarchy
- The book is called Judges, but the title is a bit of a misnomer, since it's really a book about military leaders, called captains
 - The book opens with Joshua dying
 - Joshua was the military leader the Lord appointed to succeed Moses after Moses died
 - Joshua brought Israel into the Promised Land and led the nation for 35 years through a series of military campaigns against the Canaanites
 - In that time, the tribes established a strong presence in the land,
 - But at the time of Joshua's death, Israel had not yet conquered it entirely
 - When Joshua dies, the Lord does not appoint a successor
 - Instead, the Lord expected each tribe to move into its appointed territory and complete the work of taking the land as directed
 - But this doesn't mean the Lord intended for His people to operate without any leadership
 - On the contrary, the Lord expected the patriarchal leaders of each tribe to rule over their respective tribe
 - And of course, the people of Israel were to follow the Lord according to the Law given to Moses
 - The priests would operate the temple and instruct the people
 - The elders of each tribe would adjudicate over the people
 - And fathers would lead their households
- On occasion, the tribes would encounter a strong enemy in the land, one they needed to defeat, requiring the appointment of special leadership for a time
 - In these situations, the Lord would raise up regional captains of the people

- These leaders would possess the anointing and charisma to unite a tribe or multiple tribes in a campaign to defeat the enemy
- This office of leadership, which our Bible calls a judge, is not entirely new
 - In Deuteronomy, Moses commanded that judges be appointed in every town to settled civil disputes
 - But the role of judge after Joshua was expanded
- The judges in the time following Joshua were men and women appointed to ensure Israel accomplished its duty of taking the land
 - Sometimes, these leaders assumed military authority
 - Other time, they addressed rising apostasy
 - Each judges ruled for a time and over a certain number within Israel
 - They were God's agents during a time when no single person was responsible for leading the entire nation
- So the book traces what happened in Israel when God's people were given a law and in their land with a responsibility to follow the Lord
 - How did that work out?
 - Do God's people possess the ability in themselves to follow the Lord with their whole heart?
 - Are God's promises fulfilled by the strength of His people?
 - Or will they come another way?
- The author of this book was most likely the prophet Samuel, who wrote while Saul was king of Israel
 - Samuel didn't author the book of Judges to provide a complete history of Israel's first three centuries in the land
 - Instead, he wrote a selective record focused on certain events and people
 - He wanted to explain the later arrival of kings in Israel, including David's ascending over Saul

- When Samuel wrote this book, he knew David was anointed to be the next king
- So he wrote to explain Israel's circumstances in terms of God's prophetic purposes
- In fact, the Jews placed the book of Judges among the prophets in their Bible, not as among the historical books
- Since Samuel wrote Judges to explain history, we need to do a little historical homework of our own
 - We need to understand what comes immediately before and after the 300-year period of Judges
 - Let's start at the end, looking briefly at how the book of Judges ends

Judg. 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

- You've probably heard this ominous ending of the book of Judges before
 - Samuel says "in those days there was no king"
 - Samuel reminds his readers that Israel didn't always have a king
 - In fact, the nation existed for over 350 years in the wilderness and later in the land with no king at all
 - In place of a king, the nation was led by various men, including tribal elders, prophets, and captains of the army
 - Above all the people were ruled by God Himself, leading and instructing His people in the desert and in the land
 - Then Samuel tells us all was not well with the people
 - Increasingly, in the years from Moses until the death of Joshua, the people did what was right in their own eyes
 - Samuel's phrase is intentionally ironic
 - The Hebrew word translated right is *yashar*, which literally means acting in an upright manner, a righteous manner
- Samuel reports that each Israelite did what was upright...but in their own eyes

- This qualification serves to contradict the idea of doing what's right, thus the irony
 - The phrase "in their own eyes" is a euphemism meaning acting according to one's own interests or standards
 - It means looking out for #1, doing whatever feels good
 - For example, if I were a Jew living in those days doing what was right in my own eyes concerning the Sabbath, then when I preferred to observe a Sabbath, I observed a Sabbath
 - But when I preferred not to observe the Sabbath, I didn't
 - I did what I judged was right to do
- We can immediately see the problem with this situation, can't we?
 - In matters of righteousness, there can be only one right way: God's way
 - As Jesus said to the young, rich ruler:

[Luke 18:19](#) And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.

- By our sinful nature, when we do as we choose, we sin
- Only God has a good nature, so only God does good
- That's why we need God's righteousness assigned to us by faith
- So if everyone in Israel is doing what is "right" according to their own standards, then no one is doing what is truly right at all
 - They might have obeyed God's standard on occasion, but only when it suited them
 - In general, they lived without concern for righteousness, living only for themselves
 - And as a result, the people did not obey and did not achieve what God asked
 - And remember, Samuel's commentary comes at the very end of the book of Judges
 - In other words, the period of judges over Israel didn't correct for this problem

- The problem persisted throughout the period, as Samuel observes at the end of the book
 - Such was the state of the Jewish people in the years leading up to the monarchy
 - God gave Israel leaders
 - And they possessed the Law of God and enjoyed the presence of God in the temple
 - Nevertheless, the people were driven by their flesh and lived in increasingly unrighteous ways
 - Yet at the same time, they judged themselves to be upright even as they sinned
- So Samuel wrote this account to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of human judges
 - Local, temporary leaders could not bring Israel into righteous living
 - In the end, each person judged himself righteous even as he sinned
 - The people needed a ruler strong enough to lead the entire nation
 - Of course, God Himself is that Ruler
 - But before we can fully understand the need for Messiah's rule, it's helpful to appreciate that all other options fail
 - Human leaders are inadequate, including the judges
 - So as we enter our study, we must recognize that God never intended His judges to bring righteousness to Israel
 - Like the Law itself, the judges only served to reveal the unrighteousness of Israel
- Having seen the ending, let's go back in time to the moment right before the period of judges begins, in the final chapter of Joshua
 - Beginning with Joshua's speech to the people shortly before his death

Josh. 24:1 Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel and for their heads and their judges and their officers; and they presented themselves before God.

Josh. 24:2 Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods.'

Josh. 24:3 'Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River, and led him through all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.'

Josh. 24:4 'To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau, and to Esau I gave Mount Seir to possess it; but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt.'

Josh. 24:5 'Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt by what I did in its midst; and afterward I brought you out.'

Josh. 24:6 'I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea; and Egypt pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea.'

Josh. 24:7 'But when they cried out to the LORD, He put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and brought the sea upon them and covered them; and your own eyes saw what I did in Egypt. And you lived in the wilderness for a long time.'

Josh. 24:8 'Then I brought you into the land of the Amorites who lived beyond the Jordan, and they fought with you; and I gave them into your hand, and you took possession of their land when I destroyed them before you.'

Josh. 24:9 'Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel, and he sent and summoned Balaam the son of Beor to curse you.'

Josh. 24:10 'But I was not willing to listen to Balaam. So he had to bless you, and I delivered you from his hand.'

Josh. 24:11 'You crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho; and the citizens of Jericho fought against you, and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Girgashite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. Thus I gave them into your hand.'

Josh. 24:12 'Then I sent the hornet before you and it drove out the two kings of the Amorites from before you, but not by your sword or your bow.'

Josh. 24:13 'I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you have lived in them; you are eating of vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.'

- Shortly before Joshua died, he called the leaders of Israel together in Shechem, the traditional home of the patriarchs in the land
 - Notice Israel had elders, heads or leaders of tribes, judges and officers of the military
 - These leaders collectively were led by Joshua, but now the time was coming for Joshua to die

- And in preparation for that moment, Joshua recounts briefly the history of the people leading up to this moment
- Joshua explained that Israel's fathers have lived from ancient times beyond Jordan in Ur
 - These men served other gods until the Lord took Abraham and brought him into Canaan
 - He granted Abraham a son and multiplied his people
- Later the people went down into Egypt, where they were kept in custody under slavery for hundreds of years
 - Later, the Lord plagues Egypt and brought the people out of slavery
 - He defeated the forces of Pharaoh in the sea
 - And this same generation, now old like Joshua, saw these very things happen as children
- Then in v.8 Joshua moves to telling the story of their conquest over the land under Joshua's leadership
 - Beginning with the Amorites on the far side of Jordan, Joshua's forces defeated stronger forces just as God promised
 - Even when a king tried to have a prophet curse the people, the Lord's people prevailed
 - And the Lord ensured the people received a blessing instead
 - Then they crossed the Jordan and defeated the strong city of Jericho
 - And along with Jericho, they defeated the other Canaanite people in the land
 - All the while, the people faced an entrenched and powerful enemy
 - Nevertheless, one by one, the people pushed the Canaanites out of the land God had promised to Abraham's descendants
 - And they achieved these victories by the power of the God who lead them, Joshua reminds the people

- It wasn't by the strength of Israel's army that they won these victories
- The Lord used ridiculous methods, like horns and hornets, to win the battles
- And because the Lord allowed the Canaanites to live in the land beforehand, the people of Israel came upon a land ready for their use
 - The cities had been built
 - The wells dug
 - The fields planted, the vineyards ready, the olive groves tended
 - The wild animals driven out
 - The Lord did all these things for His people because He loves them and honors His promises to them
- What an amazing testimony of God
 - And the reality of all that God has done for His people leads Joshua to one, unavoidable conclusion

Josh. 24:14 “Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.

Josh. 24:15 “If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

- How many of us have v.15 on a placard somewhere in your house?
- But how many of us have the whole verse properly quoted?
- The entire context makes clear that Joshua has his doubts about this people
 - He asks sarcastically that is after all the Lord has done the people find it disagreeable to serve the Lord, then choose another god
 - Maybe the gods their fathers served beyond the Euphrates

- Or perhaps the false gods of the Amorites on the east side of the Jordan
- But Joshua says his house will serve the Lord
 - That statement is the part of v.15 that we know so well, but consider what Joshua is saying
 - He's saying that the people were making choices of what was right in their own eyes
 - There were differing views of which god to serve, despite the history they had known
 - Many of these people were present for the parting of the Red Sea and all that followed
 - Yet they were willing to consider other gods
- Therefore, Joshua's statement is a crack in the wall of Israel's faithfulness, revealing what lay ahead for the people
 - These people are prone to wander just as Moses said
 - They rebelled under Moses' leadership
 - And their wandering hearts are showing themselves again
 - Still the people, answer Joshua much like they did Moses at the mountain

Josh. 24:16 The people answered and said, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods;

Josh. 24:17 for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and who did these great signs in our sight and preserved us through all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed.

Josh. 24:18 "The LORD drove out from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites who lived in the land. We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God."

- They state unequivocally that they will serve the Lord who brought them into the land
- The words sound right, but we know from their history that words are cheap

- Following their profession of obedience, Joshua responds in a way similar to Moses from an earlier generation

Josh. 24:19 Then Joshua said to the people, "You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins. Josh. 24:20 "If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you after He has done good to you."

Josh. 24:21 The people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the LORD."

Josh. 24:22 Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen for yourselves the LORD, to serve Him." And they said, "We are witnesses."

Josh. 24:23 "Now therefore, put away the foreign gods which are in your midst, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel."

Josh. 24:24 The people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and we will obey His voice."

Josh. 24:25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.

Josh. 24:26 And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the LORD.

Josh. 24:27 Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be for a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD which He spoke to us; thus it shall be for a witness against you, so that you do not deny your God."

Josh. 24:28 Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to his inheritance.

- Joshua's doubt in their profession is clearly evident in his response
 - He tells them they will not be able to serve God as they promise, because He won't forgive their sins
 - Why does Joshua say they won't gain God's forgiveness?
 - Because once they forsake the Lord to worship other God's, which Joshua knows is coming, they will have repeated the sin of their fathers at the mountain
 - And as they break the covenant, they sin
 - And there is no forgiveness for the sin of idolatry under the Old Covenant
 - Nevertheless, the people persist in claiming they will obey the covenant, so Joshua renews the covenant of the Law with this people
 - Just as Moses renewed the covenant before his death, so Joshua does the same

- He wrote down their agreement and set up a marker stone to remind the people of their promise
- The marker was placed under the same oak where Abraham set up his altar
- And it's in this same place where Jacob buried his idols
- In fact, a large standing stone matching this description has been found in Shechem
- So why does Joshua institute this moment before his death?
 - Because he knows that following his death, the Lord will not appoint a new national leader over Israel
 - The major campaigns of war to enter the land have been fought
 - The people have entered successfully
 - And their enemies fear them greatly
 - All that remains is for the various tribes to move into the land they have been given and settle that land as the Lord promised
 - And once settled, the people would possess the land the Lord promised in safety
 - Provided they continued in the covenant the Lord gave them through Moses
 - As the people followed the Lord through His law, they would enjoy the fruit of His promises
 - But they must do these things absent a strong, anointed leader with the power to compel obedience and deal with the rebellious
 - Despite Joshua's suspicions, the nation seemed to succeed for a time after his death
 - As the end of the book reports

Josh. 24:29 It came about after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being one hundred and ten years old.

Josh. 24:30 And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-serah, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, on the north of Mount Gaash.

Josh. 24:31 Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, and had known all the deeds of the LORD which He had done for Israel.

Josh. 24:32 Now they buried the bones of Joseph, which the sons of Israel brought up from Egypt, at Shechem, in the piece of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of money; and they became the inheritance of Joseph's sons.

Josh. 24:33 And Eleazar the son of Aaron died; and they buried him at Gibeah of Phinehas his son, which was given him in the hill country of Ephraim.

- Joshua dies at 110 and his life's testimony was that under his leadership, the people of Israel served the Lord
 - That doesn't mean Israel lived perfectly or without sin
 - It means they didn't fall to serving other gods
 - They remained true to worshipping Yahweh and no other god
 - Joshua's leadership was largely responsible for this faithfulness
 - As the people may have had reason to stray, Joshua put down rebellions
 - And just his strength of leadership was a deterrent to rebellion
 - Moreover, v.31 says that the people could remember the deeds of the Lord in bringing them out of Egypt
 - That memory helped keep them faithful as well
 - All this time they were carrying the bones of Joseph who asked to be buried in the land
 - It was a tangible reminder that they were still a people seeking their home and the Lord was leading them
 - Finally, the High Priest of the Exodus, Eleazar, dies as well
 - He ruled at the right hand of Joshua
 - And along with the elders of Israel, he knew the works of God
- So Joshua's book ends with three burials: Joshua, Joseph and Eleazar

- With their passing, the nation entered a new period, which judges explains
 - A period when men begin to do what is right in their own eyes
 - And yet the Lord has not forsaken His people
 - So next week we begin to study how He rules over His people during these 300 years of history

Judges 1B

- Following our introduction, we are ready to dive into the book of Judges in chapter 1 today
 - In our summary last week, we learned two things overall
 - Israel is about to lose their national leader, Joshua, who will not be replaced
 - And secondly, as a result of losing Joshua and the elders of his generation, the people of Israel will wander away from the Lord and commit apostasy
 - They begin to do what's right in their own eyes
 - So as we progress through the period of Judges, we will examine how the people of Israel behaved during a time of tribal rule with judges administering the Law
 - One of the challenges of studying the book of Judges is the structure of the book
 - As we said last week, Samuel didn't write this book as a strict historical narrative
 - Instead, he was writing to make a point about the deterioration of Israel and the causes that led to her apostasy
 - Therefore, I have prepared a handout to accompany this lesson and the rest of the study
 - The handout gives you an overview of the historical period covered by this book
 - And it provides a breakdown of the chapters according to Samuel's purpose
 - You'll notice that chapters 1-2 are a review of how Israel progressed in conquering the land
 - Then at the end of the book, chapters 17-21 summarize the main consequences for Israel's failure to defeat the people
 - Only chapters 3-16 run chronologically describing six periods of apostasy in Israel

- But the events of chapter 17 and later do not follow in time the events of chapters 3-16
 - Rather they focus on two specific consequences: the migration of the tribe of Dan and the Benjamite civil war
 - The migration of Dan comes late in the period of Judges
 - But the war of Benjamin comes early in the time of Judges
- In fact, as we begin in Chapter 1, take note of how Judah and Bethlehem are portrayed in contrast to how the tribe of Benjamin is portrayed later in the book

Judg. 1:1 Now it came about after the death of Joshua that the sons of Israel inquired of the LORD, saying, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?"

Judg. 1:2 The LORD said, "Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand."

Judg. 1:3 Then Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me into the territory allotted me, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I in turn will go with you into the territory allotted you." So Simeon went with him.

Judg. 1:4 Judah went up, and the LORD gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hands, and they defeated ten thousand men at Bezek.

Judg. 1:5 They found Adoni-bezek in Bezek and fought against him, and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

Judg. 1:6 But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes.

Judg. 1:7 Adoni-bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to gather up scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me." So they brought him to Jerusalem and he died there.

- Samuel begins his account by describing the first military campaign by Israel following Joshua's death
 - The fight begins with Judah, who Jacob declared would be the leader among the tribes
 - We know from Jacob's deathbed blessing of his sons that kings of Israel would arise from Judah
 - And in keeping with that plan, the Lord designates Judah to lead the final conquest of the land

- Also, when you see references to "Judah" or "Simeon" in this passage, it means the whole tribe, not the man of the same name
- So the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Simeon (which shared a border with Judah in the south) become allies in a conquest of the Canaanites in the region
- The term Canaanite can refer generally to all the people who descended from Canaan, the grandson of Noah
 - You probably remember the account of Noah after the flood

Gen. 9:20 Then Noah began farming and planted a vineyard.

Gen. 9:21 He drank of the wine and became drunk, and uncovered himself inside his tent.

Gen. 9:22 Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside.

Gen. 9:23 But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it upon both their shoulders and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were turned away, so that they did not see their father's nakedness.

Gen. 9:24 When Noah awoke from his wine, he knew what his youngest son had done to him.

Gen. 9:25 So he said,

"Cursed be Canaan;
A servant of servants
He shall be to his brothers."

Gen. 9:26 He also said,

"Blessed be the LORD,
The God of Shem;
And let Canaan be his servant.

Gen. 9:27 "May God enlarge Japheth,

And let him dwell in the tents of Shem;
And let Canaan be his servant."

- Ham's dishonoring of his father led to a curse pronounced upon Ham's family
- The curse was not applied directly to Ham, since Ham was righteous by faith
- God will not curse His children by faith
- Instead, the curse fell upon Ham's son, Canaan (as we studied in Genesis)

- This prophet curse becomes the basis for Israel's blessing in the land
- The Canaanite people eventually migrate into Palestine and set up cities, plant vineyards and make a home in the land
- They live there for hundreds and hundreds of years
- In the proper time, God calls Abram, brings him into the land of Canaan
 - Then later, the Lord makes a people from Abraham's seed
 - He sends them to Egypt for a time
 - Then he frees them to wander in the desert for forty years
 - And then they finally enter the land of Canaan under Joshua
 - The Lord could have left the promised land unoccupied by anyone during those centuries when Israel was being made a nation
 - But if He had done that, then when the time came for Israel to enter, they would have been faced with a daunting task
 - The land would have been desolate, overrun by wild animals
 - And it would not have been ready to support millions of people
 - Instead, the Lord did for Israel what He had done for Adam and Woman at Creation
 - He created a perfect home for them, ready to be occupied
 - In this case, the Lord brought the Canaanite people to the region centuries earlier to settle the land
 - While Israel was away, the land was prepared for them
 - As Joshua told us last week, the cities were built, the vineyards were planted, everything was ready for the nation to take over
 - The final piece in God's plan was to ensure that the people in the land were cursed according to His judgment so that they could be justly removed from the land
 - When the Lord ordered Israel to take the land from the Canaanites and to destroy the Canaanite people, He was simply executing the sentence that had been declared by Noah

- The Canaanite people would be servants to Israel, in that they would serve Israel's needs in preparing the land
- And the people of Canaan were cursed, which means destined for destruction
- God prepared every detail so that Israel could enter the Promised Land and enjoy it from day one
- Seeing the hand of God working in this way over centuries and generations reminds us that so often we lack the perspective to understand how God is working for our good
 - As Christians, we like to quote Romans 8:28 ("...He works all things to good for those who love Him...")
 - It gives us reassurance that even when things look bleak, we can trust the Lord to bring something good from the moment
 - And this is very true
 - But what happens when a month goes by, or a year or a decade, or a lifetime...and nothing good seems to have come from the circumstances?
 - Does your faith in God's goodness waver?
 - How many people have we encountered who tell us they no longer go to church or believe in God because of some tragedy they couldn't explain?
 - They can reconcile the evil in their life with the idea of a loving, good God?
 - When you mention Romans 8:28, they shrug it off, because they never saw the good come
 - In those moments, I hope our thoughts turn to example like Israel in Canaan
 - The bad of Ham's sin and Noah's curse resulted in immense God for God's people generations later
 - It set the stage for their blessed entry into the Promised Land
 - But consider this...the good of Noah's circumstances was visited upon other people

- So it may be for us
 - God works on a timeline so vast that we can't begin to understand or anticipate all He intends to accomplish
 - Only what He chooses to reveal to us in His word is within our knowing
 - So you and I will experience tragedies from time to time in our lives, and we may search for the good God is doing in those things
 - And at time we may see the outcome
 - But also consider that the good may not show up for generations to come
 - Remain confident in the goodness of God and do not judge Him according to what you see, that is by your own eyes
- Back in Judges, now we see the good of God's plan taking shape, as Judah marches north against the Canaanite city, Bezek
 - Bezek was a Canaanite city in the Hill Country of Ephraim in the tribal land of Manasseh
 - This city lies north of the area of Judah and Simeon
 - But it seems Judah decided to attack this city because it was a stronghold of the Canaanites
 - The point of the battle was to capture the king of Bezek, Adoni-bezek
 - The term Adoni-bezek means lord of Bezek
 - By capturing the king, you demoralize and weaken your enemy
 - When they capture him, Judah cut off his big toes and thumbs
 - While this may seem cruel to us, it served a very practical purpose in that day
 - Without thumbs you cannot wield a sword in battle
 - And without big toes, you can barely walk much less run
 - So they served as a form of handcuffs and shackles
 - In his current state, he is no longer a threat and cannot escape

- Interesting, the king himself seems to appreciate that justice has been done to him, when he mentions that he himself had done similar things to other kings
 - First, this comment shows us that Judah was not acting outside the norm of his day
 - When the leader of an opposing force is captured, he was neutralized in this way
 - Secondly, it's far more humane than murdering the king, which was the alternative
 - Eventually, Judah takes the king along to Jerusalem as a prisoner of war, where Judah planned his next battle
 - Later, the king dies in Jerusalem though we don't have details for how he died

Judg. 1:8 Then the sons of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire.

Judg. 1:9 Afterward the sons of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites living in the hill country and in the Negev and in the lowland.

Judg. 1:10 So Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron (now the name of Hebron formerly was Kiriath-arba); and they struck Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai.

Judg. 1:11 Then from there he went against the inhabitants of Debir (now the name of Debir formerly was Kiriath-sepher).

Judg. 1:12 And Caleb said, "The one who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will even give him my daughter Achsah for a wife."

Judg. 1:13 Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, captured it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah for a wife.

Judg. 1:14 Then it came about when she came to him, that she persuaded him to ask her father for a field. Then she alighted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, "What do you want?"

Judg. 1:15 She said to him, "Give me a blessing, since you have given me the land of the Negev, give me also springs of water." So Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.

Judg. 1:16 The descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up from the city of palms with the sons of Judah, to the wilderness of Judah which is in the south of Arad; and they went and lived with the people.

Judg. 1:17 Then Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they struck the Canaanites living in Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. So the name of the city was called Hormah.

Judg. 1:18 And Judah took Gaza with its territory and Ashkelon with its territory and Ekron with its territory.

Judg. 1:19 Now the LORD was with Judah, and they took possession of the hill country; but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had iron chariots.

Judg. 1:20 Then they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had promised; and he drove out from there the three sons of Anak.

Judg. 1:21 But the sons of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have lived with the sons of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

- In v.8 we find Judah attacking the next Canaanite city of Jerusalem
 - At this time, Jerusalem was a very small, unfortified city on top of Mt Moriah
 - It was a Jebusite city
 - Jebusites were descendants of Canaanites peoples
 - Judah did the job God commanded
 - They conquered the city and burned it
 - Then they proceeded south back into the territories of Judah and Simeon defeating town after town of Canaanites
 - Things are looking good at this point
 - Joshua has died, but Judah is still making good progress
 - The Lord is clearly continuing to bless His people in these conquests
 - We see Samuel remarking that the Lord is with the people in these conquests of the land
- Samuel takes a moment in this narrative to introduce an important character: Othniel
 - Othniel is a younger brother of Caleb, who was a bold warrior like his brother
 - Earlier in the campaigns of Joshua, Othniel had played a significant part in capturing a city called Kiriath-sepher

- At that time, Caleb had offered his daughter to the man who could conquer the city
- When Othniel learned of the offer, he won the daughter's hand by defeating the city
- And in return, he received Achsah as his wife
- Samuel retells the story here to explain two things
 - First, he is emphasizing that though the town was taken before, it needed to be taken again because the Israelites failed to settle it
 - Just because you defeat a city doesn't mean it ceases being a threat
 - You have to remove the inhabitants and begin occupying it
 - Joshua defeated it once, but now Judah had to defeat it again, now under its new name, Debir
- Secondly, Samuel is showcasing the strength and resourcefulness of the women of Israel in the days when they first entered the land
 - After Othniel wins Achsah's hand, she brings her husband to petition Caleb for an inheritance in the land
 - When they come to Caleb, we can see that Achsah does the talking
 - She persuades dad for land and then later for springs to support them in the desert
 - She is bold and smart, which are qualities that must have come from growing up in a time of war and conquest
 - It would seem the women of Israel were molded by their experiences under Joshua into a resourceful group of leaders
 - But we're also left wondering why her husband wasn't capable of doing the same on her behalf?
 - The norm of the day would have been for her husband to take that leadership role
 - The fact that she did so in his place is both credit to her and warning cloud of Israel's future under these judges

- As we'll see, women are an important feature in Samuel's book
 - They tell a similar story of decline in the nation
 - The book begins with women as strong leaders, like Achsah here and later Deborah
 - By the end of the book, though, we'll read a story of another woman also seen riding on a donkey
 - But in the coming story, the woman's circumstances will be very different
- But for now, Judah is making the proper inroads into the land
 - The Canaanite cities in Judah and Simeon and even into Benjamin and Manasseh have been conquered as God directed
 - Even the relatives of Moses' father-in-law, the Kenites, have chosen to separate themselves from the Israelites
 - They have moved out of Jericho and into the wilderness, returning to their nomadic lifestyle
 - But then Samuel leaves us with an ominous details concerning Jerusalem
 - The city of Jerusalem falls within the territory of Benjamin
 - Judah conquered the city and burned it, but the Benjamites didn't follow suit and drive out the Jebusites
 - We read in v.21 that the Benjamites allowed these cursed, Canaanite people to live among the people of Israel
 - And as Samuel writes this, he remarks that this problem persisted even into his day
 - Later it will fall to David to eventually conquer the city and make it the Jewish capital
- This is Samuel's first point of background for beginning the story of judges
 - The good things Judah did were followed by disobedient things done by Benjamin
 - And of course it doesn't stop there

- Looking at the rest of the chapter, the other tribes likewise failed to drive out the inhabitants of the land

Judg. 1:22 Likewise the house of Joseph went up against Bethel, and the LORD was with them.

Judg. 1:23 The house of Joseph spied out Bethel (now the name of the city was formerly Luz).

Judg. 1:24 The spies saw a man coming out of the city and they said to him, "Please show us the entrance to the city and we will treat you kindly."

Judg. 1:25 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 free.

Judg. 1:26 The man went into the land of the Hittites and built a city and named it Luz which is its name to this day.

Judg. 1:27 But Manasseh did not take possession 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; so the Canaanites persisted in living in that land.

Judg. 1:28 It came about when Israel became strong, that they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but they did not drive them out completely.

Judg. 1:29 Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who were living in Gezer; so the Canaanites lived in Gezer among them.

Judg. 1:30 Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol; so the Canaanites lived among them and became subject to forced labor.

Judg. 1:31 Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco, or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, or of Achzib, or of Helbah, or of Aphik, or of Rehob.

Judg. 1:32 So the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out.

Judg. 1:33 Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anath, but lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; and the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath became forced labor for them.

Judg. 1:34 Then the Amorites forced the sons of Dan into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the valley;

Judg. 1:35 yet the Amorites persisted in living in Mount Heres, in Aijalon and in Shaalbim; but when the power of the house of Joseph grew strong, they became forced labor.

Judg. 1:36 The border of the Amorites ran from the ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela and upward.

- Throughout this passage you find a phrase repeated over and over again
 - They did not drive out, they did not drive out

- It begins with the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (called the house of Joseph collectively) negotiating with Hittites instead of defeating them
- Did they need to make an agreement with this man or did they merely need to rely on the Lord to grant them entry into the city?
- They compromised by substituting a man-made way to conquer the city for relying on the Lord
- They settled for peace and ease of living over obedience
- We learned earlier that we may need to wait a long time to see the good things God can bring from the midst of calamities
 - Well, this principle works in the other direction as well
 - The full consequences of our disobedience may not have been known until many years later
 - And the disobedience of these tribes in not removing the Canaanites from the land were severe and lasted a long time
- To close this morning, I want to draw your attention to one of Samuel's key themes in writing this book
 - Notice how he emphasized the obedience of Judah, especially in how he defeated the forces in Jerusalem
 - And then notice who was supposed to occupy and hold the city for the nation: the Benjamites
 - Judah did what was right, while Benjamin disobeyed
 - Who rises up from the tribe of Benjamin to lead the nation of Israel?
 - Saul, of course
 - And who rises up from the tribe of Judah to lead Israel?
 - David, of course
 - Samuel is telling a story of apostasy in the land during a time of weak leadership and repeated disobedience
 - But he's also making an argument for why Saul came first and David came second
 - Why disobedience must give way to obedience

Judges 2

- We've just begun our study of Judges and we're still working through the background material Samuel provides in chapters 1 and 2
 - Last week in chapter 1, Samuel retold Israel's early stumbles in the land
 - How they began to compromise on the plan God assigned them
 - Instead of driving out the people in the land, as God instructed, Israel began to allow the Canaanite people to remain in the land
 - They opted for convenience over obedience in those early years
 - And in doing so, they violated their covenant with God
 - As Samuel repeatedly stated in chapter 1, each tribe did not drive out the people of the land from their respective territory
 - In some cases, they made them slaves
 - In other cases, they bargained with them
 - And in some cases, Israel simple retreated
 - Had the Israelites persevered in obedience, the Lord was fully prepared to grant the Israelites victory over these people, just as He had done with Joshua
 - In fact, Judah and Simeon were granting victory after victory in the beginning as they did the Lord's will
 - But their obedience was short-lived, as the remaining tribes shrank back from obedience
 - Beginning with Benjamin and the Jebusites in city of Jerusalem
- Today, we move into chapter 2, and as we do, let's remember the structure of these two opening chapters
 - As I said last week (and as your handout reflects), the book of Judges isn't a chronological presentation of events
 - Some chapters within the book will proceed chronologically, but other chapters look forward or backward to provide summaries or explanations

- For example, in chapters 1 and 2, we find background material covering the time before and during the period of judges
- This background is important to interpreting the meaning of all that follows in the book
- Chapter 1 gave the human perspective on how Israel fell into apostasy, and chapter 2 gives us the divine perspective on that same process
 - So now we open with the angel of the Lord commenting on the people's disobedience
 - Followed by another recounting of Israel's entrance into the land under Joshua and their slide into apostasy
 - Take note of how God's perspective on the circumstances differs from the perspective of the people themselves

Judg. 2:1 Now the angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you,

Judg. 2:2 and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done?

Judg. 2:3 "Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they will become as thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.'"

Judg. 2:4 When the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept.

Judg. 2:5 So they named that place Bochim; and there they sacrificed to the LORD.

- This chapter centers on the "angel of the Lord"
 - Those who have studied with me through other books, particularly Genesis, will remember the identity of the angel of the Lord
 - This is no ordinary angel
 - It is commonly a reference to the Second Person of the Godhead
 - It is the Old Testament way of describing Jesus preincarnate
 - Interestingly, the title "angel of the Lord" appears 59 times in the Old Testament, and 18 of those occurrences (over 30%) are in the book of Judges
 - That makes sense, because Judges records the period of theocracy in Israel's history

- During this time the Lord was running His nation through His word and adjudicating sin through judges
- But He was at the helm as captain of His people, making His presence known from time to time
- Just as He appeared to the earlier generation in the desert
- In v.1 the angel of the Lord comes up from Gilgal to Bochim
 - Gilgal is near Jericho, where Israel first entered into the Promised Land
 - This was the last place where we the angel of the Lord appeared to Israel, back in Joshua 5
 - In that earlier encounter, the Lord promised Joshua and the people that He would drive the Canaanites out of the land
 - Now at Bochim the Lord appears again, but the message is very different
 - The Lord begins with a statement of faithfulness
 - He made a covenant with the people of Israel
 - And the Lord will never break His word which He gave in His covenant
 - This is the basis for Paul's teaching in 2Timothy 2:13

[2Tim. 2:13](#) If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

- The Lord's faithfulness to us is not dependent on our faithfulness to Him, once a covenant is in place
- Once we enter into covenant with the Loving God, His faithfulness to us is assured and never ending
- Men are fickle and our faithfulness will waiver, but praise the Lord, His faithfulness is never in doubt!
 - That's way Paul can say with such confidence:

[Rom. 8:38](#) For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

[Rom. 8:39](#) nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- In v.2, the Lord reminded the people that He had ordered them to make no covenants with the people of the land
 - The Lord meant they should make no accommodation for the people
 - Make no covenants
 - Make no agreements
 - Form no partnerships
 - Do not enter into marriages
 - Do not make them your slaves
 - Do not accept their gifts
 - But at the end of v.2, the Lord concludes that the people of Israel did not obey His instructions
 - What is this you have done, the Lord asks?
 - He means consider the consequences of disobeying the Living God
 - In effect, the Lord is saying you do not realize the seriousness of your mistake
 - He says this because this generation of Israel has repeated the sin of their fathers
 - They have disobeyed the covenant in exactly the same way that Israel did when gathered in the wilderness at the mountain
 - Notice in v.2 the Lord also said they were told to tear down the Canaanite altars in the land
 - Those altars were used to sacrifice to false gods, so the Lord wanted the people to root out all temptations to worship false gods
 - But the Lord says at the end of v.2 that they didn't obey Him
 - So the problem wasn't merely that they didn't drive out the Canaanite people
 - They didn't tear down the altars either

- Over time, the people adopted the false worship practices of the Canaanites, just as Moses and Joshua had warned them would happen
- They repeated the sin of that early generation of Israel that wandered in the desert
 - Once again the people of Israel had constructed golden calves of one kind or another for themselves
 - And if the previous generation was condemned to die in the desert for their disobedience, what does the Lord have in store for this generation of Israel?
- In vs.3-5 the Lord pronounces His penalty on this generation of Israel
 - He says the people will suffer the consequence of their disobedience
 - Since they didn't drive out the people from the land, they will have to live with them as a thorn in their sides
 - A literal thorn in the side is a painful irritant
 - It's constantly there, bothering you and causing you to wince in pain
 - It impedes peaceful living
 - It's a distraction
 - That's how Canaanites would be to Israel for many generations
 - Secondly, the gods of the Canaanites will continue to be a snare to Israel
 - Each new generation will face the same challenge this generation failed to confront
 - They will be tempted to worship false gods
 - Some will resist and remain faithful to Jehovah
 - But many others in Israel will be drawn into idolatry
- The Lord's judgment is fulfillment of His words given in the Law:

Deut. 5:9 'You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,

Deut. 5:10 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

- Serving false gods is a sin under the Old Covenant that brought penalties, which lasted multiple generations
 - The Lord wasn't saying that He forced later generations to pay for the sins of the fathers
 - He was saying that the penalty earned by the generation that commits idolatry would reverberate down into later generations
 - Like the old saying, "I'm going to spank you so hard, your grandchildren will hurt."
 - The Lord's penalty delivered to an idolatrous generation will still be felt generations later
- That's what's happening in the book of Judges
 - A new generation of Israel enters the land with a covenant that requires obedience and faithfulness
 - And when this generation entered the land, it started well under Joshua
 - But when Joshua wasn't there, the people strayed from obedience
 - And straying from obedience led to idolatry
 - And idolatry led to judgment for multiple generations
- This pattern brings us to a clear picture of faith in Jesus Christ
 - As many know, the name Joshua is the same name as Jesus
 - And so Joshua is a clear picture of Jesus Christ
 - As Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land, so does Jesus lead His people into the Kingdom
 - And only by the presence and leadership of Joshua/Jesus, will the people of God remain faithful and obedient

- When you take Jesus out of the picture, the heart is incapable of pleasing God
- We stray from the Living God, and as we stray, we eventually enter in idolatry
- Paul taught about the downward spiral of the sinful human heart in Romans 1

Rom. 1:21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Rom. 1:22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,

Rom. 1:23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

- Judges is yet another example of this truth
- Joshua serves as a shadow of Jesus, the leader who holds the nation to obedience
- Just as we are now are held in the covenant of grace by the power of Christ
- His faithfulness ensures our redemption
- But without that covenant, we would have no hope to remain faithful
- Finally, notice the people are very upset to hear that the Lord had pronounced this judgment upon them
 - Their reaction is understandable
 - And it's reminiscent of what their fathers said after they were judged for their sin in the desert

Num. 14:32 'But as for you, your corpses will fall in this wilderness.

Num. 14:33 'Your sons shall be shepherds for forty years in the wilderness, and they will suffer for your unfaithfulness, until your corpses lie in the wilderness.

Num. 14:34 'According to the number of days which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day you shall bear your guilt a year, even forty years, and you will know My opposition.

Num. 14:39 When Moses spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people mourned greatly.

- How did the people get to this place again, especially when they had the example of their fathers to learn from
 - Samuel moves forward to answer that question in the rest of chapter 2,
 - He begins back in the days when Joshua first arrived with the people in the land

Judg. 2:6 When Joshua had dismissed the people, the sons of Israel went each to his inheritance to possess the land.

Judg. 2:7 The people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the LORD which He had done for Israel.

Judg. 2:8 Then Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of one hundred and ten.

Judg. 2:9 And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

Judg. 2:10 All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.

Judg. 2:11 Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals,
Judg. 2:12 and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the LORD to anger.

Judg. 2:13 So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroth.

Judg. 2:14 The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies.

Judg. 2:15 Wherever they went, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had spoken and as the LORD had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed.

- As we learned in chapter 1, the people of Israel were in a good place as they entered the land
 - They served the Lord all the days of Joshua
 - As long as Joshua lived and for as long as the elders of that generation were around, the people were obedient to the covenant

- The memories of all the Lord had done for the people in the desert kept them mindful of serving the Lord
 - But then Joshua died and was buried, as was that entire generation of Israel
 - Now the nation was in the hands of a generation that had not seen nor known the magnificent works of the Lord in the desert
 - This might seem like a significant disadvantage, but remember they had the word of God
 - Faithfulness isn't a matter of what we see in any case; it's a matter of confidence in things unseen
 - And so as a result of a new generation coming rising up in Israel, in v.112 we're told that the nation did evil by worshipping Baal
 - They forsook the Lord, which means they rejected Him
 - And instead, they followed other gods, the gods of the Canaanites
 - They bowed down to false gods and angered the Lord
 - The conclusion in vs.14-15 was the fulfillment of the words of the angel of the Lord
 - The people of the land became a painful thorn in the side of the nation
 - The Israelites couldn't live in peace in the land
 - At times, the cities of Israel were plundered by the Canaanites
 - Other times, the people of Israel were captured and enslaved by the Canaanites
 - The people of Israel were never strong enough to oppose the Canaanites by their own might
 - They were a small nation compared to those around them
 - Yet the Lord granted them great military victories as they entered the land because He fought for them
 - Now as punishment, the Lord refused to vanquish the Canaanite peoples

- As He declared in v.3, the people would not be able to stand in the face of these powerful enemies
- What a great burden of fear the people must have known in those generations
 - They were brought into another's land by the power of God
 - And now because of their disobedience, they were subject to these powerful enemies on an ongoing basis
 - It must have felt like they were on a raft in the middle of the ocean surrounded by sharks
 - They were in this place because they forsook the Lord and His covenant
 - As Samuel summarizes in v.15...they were severely distressed because they did evil
- To end the chapter, Samuel summarizes how the period of judges plays out after the Lord's judgment against the people

Judg. 2:16 Then the LORD raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them.

Judg. 2:17 Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do as their fathers.

Judg. 2:18 When the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them.

Judg. 2:19 But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways.

- Even though the people were under judgment for their idolatry, nevertheless the Lord didn't forsake them even as they forsook Him
 - Instead, He raised up judges to guide the people back to obedience and to protect them from the worst of their enemies
 - Proving once again that the Lord remains faithful even when we are faithless

- These judges were ongoing proof to the people that their Lord was still in covenant with His people, preserving them as He promised
- Notice the grace of God at work in v.18
 - The Lord raised up judges and placed His Spirit on these judges to deliver the people from their enemies at least temporarily
 - He did this in response to the groanings of His people
 - They groaned under the penalty they received for their disobedience
 - And in compassion for His people, the Lord would lessen the penalty through judges from time to time
- So how did the people respond to the Lord's faithfulness even in the midst of His judgment?
 - In vs17 & 19, Samuel says the people didn't listen to the judges
 - They continued in their spiritual harlotry
 - They quickly turned aside from the good example set by their fathers
- Even when a judge was given to the people, the people would not obey the Lord for long, if at all
 - As soon as that judge died, the people turned back and corrupted themselves again
 - Not only do they turn back, but in the turning, Samuel says they do even worse things than their fathers
 - The sin spiral gets worse with each generation
- While we shake our heads in astonishment and pity for Israel, be careful you don't take the Lord's faithfulness for granted
 - The Lord showed Israel mercy and grace when He raised up judges in response to their groaning
 - He did so because He was in covenant with them
 - And because He is loving and compassionate despite the sin of His people

- Seeing the people spurn the Lord's mercy may strike us as one too many chances, but have you considered you do the same thing with God's mercy?
- When we sin in our covenant, we are potentially provoking the Lord to anger
 - And though we are saved from the eternal penalty for our sins, we can't expect the Lord to withhold the consequences of our sin
 - If we forsake the Lord in one way or another, disobeying Jesus commands, living in unrepentant sin, what lies in store for us?
 - Are we assuming the Lord will grant us unlimited mercy?
 - Are we any different than those in Israel who knew Him but failed to keep His word?
- John tells us that we can have God's forgiveness and release from the consequences of our sins if we repent

1John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

1John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- If you live without a willingness to confess your sin, you are only deceiving yourself
 - But you're not fooling God, since he knows our hearts
 - And therefore, we are called to confess our sins to God
- Confession implies repentance and a sincere desire to move beyond our sinful patterns
 - Confessing our sins to Christ as a Christian means bringing our mistakes out in the open before Him and seeking His forgiveness
 - We are already forgiven from the eternal penalty for sin by our faith in Christ, but John is talking about the temporal penalty
 - We're called to confess in the expectation that we might receive God's mercy here and now, in the same way the Israelites did in the time of Judges

- When we confess sin, the Lord is full of compassion and faithful to His promises, so He will forgive us
- He is just to do so, because His Son has paid the penalty and reconciled us to God by His blood
- But the people of Israel responded in a very different way
 - Instead taking full advantage of God's mercy, they spurned the Lord
 - As the Lord raised up a new judge, the people could have taken the opportunity to confess their sins and recommit to following the Lord
 - And in mercy and faithfulness, the Lord may have brought the nation into a new period of blessing
 - He's done it in past generations, and He does it again in future generations, so we can safely assume He would have done it in this generation
 - But this generation doesn't respond in faithfulness
- So to end the chapter, Samuel summarizes the Lord's response from what He observed in the hearts of Israel

Judg. 2:20 So the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He said, "Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers and has not listened to My voice,

Judg. 2:21 I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died,

Judg. 2:22 in order to test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers did, or not."

Judg. 2:23 So the LORD allowed those nations to remain, not driving them out quickly; and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua.

- As the angel of the Lord declared, the Lord decided to leave the Canaanites in the land as a test of Israel
 - Like all tests in scripture, this test is intended to reveal the hearts of the people
 - Who among the people would go after false gods?
 - Who will remain faithful to God?

- Many will fall to the snare
- A remnant will remain faithful
- This test lasts for many, many generations
- And the concept of a remnant will continue and grow throughout this time, continuing to today
 - As Paul teaches in Romans

Rom. 11:2 God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel?

Rom. 11:3 “Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE.”

Rom. 11:4 But what is the divine response to him? “I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL.”

Rom. 11:5 In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice.

- The time of Judges marks the beginning of a period of testing for Israel, when the people are exposed to the sin and idolatry of their enemies in the world
 - And the Lord is using these people to distinguish between the sinful, unfaithful hearts in Israel and the faithful remnant
 - Without this test, how would the people and the world know the difference?
 - Now the difference will be evident in all generations of Israel
 - Until the coming of the True Joshua, the people of Israel experienced this test
 - Hearts tested and exposed
 - Some living faithfully
 - But most are following after the gods of their enemies
 - And the people suffer greatly in their idolatry
 - We are not Israel, but we are in covenant with the God of Israel
 - Let's not provoke the Lord by our own disobedience
 - Let's learn from the example of Judges

Judges 3A

- The introduction to Judges is finally behind us, so we're well-prepared to study Samuel's storyline
 - Beginning today in chapter 3, and continuing into chapter 16, we enter into the heart of the book
 - We'll study 12 judges of Israel altogether
 - Each judge comes to power for a time during the 300 years of Israel's history
 - They are not like kings, in which the passing of one judge leads to the inauguration of a new judge
 - Judges operated more like prophets, who were raised up independently of one another and at unpredictable times
 - The number twelve is itself an interesting detail, since the number has a particular meaning in scripture
 - Twelve represents God ruling His people through appointed representatives
 - Just as we saw twelve apostles in the church and twelve tribes in Israel, so there were twelve judges in Israel
 - That's why we call this period in Israel's history a theocracy
 - A theocracy is a government where God rules
 - And that rule is accomplished by representatives who bring the word and direct the people and judge their mistakes
- To start this section, we'll look at the first 6 verses of chapter 3
 - The passage is marked out separately on your study handout because it stands out
 - Here we will find the Lord explaining that a test will now ensue for Israel
 - The test has four purposes, and each purpose explains why God decided to leave Canaanites in the land with Israel

Judg. 3:1 Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to test Israel by them (that is, all who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan;

Judg. 3:2 only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war, those who had not experienced it formerly).

Judg. 3:3 These nations are: the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath.

Judg. 3:4 They were for testing Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers through Moses.

Judg. 3:5 The sons of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites;

Judg. 3:6 and they took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

- This isn't the first time the Lord has said that the people of Israel will be tested by the Canaanite peoples
 - Remember in chapter 2 the angel of the Lord said that the Canaanites would be used to test the hearts of God's people
 - The Lord gave us the first two reasons for the test
 - First, the Canaanites will reveal the hearts of Israel because their pagan influence will give Israel a choice of who to worship
 - As Joshua warned the people before his death, choose who you will serve, God or other gods
 - Some in Israel will pass this test, remaining true to Yahweh
 - But most will fail the test by going after foreign gods
 - Secondly, the angel of the Lord said that the Canaanites will be a retribution to the people for their sin under the covenant
 - They will be a thorn in the side of the people
 - Plundering, enslaving and generally harassing the people
 - Consider the Canaanites to be instrument of discipline
 - To those two reasons, chapter 3 now adds two more reasons for leaving the Canaanites in the land

- In v.2 the Lord said He wanted this generation of Israel to experience warfare
- The generation that preceded this generation fought its way into the land under Joshua
 - This generation of Israel is the baby boomer generation of Israel
 - They didn't fight for what they have
 - Their prosperity was handed to them by their parents
 - And it produced a degree of entitlement and an unwillingness to obey authority
 - That's why the Lord wants them to experience warfare in fighting the Canaanites in the land
 - Notice he says they must be "taught" war
 - At first this sounds like God is teaching Israel the art of warfare, of becoming more effective warriors
 - But that wouldn't make any sense
 - Israel has never been known as a mighty nation of warriors, not even in Joshua's generation
 - All their great victories like at Jericho have come only because the Lord did the fighting
 - Even the people in the land recognized that the God of Israel was fighting for them
 - And that is the Lord's point here
 - This generation has forgotten how the Lord delivered Israel in the past
 - They do not understand nor appreciate the power of the Lord with Whom they have a covenant
 - So, the Lord wants to teach them warfare but according to the Lord's way
 - The Lord's way of warfare is to obey His commands and watch Him win the victories on their behalf

- The Lord hasn't stopped working this way...today He allows His Church to experience conflict, trial and calamity for similar reasons
 - He delights to show Himself strong when we are in the midst of our enemies
 - So from time to time, the Lord will bring us into circumstances that rock our boat or our world
 - He doesn't allow calamity to hurt us, but so that He can show up in our lives in a powerful way
 - And here's what we need to remember
 - The Lord is often fighting for a different objective than we are
 - When the bad times comes, we are prone to seeing the person or situation that has come against us as the problem to be solved
 - We see our battle as against something moving us *away* from peace and contentment
 - And we define winning as a *return* to our previous circumstances or better
 - Israel will perceive their circumstances in this way in Judges
 - They recognize that their peace in the land was at risk because of the Canaanites attacks
 - So they made their goal finding a peaceful way of life in the land, by living side by side with the Canaanites
 - But that wasn't the Lord's goal
- The Lord's goal is to change us through the struggle we're experiencing
 - Remember, the Lord doesn't need your might or wisdom in the fight
 - The Lord has the power to win the battle by Himself
 - He could have driven out the Canaanites
 - Israel's strength was immaterial to the outcome
 - Likewise, the Lord can put an end to your struggles any day He chooses
 - So why does the Lord allow the fight to happen all much less continue?

- The answer for us is the same as it was for Israel
- He wants to train us in warfare
- As a new Christian, we're not experienced in spiritual battles
- When you suffer insults or attacks, you've been thrust into a spiritual test
 - When you experience a disaster like a fire or flood, your war has begun
 - When you lose a job, contract an illness, experience broken relationships, or just stress out of an exam or work assignment...the battle has begun
- But you're not fighting alone
 - The Lord is your strength, He has the power to win the battle
 - And as we face these trials, we will be strengthened in the battle
- War exposes spiritual weakness and exposes opportunities to be sanctified
 - Whether our weakness is a lack of trust in the Lord, a lack of patience, selfishness, pride or whatever, the stress of battle will expose it
 - And in the process, the Lord uses these circumstances to reshape our hearts
- This is why the Bible says pray for trials, and why the church has always been strongest during periods of persecution
 - Our degree of spiritual maturity is directly proportional to our experience in spiritual warfare
 - Not everyone survives these battles
 - There will be casualties along the way
 - A casualty in the sense that some believers are unable or unwilling to learn the hard lessons that God is endeavoring to teach
 - In the worst case, the test reveals that some who claim a place in the body of Christ have never been born again truly

- But for the one who is trained up by the Lord's discipline, there will be peaceful fruit of righteousness
- In Judges, the Lord is eager to deliver lessons that can only be learned in warfare
 - For Israel, the warfare will be not only spiritual but also literal
 - Israel will come into conflict with the Canaanites, both as spiritual stumbling blocks and as military adversaries
 - And in both ways, the people in the land will test and teach the hearts of the people
- Finally, the Lord says the Canaanite people in the Land will serve to test Israel's commitment to the covenant
 - As the Lord says in v.4, "to find out if they would obey the commandments of the Lord"
 - This seems like a strange reason to engage in a test of the people of Israel
 - First, they have already broken the covenant, more than once
 - So the answer to the question is already evident
 - The people do not obey the covenant
 - No generation of Israel can obey this covenant
 - Secondly, the Lord wouldn't need a test to know their hearts
 - The Lord knows the hearts of all men
 - There is nothing hidden to Him
 - So why the question?
- Like all tests in scripture, this one isn't intended to inform the Lord
 - The audience is Israel itself and all God's people throughout time
 - As when the Lord asked if He should reveal to Abraham what He planned to do in Sodom
 - The question was asked with a purpose in mind, to invite Abraham into a conversation

- And similarly, these years will reveal to us that human judges can't rule over sinful hearts
 - That a covenant written on stone can't compel righteousness in us
 - That sin and rebellion is hard-wired into the very nature of humanity
- And learning that fact leads us all to recognize we need a different solution to reconcile with God
 - A different covenant, under different terms.
 - For if Israel couldn't find obedience to God's law with all they were given, how could we?
- As Paul observed

Rom. 3:19 Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God;

Rom. 3:20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

- What the Law says, it says to Israel, those under the Law
- But why did Israel possess a Law they couldn't keep?
- So that every mouth may be lose and the world may be accountable
- Because through Israel's experience living under the Law we come to learn that no flesh can be justified by works of law
- We only learn more and more about the pervasive, unrelenting nature of sin
- That's the reason for the test...to reveal how impossible it is for a law or rule or even a strong judge to rescue us from our sin nature
 - If that were ever a possibility, then Judges would have been the time to see that happen
 - Israel had everything going for them at the start
 - They had the land set out before them

- The Lord winning their battles
- The word of God revealed through Moses
- A priesthood and tabernacle filled by the glory of God
- And a covenant with a God Who is forever faithful
- But obedience to God requires a more powerful law, one written on our hearts
 - And a force for change within us to lead us into obedience
 - And ultimately a new body without the desire to rebel
 - God is prepared to give us these things
 - But before we can understand the need for them, we must understand the impossibility of succeeding in any other way
- And to provide the point quickly, Samuel describes the reign of the first judge in a mere five verses

Judg. 3:7 The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth.

Judg. 3:8 Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the sons of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years.

Judg. 3:9 When the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.

Judg. 3:10 The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand, so that he prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim.

Judg. 3:11 Then the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

- In this short account of the first judge, we discover a pattern, one that will be repeated seven times in the book of Judges
 - The pattern is easy to see
 - Samuel even repeats several key phrases across these seven examples to make sure we don't miss the point
 - Not every phrase appears in each example, because after a while you get the point

- But to begin, all of the phrases are found in this first example
- The first phrase appears in v.7, where we see the beginning of the pattern
 - The sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord
 - Specifically, they worshipped the gods of the Canaanites
- In Canaanite mythology, the chief god was El, who was father of all other gods
 - His wife was Asherah (or Asheroth), the mother of gods and the goddess of the sea
 - Then there was Baal, the god of rain and fertility
 - Ashtoreth was the female counterpart to Baal, responsible for female fertility and a goddess of love and war
 - Anah, Baal's sister and his wife
 - There are the five primary gods of Canaan that entrapped the Israelites living in the time of Judges
- Notice the Lord's declaration in v.7 is a direct repudiation of the people's perspective
 - Earlier, we learned the people did what was right in their own eyes
 - But now we hear that in the sight of the Lord, the people were doing evil
 - Human eyes is a reference to flesh, while the word "sight" suggests true insight and wisdom
 - The Lord knew better that what they people did was evil
 - Moreover, the Lord is the true Judge, so His opinion is the only one that matters
 - In v.8 we learn that His anger burned against the people because of their sins
 - And as promised, He uses the people of Canaan to bring judgment
 - Here we the second common phrase in the pattern I mentioned

- Samuel says the people were sold into the hands of an enemy
- Sometimes the phrase will read given into the hand...
- The point is the circumstances Israel encountered were the direct result of a decision God made to bring it about
- It wasn't bad luck; it was providential
- As a result, the people in Israel were once again enslaved
 - This time the enemy was a king in Mesopotamia
 - He was powerful enough to capture all Canaan and take most if not all of Israel captive as slaves back to Mesopotamia
 - His name is Cushan-rishathaim, and the second half of his name means "double wicked"
 - He oppressed Israel greatly
 - At some point, the people learned a lesson, and they cried to the Lord for mercy
 - This is the third repeating phrase
 - Every time Israel is confronted with the consequences of their sin, they cry out, which is exactly as God intended
 - Which leads to the fourth part of the pattern
 - When the Lord heard their cry, he rose up a deliverer
 - The deliverer was the judge Othniel, Caleb's younger brother
 - The fact that Othniel could be the judge tells us that this apostasy happened shortly after the people were in the land
 - This man was the gift God gave Israel in response to their cries to him
- Othniel experiences the Spirit of the Lord coming "upon" this man
 - This is the principle ministry of the Spirit in the Old Testament
 - He will come upon a man at a point in time to effect a certain outcome in ministry, like Joshua or the men who built the tabernacle

- This ministry does not depend on the character of a person
- Unlike the New Testament ministry, this ministry of the Spirit isn't associated with the salvation of a person, since He can come and later depart
- The purpose was to empower a man or woman for service according to God's will
- The result of the man receiving the Spirit of the Lord while in captivity is to somehow lead the people in a rebellion
 - We don't know the details, except that he was successful in winning the people's freedom
 - They run their oppressors out of the land
 - And for forty years the nation experience peace in the land
- The whole story sounds like a mini-Exodus, doesn't?
 - It should because that's the point
 - The Lord was giving a new generation a chance to learn warfare in the way their ancestors did
 - Sin leads to slavery
 - Disobedience to God produces slavery to sin and death
 - But repentance and cries for mercy will lead God to raise up a deliverer for His people
 - The final two phrases in our pattern are found in this ending
 - The Lord gave the oppressors into the hands of the judge
 - And the land saw a period of rest as a result
 - Notice the length of rest was forty years
 - The number forty in scripture represents testing
 - Just as Jesus was tested in the desert for 40 days
 - And the people of Israel wandered in the desert for 40 years
 - So now these generation has fallen, experienced judgment, cried out for mercy

- And now they are experiencing the peace of resting in the Lord's work to free them from slavery
- This isn't just the Exodus story...it's the Gospel
 - We enter into slavery by our sin, being a slave to that sin
 - We will live their perpetually until such time that we lift our eyes to heaven and cry to the Lord
 - And by our repentance and by turning in faith to Christ, we are granted that mercy
- In faithfulness to His covenant, the Lord raises up Deliverer, Christ
 - Who was raised from the grave, having died for our sins
 - And He wins the battle over our slavery for us
 - And once we have that victory, we rest in that work
 - That's the victory that faith wins
 - The one that earthly judges and earthly kings couldn't win for us
 - But the One Judge and King of the Creation did win for us
- That's the pattern we'll see repeated in seven of the 12 judges
 - The pattern repeats but it changes
 - The sins get worse
 - The victories become less complete
 - The period of peace and rest grows shorter
 - Once again, nothing men can accomplish by the flesh can replace what God alone does in our spirit
 - Our salvation and freedom from sin can only be won on our behalf by Christ on the cross
 - And Judges only serves to prove that point

Judges 3B

- Last time, we met the first of twelve judges
 - The first judges was Othniel
 - Israel had sinned by doing evil by worshipping idols in the land
 - The Lord responded by putting Israel into captivity at the hands of an enemy from Mesopotamia
 - After eight years, the people cried out for relief
 - And so God raised up Othniel to free Israel
 - He ruled for 40 years and during this time the people returned to obedience more or less
- Othniel's story was short
 - Other Judges will have much longer accounts
 - But in all cases, the details of each situation or judge matter less than the overall pattern of sin and redemption that plays out in each example
 - Samuel kept Othniel's story intentionally brief so we will have opportunity to learn the pattern
 - And that pattern always begins with Israel doing evil, despite possessing the Law and the Lord's blessing
 - Then the Lord will respond with a judgment of some kind
 - Which will lead the people to eventually learn their lesson
 - At which point the Lord will raise up a judge to contend with their sin
 - And for a time, the judge will serve to restore a degree of obedience
- But each turn of this wheel, the pattern is less successful at bringing Israel back into obedience
 - The destructive nature of sin and idolatry erodes the opportunity for future repentance and obedience

- And successive judges become less effective in controlling the people's hearts
- And the judges themselves become less righteous
- We noticed that Samuel records nothing negative about Othniel, not because he was perfect
- But because Samuel is preparing us to see a degradation in the quality of the judges
- The whole book teaches us that the human heart is desperately wicked
 - And Law and human judges simply can't rescue men from that dilemma
 - The Law highlights our sin
 - And even our judges are corrupt
- So where does Israel find its answer?
 - This book gives us to the same answer every book of scripture gives: Messiah
 - Men need a Law on our hearts
 - And a Judges who forgives
 - And a King who will rule in peace
- So let's go back into the story of Judges, with a new judge but a familiar pattern

Judg. 3:12 Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD.

Judg. 3:13 And he gathered to himself the sons of Ammon and Amalek; and he went and defeated Israel, and they possessed the city of the palm trees.

Judg. 3:14 The sons of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.

- Once again, the pattern begins with the tell-tale phrase: Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord
 - We aren't told what they did in this second cases, but we don't need to have the detail, because Samuel defined it earlier

- Doing evil in the book of Judges is shorthand for worshipping false gods
- So after forty years of peace, the nation returns to idol worship
 - What caused the turn?
 - We learned that in the earlier verse
 - In v.11 we were told that Othniel dies
 - Apparently, the death of that judge gave opportunity for the people to return to their sinning ways
 - Now this pattern is hardly unique to the Israelites
 - All mankind follows this pattern, including those who have been saved by God's grace
 - Try as we might, we can't obey the Lord and refrain from sin unless we have help
 - We need accountability, we need encouragement
 - And sometimes we need correction
 - Within the body of Christ, we have all these things, or at least we should have these things when the Church is operating properly
 - We all need someone to hold our feet to the fire
 - And if we think we're an island and can stand up to the temptations and the schemes of the enemy, then we are fools
 - James tells us to confess our sins to one another and to pray for one another
 - We need that support to stay in the Lord's will
 - But above all else, we need the Spirit of God living in us
 - That's the unique and supreme blessing the Lord has bestowed upon His church, the deposit of His Spirit
 - By the Spirit's presence in our life, we are given both an awareness of what is right and the power to do it
 - By His power we have the potential to live in obedience, if we chose to follow Him over our flesh

- In the days of the judges, the people of Israel did not possess the Spirit of God, not even the Old Testament saints who were righteous by faith
 - Only occasionally did the Lord place His Spirit upon a person in the days prior to the Church
 - But the Lord did provide prophets, judges and later kings
 - And these men (and sometimes women) were God's provision in Israel to promote obedience to His word
 - Those who lived by faith took full advantage of that provision
 - But these judges were temporary and and their power insufficient to the task of promoting righteousness among the people
 - So in v.12 we move to Step 2 two of our Judges pattern
 - The Lord empowers three of Israel's enemies to do His bidding in chastising the people of Israel
 - The three enemies are Moabites, Ammonites, and Amalekites
 - The three nations were led by Eglon, king of Moab
 - The Moabites and Ammonites were descendants of Lot
 - And the Amalekites were descendants of Esau
- So the people God long ago declared would be enemies and oppressors of Israel are now beginning to fulfill their purpose
 - They begin their assault by retaking Jericho
 - This is the new Jericho which had been rebuilt near the site of the original city destroyed by Joshua
 - From their they were able to defeat the tribes of Israel throughout the land
 - And they made Israel their slaves for 18 years
 - They were able to defeat Israel because the Lord strengthened these enemies
 - Once again we shake our heads a little at the Israelites stubbornness, don't we?

- The first time around, they were oppressed 8 years before the Lord raised up a man to free them
- The number 8 stands for new beginnings in the Bible
- The Lord was giving Israel a second chance, saying, "Let's try this again."
- And then they received 40 years of peace, 40 being the number of testing
- In effect, the Lord said, "I'm giving you 40 years under Othniel to see if you will serve Me according to My Law."
- But Israel squandered that new beginning, so now the Lord has brought judgement for 18 years
 - This period of judgment lasted more than twice as long as the first
 - But there is also message in this number
 - The number 18 is twice 9, and 9 stands for judgment in scripture
 - So in effect, the Lord was saying, "For failing this second time, I will give you a double judgment."
- While I hesitate to make rules out of examples in scripture, I do believe there is a principle in scripture evident here
 - When we fail to change our ways in response to God's correction, He responds with still stronger measures
 - The Lord is long-suffering, patient, loving and forgiving with His adopted children
 - But we can test that patience by repeated sinning
 - Early missteps may receive mild rebukes and patient correction
 - But if we persist in our sinning, we should expect our loving Father in Heaven to dial up the correction
 - Because if we won't pay attention to the soft word, then we should expect a harsher correction
 - For the Lord will not leave us without the benefit of His correction

- Israel is a perfect example of the Lord's patience united with His persistence
- He wasn't crushing the nation
- He didn't put an end to them
- But neither did He tolerate their disobedience
- And as they failed to heed the lessons He taught to one generation, He increased the pressure on a later generation
- We can't defy the Lord and expect Him to turn a blind eye forever
 - Be assured He notices and He cares
 - And He responds
 - And if we persist in sin, the consequences of our sin will spill over into the lives of others
- Sure enough, as the correction takes hold, the people of Israel cry out to the Lord, and so Step 3 follows

Judg. 3:15 But when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for them, Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man. And the sons of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab.

- Now we're introduced to our second Judges in the book of Judges
 - Ehud is a Benjamite
 - It makes good sense that the Lord would raise up a Benjamite to defeat the enemy
 - King Elgon has set up his home in Jericho, which is located in the land of Benjamin
- He is described as a left-handed man, but this term is misleading in English
 - If he were merely left-handed, then it wouldn't be worth mentioning
 - First, we need to understand that the name Benjamin means the son of the right hand, which itself refers to the son of greatest honor

- So the fact that this Benjamite is uses his left hand becomes irony given his tribal identity
 - Secondly, the phrase is an indication that he uses his left hand out of necessity, not preference
 - Perhaps his right hand was injured
 - But whatever the reason, Ehud is limited to fighting with his left hand
 - It's as if he has one hand tied behind his back
 - These details lead us to understand the Lord is raising up a weak hero to lead Israel out of their predicament
 - This won't be the only time we see the Lord choosing to use the weak to shame the wise of Israel
 - And it won't be the last time we see a left-handed Benjamite in the book of Judges
 - But we would be hard pressed to imagine a more unlikely hero than a one-armed, left-handed son of the right hand
- Ehud's limitations also explain the peculiar method he chooses to assault the king
 - Rather than lead an army against the king, Ehud elects to attack like a Jewish ninja
 - First, can you imagine the response Ehud would have received had he proposed to lead such an army?
 - A one-armed man doesn't exactly inspire men to join a rebellion
 - It's likely he had no choice but to act on his own
 - Plus, a secretive one-man operation was more likely to succeed
 - So he begins his attack by forming a plan to visit the king under the pretense of bringing a payment of tribute or taxes
 - Ehud is bringing the tribute on behalf of the Jewish people, perhaps of the tribe of Benjamin
 - Then the rest of the plan unfolds

Judg. 3:16 Ehud made himself a sword which had two edges, a cubit in length, and he bound it on his right thigh under his cloak.

Judg. 3:17 He presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man.

Judg. 3:18 It came about when he had finished presenting the tribute, that he sent away the people who had carried the tribute.

Judg. 3:19 But he himself turned back from the idols which were at Gilgal, and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." And he said, "Keep silence." And all who attended him left him.

Judg. 3:20 Ehud came to him while he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber. And Ehud said, "I have a message from God for you." And he arose from his seat.

Judg. 3:21 Ehud stretched out his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh and thrust it into his belly.

Judg. 3:22 The handle also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the sword out of his belly; and the refuse came out.

Judg. 3:23 Then Ehud went out into the vestibule and shut the doors of the roof chamber behind him, and locked them.

Judg. 3:24 When he had gone out, his servants came and looked, and behold, the doors of the roof chamber were locked; and they said, "He is only relieving himself in the cool room."

Judg. 3:25 They waited until they became anxious; but behold, he did not open the doors of the roof chamber. Therefore they took the key and opened them, and behold, their master had fallen to the floor dead.

- As Ehud prepared to visit the king, he first made a sword about 16" in length
 - This is not the usual length of battle swords, which is why he had to construct it specially for this moment
 - Besides the length, the sword is double-edged
 - A double-edged sword is especially dangerous because it cuts from both sides increasing the lethality of a piercing
 - And of course we remember the term "double-edged sword" to be a reference to the word of God, which Jesus uses to judge all
 - In that way, Ehud is a picture of the ultimate Judge, Jesus Christ, judging all ungodliness in the future
 - Then Ehud hides the dagger under his clothing on the right side of his body under his bad right arm

- Since he fought with his left hand, the sword needed to be on the right side of his body so he could draw it
- This was not have been a customary place for a sword, since men customarily fought with the right hand
- So if searched, it was possible for Ehud's sword to escape detection
 - Then he sets out with a small delegation to deliver the tribute
 - They arrive at the palace and present the tribute to the king
 - Interestingly, Ehud doesn't attack the king while he has the chance
 - The text doesn't say why, but as the events unfold it seems obvious that Ehud got cold feet
 - He couldn't go through with it in the moment
 - Instead, he leaves with the delegation and walks about a kilometer to Gilgal
 - This curious detail is important because it reminds us Ehud is not a strong man
 - He is weak both physically and in fortitude
 - The risk of attacking the king was too much for Ehud
 - This is not a natural warrior
 - This is man like you or men, or perhaps even weaker
 - He's a living testimony that the Lord uses men and women apart from our natural abilities
 - Israel was defeated by three strong enemies because God gave them the strength to accomplish that feat
 - And now He ha empowered a very weak man to singlehandedly defeat that same force
 - That's how we need to understand Ehud's hesitation: it's the weakness of the flesh
 - But of course, the Lord isn't going to take no for an answer
 - And so as Ehud is leaving the city, the Lord directs his path by Gilgal

- At Gilgal, he comes upon the idols that were set up in that place
- This would have been the idols of the Moabites
- These are the very same gods that Israel was worshipping earlier that led the Lord to punish them with Elgon
- It seems Ehud took one look at those idols and all they represented and all the devastation they had brought to Israel
- And this gave him the courage to act
 - That's the love and patience of God showing up to strengthen Ehud
 - That's why the Bible says:

Phil. 4:13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

- So under the conviction and strengthening of the Spirit this judge-to-be tells his traveling party to return home without him
 - And he returns to finish the deed
 - When he arrives at the palace he informs the palace staff he has a secret message for the king
 - They probably relay the message to the king, who responds by telling Ehud to keep the secret to himself while the king dismissed the staff
 - Then Ehud is granted access and finds the king alone in a room on the roof of his palace
 - People often spent time on in a shaded room on the roof of a home to catch the cooler daytime breezes
 - As Ehud approached the king, he says he has a message from God for the king
 - This is not a lie, in the sense that Ehud is delivering a message from God
 - The message was that the king's days were over, and God intended to deliver the message at the point of a sword
 - The king arose from his seat to receive a message from God, at which point Ehud drew the sword and plunged it into the king's body

- Earlier we were told the king was very fat
- This detail now becomes relevant as we're told the sword disappears into the man's body, including the handle
- It even emerges out his backside, and in the process the foul contents of his intestines come out with the sword
- Why did the Bible record such a detail?
 - Probably for two reasons
 - First, it would have been a delight for Israelites to know that the king of their enemies was despatched in this way
 - His death included ritual uncleanness, which was humiliating
- Secondly, the excrement gave opportunity for Ehud to escape
 - In v.23, Ehud simply walked out as if everything was normal
 - He closed the door to the room and locked it
 - And then he departed the palace
 - The staff came back immediately to attend to the king but found the door locked
 - Normally, they would have been concerned
 - But in this case, they could smell the odor of the feces and made a conclusion
 - They said the king must be relieving himself
 - A king would have had pots available in every room on which to relieve himself
 - Servants would remove the offending pots and bring clean one in place of their place
 - So they wait patiently outside for the king to finish and unlock the door
 - At a point though they became worried by the long delay
 - Eventually, they opened the door and found the king dead
 - By that time Ehud was long gone

Judg. 3:26 Now Ehud escaped while they were delaying, and he passed by the idols and escaped to Seirah.

Judg. 3:27 It came about when he had arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel went down with him from the hill country, and he was in front of them.

Judg. 3:28 He said to them, "Pursue them, for the LORD has given your enemies the Moabites into your hands." So they went down after him and seized the fords of the Jordan opposite Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross.

Judg. 3:29 They struck down at that time about ten thousand Moabites, all robust and valiant men; and no one escaped.

Judg. 3:30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land was undisturbed for eighty years.

- Ehud's escape took him passed the idols in Gilgal a second time
 - This time Ehud must have looked upon the idols with a completely different sense
 - Where before they mocked his cowardice and inspired him to obey the Lord
 - Now they are perfect representatives of the dying, king of Moab
 - Silent, impotent and unclean
 - He arrives in the hill country of Ephraim and calls for the men of Israel to gather
 - He announces he has killed the king
 - And he calls for Israel to remove the Moabites from the land
 - An army assembles and attacks at Jericho, eventually driving the retreating Moabites to the Jordan
 - They seize the crossing places and prevent the Moabites from escaping to Moab
 - Instead, they kill about 10,000 men allowing no one to escape
- And in that way, Moab is subdued and the land is freed for eighty years
 - This victory was won by Ehud's faithfulness but the Lord was also at work through others

- In the final verse of chapter 3, another character enters and exits the story in a single verse

Judg. 3:31 After him came Shamgar the son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad; and he also saved Israel.

- This guy is a great mystery in scripture
 - His name is not Hebrew
 - He appears to be Hittite, a Canaanite
 - If so, then he was a Gentile who turned to the living God
- How does he relate to Ehud?
 - Well the phrase "after him" at the start of v.31 could mean he followed Ehud after Ehud died
 - If so, he would be the next judge
- But I don't think that's the proper interpretation
 - If you glance at chapter 4, you'll see Ehud's passing recorded
 - And in the time after Ehud, the pattern repeats again, with Israel descending into evil again
 - It makes little sense for Samuel to mention Shamgar at the end of chapter 3 if he rose to Israel's defense in the midst of the third apostasy
 - On the hand, the phrase after him could mean after Ehud rose up against the king of Moab, this man took opportunity to join the fight in the west
 - Along the western coastal plains, he rose up against the Philistines to assist Israel's defense
 - So as Ehud and his men defeated the Moabites, Shamgar was working to defeat the Philistines
 - And like Ehud, Shamgar is an unlikely hero
 - Armed with nothing more than an ox goad, he kills 600 Philistines

- An ox goad was a large pole about 8-10 feet long and sharpened on the business end
- It was used to motivate ox to pull a hoe
- But this man, clearly empowered by the Spirit, manages to kill a slew of warriors
- And in doing so, he ensures Israel is protected on both sides as they battle the occupying forces
- What do we learn from the second judge?
 - Well first, we see the pattern continue
 - Despite the nation's unfaithfulness, the Lord remains faithful
 - Israel can't sin its way out of the covenants the Lord has established
 - And neither can we sin our way out of the promises we have received in Christ
 - But as we disobey the Lord will respond and His response is likely to become more severe the longer we test His patience
 - His response is never intended to crush or destroy
 - It's intended to bring repentance
 - But if we are persistent in our sin, He always has the upper hand in that test of wills
 - Finally, we see the Lord using unlikely and even weak men to bring relief to His people
 - He brought a handicapped warrior
 - And he even threw in a Gentile armed with little more than a large stick
 - And together they defeated fierce and entrenched enemies
 - If you're beset by the consequences of your sin, then turn to the Lord in repentance and watch Him to respond in unexpected ways
 - He will bring rescue to those who seek His mercy

Judges 4A

- Let's meet our third judge in the book of Judges
 - This next judge is far better known than the first two we've studied
 - And perhaps the most interesting of all, this judge is a woman, Deborah
 - Given the patriarchal culture of Israel and scriptures teaching on male headship, God's choice to raise up Deborah is quite remarkable
 - So as we study her account, we'll take opportunity to consider the significance of God's choice of a woman to judge Israel
 - Furthermore, the story of Deborah is longer than the first two judges put together, spanning two chapters
 - Nevertheless, the story will still follow the familiar pattern we've learned
 - The pattern is sin, discipline, repentance, redemption
 - And then cycle repeats

Judg. 4:1 Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died.

Judg. 4:2 And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; and the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim.

Judg. 4:3 The sons of Israel cried to the LORD; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years.

- Chapter 4 finishes the life of our second judge, Ehud and introduces the start of the next cycle
 - Ehud lived a long life and according to chapter 3 he oversaw a period of eighty years of relative obedience and peace in the land
 - In 3:30 Samuel says that the land was undisturbed
 - He means that the Lord didn't bring a disturbance into the land
 - And of course, that peace was a result of obedience to the covenant under the leadership of Ehud

- Obedience = Peace
 - When we set our minds on obeying the Lord, He brings us peace
 - He won't disturb us in the sense that He would be at work chastising us
 - This doesn't mean that there won't be trials
 - The Apostle Paul was very much in the Lord's will throughout his ministry, and yet he faced many trials
- Trials are a sign we are invading darkness and disturbing the enemy
 - But when we disobey, the Lord visits that disturbance upon us
 - And if you're wondering how you will know the difference, let me assure there is a world of difference
 - Every child of God knows when they are suffering for disobedience, even when we don't like to confess it
 - And we will also know when we are facing persecution for the sake of Christ's name
 - In the first case, we will feel conviction and the weight of our mistakes bearing down on us
 - And in the second case, we will feel a peace that passes all understanding
- Israel has known that peace for 80 years, and then Ehud dies, and we see that sad refrain: Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord
 - We remember this means the nation went back to idol worship
 - Apparently Jewish History was not a required course in Israelite schools
 - Because they easily forget the pattern of their forefathers
 - As soon as the judge is gone, the people return to following their flesh
 - Which leads to step 2, the Lord bringing discipline to the people by means of an oppressor
 - This time the Lord raises up a man named Jabin, but this is probably not his actual name

- Another king of the same name ruled in this same area in Joshua's time
- So it's probably a title, like Pharaoh
- Jabin is a Canaanite king ruling over the Canaanites from Hazor, a town in the north of Israel
 - We are also introduced to the commander of Jabin's army, Sisera, who lives a few miles away in the town Harosheth-hagoyim
 - The source of the Canaanites' strength in the north was there numerous chariots
 - The region they controlled was the relatively flat lands of the Jezreel Valley, where chariots were unbeatable war weapons
 - Two men shooting arrows while riding a chariot behind a fast horse could inflict tremendous damage on opposing troops
 - And Josephus reports that Jabin had 300,000 foot soldiers, 10,000 horsemen and 3,000 chariots
- The Biblical text counts 900 iron chariots among all that Jabin had
 - Interestingly, the number 9 is the number for judgment
 - So the chariots were a representation of God's judgment against the people of Israel
 - With these chariots, Jabin oppressed the people of Israel for twenty years
 - We notice the period of oppression has risen again from 18 to 20 years
- So in v.3 the nation has begun to repent and cry out for the Lord to rescue them
 - And once again the endless faithfulness and mercy of the Lord is evident
 - He responds by raising up another judge to fight the enemy and free the people

Judg. 4:4 Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time.

Judg. 4:5 She used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment.

Judg. 4:6 Now she sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali, and said to him, "Behold, the LORD, the God of Israel, has commanded, 'Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun.

Judg. 4:7 'I will draw out to you Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his many troops to the river Kishon, and I will give him into your hand.'"

- And now we're introduced to Deborah, a prophetess
 - In the Bible, we find a number of women called prophetesses
 - Besides Deborah, we have Moses' wife, Miriam
 - Isaiah's wife
 - Huldah, the prophetess to King Josiah
 - In the NT, we hear of Anna and Philip's four daughters
 - Besides being female, Deborah is different than the first two judges in that she is not a military leader
 - She is ruling as judge even as the people of Israel are being oppressed in the north
 - Apparently, the people of Israel did not possess the military might or confidence to rise up against Jabin's forces
 - But in the south, Deborah was already at work judging the people in a civic capacity
 - Her name means "bee" which is a reflection of her sting and sweet victory
 - Her name is similar in Hebrew to the word for "speak" and "word"
 - That suggests her role in speaking truth and confidence to the people of Israel, inspiring the people on to victory
- What can we say about God using a woman to judge the people of Israel?
 - First, remember that a judge wasn't the king or leader of all people

- Primarily, they acted as a prophet or spokesperson for the Lord
- They didn't supplant leadership in the tribes or homes
- Secondly, they enforced the Law by calling the people to follow the Lord obediently, not by forcing that outcome
 - They weren't always military leaders, as we see with Deborah
 - They didn't depend on the leaders in homes and within the tribes to heed the word of the Lord
- Finally, this is a period of theocracy in Israel, when God ruled directly over the people
 - Since God had the reigns of power, no human leader possessed authority over all the people – no man, no woman
 - That awaits for the time of kings
- Nevertheless, the story of Deborah will feature women doing the right thing while men are either AWOL, reluctant to act or downright ungodly
 - It's a commentary on the state of Israel culture that the women are stepping up to compel righteousness among the people
 - While the men are rarely seen to take charge in that same way
- Certainly both men and women have a role in promoting and enforcing godliness among God's people
 - But when that burden fall disproportionately upon women, it's a sign that things aren't going well in the culture
 - Isaiah insults Israel's enemies by calling them children and saying women rule over them
 - For a patriarchal culture, though, it was strong indictment that women were the only ones assuming the reigns of leadership
 - And there is a similar commentary present in this chapter
- Meanwhile, Deborah is now a prophetess living in the hill country of Ephraim, speaking God's instructions to the people
 - And when the time came to rescue Israel, the Lord spoke through Deborah
 - Deborah calls a military man to lead Israel into battle

- His name is Barak
- His family comes from the far north, the territory of Naphtali
- So he had a knowledge of Canaanite territory where the battle will be fought
- Barak means “lightening,” which is a prophetic indication of his performance in battle
 - When Barak meets Deborah, he’s told the time has come for the Lord to deliver Israel
 - Barak must enlist 10,000 men from Zebulun and Naphtali to fight the commander of the army to the Kishon river
 - These were the two northern tribes that occupied the lands under the control of King Jabin
 - The Lord was insisting that these tribes do their duty to defeat the forces in the land
- You remember that when the Israelites entered the land under Joshua, they were commanded to drive out the Canaanites in the land
 - Under Joshua’s leadership, the people were successful at establishing a beach head
 - And then at Joshua’s death, the tribes were told to go out to their assigned territories and complete the conquest
 - But as we read, the tribes failed to follow the Lord’s command
 - And instead, they settled in next to the Canaanites
 - Then the Lord declared He would not drive the Canaanites out quickly
 - Instead, He declared that the Canaanites would be a thorn in Israel’s side
 - Nevertheless, the command to drive out the Canaanites still stands
 - So each time the Lord intervenes to rescue the people, He calls another tribe to do its duty in battle
 - This time He calls Zebulun and Naphtali to do what they should have done in the beginning

- To drive out the Canaanites
- Take note that the Lord is promising to win the battle for Barak
 - Barak has received assurances from the prophetess of the Lord that he will win a victory
 - Deborah says "go" because the Lord commanded
 - And then the Lord says "I" will draw out the enemy and "I" will give him into your hands
 - You can't get more assurance than that
 - Barak knows he will win the battle because the Lord has declared it will happen
 - Now you would think that would be enough for Barak

Judg. 4:8 Then Barak 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."

Judg. 4:9 She said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the honor shall not be yours on the journey that you are about to take, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman." Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh.

- But he turns to Deborah and says he won't do what he's told unless she accompanies him
- If we want to be generous, we could give Barak the benefit of the doubt and assume he just wanted Deborah's prophetic gift to accompany him
- If the Lord had more to say to him, he would be able to receive it
- But that's not the reason
 - Barak doesn't need to hear more from the Lord
 - And even if more information was required, he could be sure the Lord would find a way to get a message to him with or without Deborah
- The real reason Barak insists on Deborah is because he lacks the faith in the power of God's word
 - He says Deborah as his insurance policy in case the word of the Lord failed

- Barak knows that Deborah is a prophetess
- And he assumes that God would not fail Deborah or allow her to become a victim of the enemy
- So that if Deborah is present at his side, the Lord would be forced to bring victory lest Deborah be harmed
- This is a serious lack of trust in the Lord
 - Barak fears the Lord will throw him under a bus during battle
 - But he believes the Lord will come through for Deborah
 - In a very real sense, Deborah is Barak's idol
- And in this account, Barak becomes a poster child for what was wrong in Jewish society as a whole during this time
 - Women were exhibiting courage and following the Lord's word, as they should
 - While the men were spiritual wimps
 - The men of Israel weren't listen, they weren't obeying, not even the ones anointed by God and given personal assurances
 - They were too timid
 - They doubted in the word of the Lord
 - This is the third cycle of our Judges pattern
 - Like before, Israel sinned, they were punished, they cried out, and now it's time to restore them
 - But can you see the deteriorating condition of Israel?
 - Unlike the first two cycles, Jewish society has become so weak spiritually that it's hard to find someone to answer God's call to free the people
 - With Ehud, Israel had an unlikely hero taking great risks
 - But now we have the opposite situation
 - A mighty warrior with ten thousand men at his disposal needs convincing to go to battle

- In fact, unless a woman accompanies him into battle, he refuses to go
- For a patriarchal culture, there can be few greater indictments than this
- When those appointed by God to lead abdicate that responsibility, the people are in trouble
 - Men and woman have roles in God's economy, and neither role is dispensable
 - But when men go AWOL, bad things happen
 - The men of Israel have forgotten what it means to follow the Lord and lead His people
 - They aren't willing to trust in His word
 - And they can't find the strength obey
 - And this is not to say that women can't be leaders or shouldn't be a source of spiritual strength among God's people
 - On the contrary, spiritually strong women are a great blessing to God's people
 - We certainly don't want the women of God to be weaker
 - We want the men of God to match and exceed spiritual strength of the women while performing their duties as spiritual leaders
 - When men shrink back from this responsibility, forcing women to step forward to fill that gap, it's an indictment on the culture as a whole
- Besides being a litmus test for a spiritual community, this pattern is also a barometer for our personal sanctification
 - What saint hasn't hesitated to obey the word of the Lord because of fear or doubt or selfishness?
 - Like Barak, who among us hasn't made excuses for why we can't obey the word we know?
 - We read the word, or at least we should, so we know what the Lord has commanded

- And even if we're not the world's best Bible student, we understand the basics well enough
 - Keep yourself from sin, love the Lord, discipline the body, make disciples, etc.
- And yet how often do we still act contrary to what it says?
- How many times have we refused to rise up and change something in our life
- How often do we just say no

- Maybe we've even offered Barak's excuse?
 - We say "yes" but we put conditions on our obedience
 - We tell the Lord we need guarantees or crutches
 - We tell ourselves that we are weak or that we need to be given more time to comply
 - "I know I need to break that habit or forgive that person, but I can't be expected to do this on my own..."
 - Or "I'll make that change, Lord, but you have to give me time..."
 - Or "I know what the word says, but my situation is different..."
 - Or even, "I'm going to do it my way and who cares what the Lord thinks"
- How did the Lord respond to Barak's excuses?
 - He said "go" meaning don't hesitate
 - And He said "today" because He decided the timing
 - So our excuses count for nothing; they are simply disobedience

- This is the Lord's standard for obedience
 - The word of God tells us what to do and it calls us to do it today
 - Obedience isn't saying "maybe", or "later" or "yes, but only my way"
 - Obedience is living according to God's word

- It's trusting that the Lord's commands are better than our own ideas because He knows the future and we don't
- Ask yourself where in your life are you offering excuses or delays instead of simply obeying what the Lord has said
 - Perhaps you're saying I want to obey but I'm weak in the flesh?
 - Well, join the club
 - Barak couldn't win his battle in his own strength either
 - That's why God didn't send Barak to the fight expecting him to win the battle on his own
 - The Lord said "I will give you enemy into your hand"
- And the same is true for you and me
 - The Lord knows our weaknesses
 - He knows it's hard to say no to ourselves, to forgive another person, to discipline our flesh, to make sacrifices
 - To face persecution, to forgo the world's pleasures
- These things are hard...in fact, they are impossible, but as Jesus said

Luke 18:27 But He said, "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God."

- Commit to obedience and watch the Lord show up when you need Him to deliver you
- Your walk won't necessarily be easy...but if the Lord commanded it, then success is assured
- So look how the Deborah responds
 - Deborah agrees to go up, probably just to ensure Barak follows through
 - But she isn't happy to do it
 - She's not pleased by Barak's unwillingness to trust the word of the Lord which she has spoken
 - So she gives him another word, a rebuke as a result of his failure to act in faith

- Deborah says that when Israel does win this victory, it won't come at his hands but at the hands of a woman
 - At first, it may seem as if Deborah is referring to herself
 - But as we'll see later in the chapter, she's speaking of another woman
 - The Lord will use a unlikely woman to deliver the victory because Barak was unwilling to trust in His word
- Consider what we're witnessing
 - God used a woman to call a man to serve in battle
 - And that man, an accomplished warfighter, won't proceed unless a woman goes with him
 - And so to mock his lack of faith, God proclaims that the victory will be won by a woman
 - Barak won't get any honor for the end result
- The next time you're contemplating whether to obey the Lord's call, give some thought to this
 - The Lord is going to see His purposes met
 - And so either we can join with Him, receiving honor and blessing for that obedience
 - Or we can watch as others serve Him in our place, receiving that honor instead
 - And this truth applies even in struggles of personal sin
 - When we don't say no to ourselves and yes to the Lord's commands, we potentially disqualify ourselves from His service
 - And in our place, the Lord will raise up others
 - Let's be people who love the Lord so much that we make obedience our greatest goal
 - Let's not be a generation where our men are afraid to lead
 - And let's not be so shortsighted that we believe the lie that getting our way now is better than earning the Lord's pleasure in eternity

Judges 4B

- Last time we were introduced to Deborah and Barak, a partnership forged to defeat Israel enemy
 - Deborah is the judge while Barak is the nations key military leader
 - When the Lord was ready to free Israel from their oppressor, He directed Deborah to call for Barak
 - Deborah told Barak that the Lord was prepared to free Israel by his hand
 - Barak was to travel north and recruit an army of 10,000 Israelites to defeat the Canaanite king
 - Barak contemplated the difficulty of recruiting 10,000 men and defeating a powerful and entrenched enemy, so he hesitated
 - He insisted that Deborah accompany him to ensure his success
 - Deborah agreed but countered that Barak would not see the final victory
 - Instead, the victory will be won by a woman
 - Barak believed the Lord was speaking through Deborah, but he lacked confidence to obey that word
 - His response reflected the state of leadership in the nation at this point in Israel's history
 - Men were doubting, women were picking up the slack and the nation was suffering
 - But this is also a nation in covenant with the covenant-keeping God
 - So the Lord brings Deborah and Barak into the battle
- Barak accompanied by Deborah move from the hill country of Ephraim to Kadesh, a town in the center of Naphtali's territory
 - There, north of Hazor, they plan the attack

Judg. 4:10 Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali together to Kedesh, and ten thousand men went up with him; Deborah also went up with him.

Judg. 4:11 Now Heber the Kenite had separated himself from the Kenites, from the sons of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaanannim, which is near Kedesh.

Judg. 4:12 Then they told Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor.

Judg. 4:13 Sisera called together all his chariots, nine hundred iron chariots, and all the people who were with him, from Harosheth-hagoyim to the river Kishon.

Judg. 4:14 Deborah said to Barak, “Arise! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hands; behold, the LORD has gone out before you.” So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him.

- Barak assembles the 10,000 men from the two tribes at Kadesh
 - Meanwhile, Samuel introduces us to another family living in the same area
 - Heber the Kenite is living near Kadesh
 - The Kenites were descended from Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses
 - The Kenites were not Jewish
 - They were the family Moses married into while in Midian
 - But they were always supportive of the Jews
 - Remember in chapter 1 we learned that the Kenites followed Joshua and the Jews out of the desert when they entered the Promised Land
 - Most of the Kenites migrated south into Judah
 - But now we learn that at least one family, the family of Heber, separated himself from the rest of his family by moving north
 - He settled near Kadesh by the oak of Zaanannim
 - His name means “ally” reflecting his double agent life
 - While he entered the land with the Jews, he’s also made a good living as an ally of the Canaanite king
 - The word kenite means blacksmith, which was the primary trade of the Kenites

- Iron had been introduced into the land years earlier, and Heber seems to have been working to make the iron chariots for the king
- So here we have a man who is not a Jew and he's consorting with the enemy of God's people
 - He has a distant relationship to God's people
 - But he's not taking sides
- Meanwhile, the king's commander, Sisera, learns that Barak has amassed an army at Mt. Tabor, about 25 miles southwest
 - Sisera's response is to move his 900 chariots to the valley of Kishon, at the base of Mt. Carmel
 - About 14 miles further west of Mt. Tabor
 - He's essentially flanking Barak by approaching from the opposite direction
 - This is a very unexpected military move
 - Barak would have expected the commander to attack from the northeast
 - That way Sisera could keep his forces between the enemy and the king's headquarters in Hazor
 - But we remember what the Lord told Barak through Deborah
 - Back in v.7 the Lord said He would draw Sisera and his many troops to the river Kishon
 - The Hebrew word translated draw is the same word for pull
 - Literally, the Lord pulled Sisera away from his natural fighting place and toward the river
- When Barak sees Sisera take up a position in the Kishon river valley, it must have reinforced Barak's faith tremendously
 - There was no military explanation for Sisera's move, but there was a supernatural explanation
 - God was moving pieces on the chessboard just as He promised

- This was Barak's confirmation that God planned to do what He spoke
- Nevertheless, when Sisera makes this move, Barak seems to hesitate
 - I say that because in v.14 we see Deborah commanding Barak to attack
 - We know Deborah was not a military leader, so she was not accustomed to determining the proper moment to attack
 - She was simply responding to the obvious sign God provided
- The Lord said look for Sisera to move to Kishon, so now that he's there, it's clearly time to act
 - But Barak doesn't seem to move without Deborah's insistence
 - She repeats to Barak that the Lord has delivered Sisera into his hands
 - In fact, the Lord has gone out before you, she says, which means the Lord is already at work to defeat the enemy
 - Just get up and join the Lord in that work
- Now we understand why Deborah agreed to do with Barak
 - The Lord is going to win this battle, and all Barak needs to do is come along for the ride
 - There is very little Barak must do and even less he will contribute to the victory
 - At best, he's just there to witness God's work
 - Nevertheless, it requires a woman to drag Barak into battle to save Israel
 - Even when a clear sign is given and fulfilled, Barak didn't recognize the moment to act
 - Spiritual leadership isn't just acting brave in difficult moments
 - It's being prepared spiritually to put that leadership into action whenever necessary
 - Husbands and fathers are called by God to serve as the spiritual leaders in their homes

- But too many men assume this calling means taking dramatic, life-or-death actions to protect the family
- It's the kind of attitude that says, "I would take a bullet for my husband."
- But will you pick up your underwear or do the dishes when she asks?
- A man won't be prepared to take the role of leader as God intended unless they are thinking and preparing for that role everyday
 - We can't expect to live selfish, self-centered lives for years, ignoring God's word and hesitating to follow the Spirit
 - And then assume in a moment of spiritual crisis, we'll step forward and save the day
 - When your teenagers rebel against authority
 - When your marriage gets rocky
 - When your health fails
 - These things put a stress on any family, but if you're not already practiced at leadership, where will you turn?
- Barak and the other men of Israel weren't practices at listening to the Lord and obeying, so when the word came to destroy the king, Barak struggled to rise to the occasion
 - God in mercy sent a woman to save the day, and He's about to send another woman to finish the job
 - But first Barak must lead his men to dispatch the enemy's army

Judg. 4:15 The LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot.

Judg. 4:16 But Barak 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 even one was left.

Judg. 4:17 Now Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite, for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.

- Just as God foretold, Israel routs the enemy
 - Notice Samuel is careful to emphasize that the Lord won this battle

- Barak was not the cause of the outcome, though the Lord used him and the men he assembled to prosecute the fight
 - It was the Lord's might that secured the victory
 - Still, we should give credit where credit is due, and Barak deserves credit for entering into battle
 - Yes, Deborah had to encourage him, but then Barak did take his troops into battle against a much better equipped army
 - What would cause a man to take such risk?
 - To dare to attack an army that – on paper – was undefeatable?
 - The answer is faith...Barak has faith that the Lord would keep His word
 - He heard the prophecy of Deborah
 - And when the sign appeared, he had confidence that the Lord was at work
 - In fact, Barak's faith is highlighted briefly in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11:32
 - It was Barak's lack of confidence in leading God's people that caused his hesitation
 - And that's the danger when men fail to accept their God-given role as spiritual leaders
 - It's like a muscle you have to exercise or else it atrophies
 - So that even when the time comes, it may need a kick start to spring into action
 - Thankfully, Barak had a woman to help him move ahead
 - And many husbands and fathers are blessed to have a wife to do the same thing...if only they are listening and willing to act
 - We aren't told how Barak was able to defeat the 900 chariots, but we find out in chapter 5 (so I'll save the answer for then)
 - For now, we understand that Barak's army destroys every single soldier in Sisera's army
 - Without an army, the king will be unable to defend his claim over Canaan

- But the victory is incomplete, because Sisera, the commander, escapes
 - Without Sisera's head, Barak can't declare the battle won
 - Sisera's escape leaves open the possibility he could muster a new army and counter attack in the weeks to come
 - If Sisera isn't killed, the regime's overthrow remains in doubt
- Sisera ends up seeking refuge in the home of Heber, east of the battle
 - He assumes that Heber will protect him, since there was peace between Heber and the king
 - Sisera approaches the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber
 - This was a huge error on Sisera's part
 - Sisera counted on Heber being a Canaanite sympathizer, but he didn't realize Heber's wife felt differently

Judg. 4:18 Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, "Turn aside, my master, turn aside to me! Do not be afraid." And he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug.

Judg. 4:19 He said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty." So she opened a bottle of milk and gave him a drink; then she covered him.

Judg. 4:20 He said to her, "Stand in the doorway of the tent, and it shall be if anyone comes and inquires of you, and says, 'Is there anyone here?' that you shall say, 'No.'"

Judg. 4:21 But Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and seized a hammer in her hand, and went secretly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went through into the ground; for he was sound asleep and exhausted. So he died.

Judg. 4:22 And behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him and said to him, "Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking." And he entered with her, and behold Sisera was lying dead with the tent peg in his temple.

- As Sisera approached the tent and sees that it is the tent of Heber's wife, he must have hesitated to enter
 - By custom it was highly inappropriate for him to enter the tent of another man's wife
 - But as he hesitates, Jael encourages him to come in

- In v.18 Jael says “turn aside, my master” which means to come into my tent
- And she tells Sisera not to be frightened by the break in custom
- Sisera must have considered the request and realized it was a crafty plan
 - Who would think to look for him in the tent of Heber’s wife?
 - No one would suspect to find him there
 - So he enters to hide
 - But Jael has an entirely different purpose in mind
- Quickly, he asks for water since he was thirsty from the battle
 - And Jael responds by giving him milk
 - Milk was considered a preferable drink to water, and so it made Sisera feel even more welcomed
 - It also had the effect of making him even more drowsy, which was Jael’s plan
- Finally, Sisera gives Jael orders to guard the entrance to the tent and to lie to any who come looking for him
 - This was a demanding request, since it put Jael’s life at risk
 - If she was caught lying, she would be killed too
 - Then after making this request, Sisera lies down to sleep
 - And Jael covers his body with a rug, as if to hide him from detection
- Sisera was expecting Heber’s family to grant refuge, but he didn’t realize that Heber’s wife, Jael, was no Canaanite ally
 - Instead, she was still loyal to the Jewish people, who brought her family into this land under Moses and Joshua
 - She knows the Canaanites are the enemies of God
 - And she is probably displeased that her husband has chosen to profit from the king’s army

- So when Jael saw the commander of the Canaanite army come into her camp in obvious fear for his life, she knew something was amiss
 - She may not have known the circumstances of his flight
 - But she knew the commander was in need of her help
 - And by her quick thinking, she gained the opportunity she wanted to defeat the enemy
- After Sisera fell sleep, she returned to the tent with a mallet and a wooden tent peg
 - She crept silently up to Sisera
 - And she positioned the tent peg above his temple
 - And then with all her might, she hammered the tent peg through the rug and into his skull
 - In fact, v.21 says she drove the peg with so much force, it went through his head and into the ground
- Sisera never knew was hit him
 - He was so exhausted, he was dead tired
 - He was out before his head hit the pillow
- And consider the imagery
 - Sisera is a mighty warrior, but he's wrapped up in a rug like an infant
 - Sleeping on a tummy of milk
 - And who's calling the shots? A woman
- Once again, this scene paints the men of the land as dependent on the women for support
 - Sisera was too weak to defend himself
 - He needed a woman to make him comfortable, protect him, feed him and lie for him
 - I've known too many husbands that fit that description

- It's always to a man's shame when he can't fulfill his role as leader, and Sisera is just the latest example
- How did Jael expect to get away with this assault? And are we to congratulate her?
 - I assume Jael never had to say anything
 - A man in her tent would naturally be assumed to have wrong intentions
 - She was simply defending herself
- And as far as judging her behavior, remember that the Canaanites and Jews were at war
 - Had Barak found Sisera, he would have killed him just as Barak killed the rest of his army
 - Jael was simply acting as another combatant
 - She was allied with the nation of Israel, so she acted in their defense
 - God had commanded that all the Canaanites be wiped out from the very beginning, so this woman was willing to do God's will
- When Barak arrived looking for Sisera, Jael courageously comes forward to reveal the man to Barak
 - And then the Lord's second prophecy concerning Barak is fulfilled
 - Barak was told he would secure a great military victory
 - But because he was hesitant to claim that victory without Deborah's leadership, he won't get credit for winning
 - Instead, it will go to a woman, Jael
 - This was exactly as the Lord declared, and it was to Barak's shame
 - Even as we remember his part and even see him mentioned in the book of Hebrews, his victory was diminished by his weakness
 - It's not enough that we follow the Lord in the end
 - Yes, following the Lord is always better than not following Him

- But let's not be too quick to congratulate ourselves for eventually falling in line
 - We need to understand that true obedience says, "Send me Lord, I will go."
 - True faith doesn't depend on a sign, even when the Lord is willing to grant us one
 - And true obedience means assuming the role the Lord has appointed for us in our family, our church and in our world
- If you are a father or husband, then assume the spiritual leadership role in your family
 - Don't let your wife drag you into obedience
 - And don't be satisfied that she knows the Bible or that she goes to church or that she volunteers
 - Don't abdicate your responsibility to teach the kids the word of God
 - And if you aren't feeling qualified to do it, then you had better get serious about your own study because time is running out
 - And your kids aren't getting any younger
- If you're a wife or mother, then don't let your husband's spiritual laziness become excuse to slow down in your own walk
 - In the end, each person will give account to the Lord and face judgment for our life of service
 - So you must press on, with or without him
 - But don't let him off the hook either
 - Encourage him, challenge him and model obedience for him
 - And pray for the Lord to bring him along
- Finally, if you are a couple where both husband and wife are walking with the Lord, the husband leading and the wife close at his side, then praise the Lord
 - He will accomplish great things in and through you
 - But be prepared for the enemy to do all he can to tear you down

- And everyone...remember that the Lord wins the victories in our lives

Judg. 4:23 So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the sons of Israel.

Judg. 4:24 The hand of the sons of Israel pressed heavier and heavier upon Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin the king of Canaan.

- Notice in v.23, the Lord won the victory
 - Not Deborah, not Barak, nor Jael
 - The Lord made the events come to pass as He determined
 - And it was in keeping with His purposes to chastise the people of God
 - And then to redeem them in due time
- But also notice in v.24 that He accomplished these things through the hands of obedient servants
 - By the hand of the sons of Israel, the Lord brought Jabin to his end
 - Always remember the Lord's sovereignty in all events of our lives
 - But also remember that He accomplishes His purpose by the hand of His obedient servants
 - Obey, and become useful to Him so that you will receive a reward
 - Shrink back, and watch Him accomplish great things through others

Judges 5A

- As we ended chapter 4, the king of Canaan was defeated by Barak and his army
 - But in reality, that victory belonged to the Lord
 - He orchestrated it
 - He initiated it
 - And He accomplished it
 - And the Lord brought it about principally by the hands of two women
 - Deborah the Judge announced the manner and timing of the battle
 - And she called the man, Barak, who the Lord selected to wage the war
 - She even provided Barak with the sign to recognize victory was at hand
 - Without Deborah's prodding, the reluctant warrior might never have entered the fight
 - But the final victory belonged to a second woman, Jael, who killed Sisera, the commander of Canaanite army
 - Jael means mountain goat, and her name reflects her toughness
 - She smartly coaxed the commander into her tent
 - And after putting him to sleep, she dispatched him with a hammer and tent peg
 - She mustered the determination and courage to do what was necessary and in so doing, she freed Israel
- Chapter 4 presented a complicated look at the Jewish culture during the time of the third Judge
 - Samuel's story was a study in contrasts
 - Israel's culture had strong leaders...but they were all women

- And the men of Israel had no effective means for challenging the powerful chariots of the Canaanite king
- Yet they readily volunteered and went up to fight with Barak in faith that the Lord would deliver them
- While Israel's enemy was powerful and confident
- But ended up running away to seek safety and refuge in the tent of a woman

○ What is Samuel trying to teach us by these contrasting images?

- That's why we have chapter 5
- Today's chapter is a song of praise sung by Deborah and Barak to the Lord following the defeat of the king
- The song serves as commentary on the events of chapter 4
- So it brings into focus not only *what* happened by also *why* it happened

- The song has three parts, and each part contains its own contrast, so we'll study it according to its three parts, beginning with part 1 today

Judg. 5:1 Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying,

Judg. 5:2 "That the leaders led in Israel,

That the people volunteered,

Bless the LORD!

Judg. 5:3 "Hear, O kings; give ear, O rulers!

I – to the LORD, I will sing,

I will sing praise to the LORD, the God of Israel.

Judg. 5:4 "LORD, when You went out from Seir,

When You marched from the field of Edom,

The earth quaked, the heavens also dripped,

Even the clouds dripped water.

Judg. 5:5 "The mountains quaked at the presence of the LORD,

This Sinai, at the presence of the LORD, the God of Israel.

Judg. 5:6 "In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath,

In the days of Jael, the highways were deserted,

And travelers went by roundabout ways.

Judg. 5:7 "The peasantry ceased, they ceased in Israel,

Until I, Deborah, arose,

Until I arose, a mother in Israel.

Judg. 5:8 "New gods were chosen;

Then war was in the gates.

Not a shield or a spear was seen

Among forty thousand in Israel.

Judg. 5:9 "My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel,

The volunteers among the people;

Bless the LORD!

Judg. 5:10 "You who ride on white donkeys,

You who sit on rich carpets,

And you who travel on the road – sing!

Judg. 5:11 "At the sound of those who divide flocks among the watering places,

There they shall recount the righteous deeds of the LORD,

The righteous deeds for His peasantry in Israel.

Then the people of the LORD went down to the gates.

- This first section serves as background on the battle, and offers a glimpse into what life was like for Israel under Canaanite oppression
 - Beginning in vs.1-3, Deborah claims this is a song of praise to the Lord
 - Notice the first person singular references throughout this section and the entire song
 - The "I" in this song is Deborah
 - So once again, though we're told that Barak and Deborah sang this song, it's clear that Deborah is the author
 - Which reminds us that women were the leaders in the society during this time
 - In these opening verses, there are a couple of important points worth noting
 - First, this song was sung in the day of the battle
 - There was no delay on Deborah's part to praise the Lord for His work in the moment
 - Notice in v.3 Deborah is intent on the world's kings and rulers recognizing that the Lord has done this work
 - And in v.2 she says that even though the leaders led and the people volunteered, it was the Lord Who should be blessed for this outcome

- The leaders wouldn't have known what to do much less been successful in doing it without the Lord
- And the people wouldn't have had the courage to volunteer without the Lord prompting them to join the battle
- So in all these things, Deborah acknowledges the Lord won this victory
- Deborah serves as a great example of godly humility in response to those successes the Lord awards us in life
 - If we are willing to appeal to the sovereignty of God in moments of tragedy, then we must be equally willing to give Him praise for our triumphs as well
 - When we need the Lord to help us pass a test in school or a difficult assignment at work, we'll often turn to Him for help then
 - And if we fail at a task, we almost certainly pray for the Lord to fix our dilemma or rescue us from the consequences
 - But do we think to immediately praise Him for the victories He grants us?
 - It can be easy to forget to praise to the Lord when things go our way in life, like in our workplace or school or family life
 - Because we tend to credit ourselves for success
 - Notice that Deborah praised the Lord on the same day and did so publicly to an audience of kings and rulers?
 - The world needs to see the Lord at work to reward those who seek Him
 - The ultimate manifestation of our reward awaits the Kingdom,
 - But the Lord still bestows many other blessings upon us in the meantime
 - The point here is that our timely praise is important to glorifying the Lord among the nations
 - Land a new job? Get accepted to a school? Score the winning point? Receiving the unexpected bonus?

- Give the Lord immediate, public praise for His work, because these outcomes are the Lord's work

James 1:17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

- Let's be sure we tell the world about His goodness
- Then in vs.4-5, Deborah compares the Lord's work in freeing Israel from the Canaanites to His work in the Exodus
 - Deborah calls Israel to remember the Lord's record of rescuing Israel in the past, so they can appreciate His faithfulness to His covenant
 - And in particular, notice how Deborah highlights the strength of the Lord
 - He marched
 - He made mountains quake
 - He made clouds bring rain in a desert
 - Just the mere presence of the Lord resulted in powerful displays on earth
 - Israel serves a powerful God
 - But then look at the contrast in vs.6-7
 - Back in the days of Shamgar, the man who fought with Ehud and And again in the days of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite...
 - The main highways were deserted
 - Jews traveling in their own promised land were forced to travel by roundabout ways through the land or else risk attack and abuse by the oppressors in the land
 - And the peasants of Israel no longer grew and sold crops because of Canaanites threats and oppression
 - Deborah is painting a picture of a weak, downtrodden culture made like slaves in their own land
 - The people are humiliated, weak and fearful
 - It was that way before and it is that way again

- And why are they suffering in this way?
- Because they turned away from the living God and broke the covenant
- Here's the key contrast in part 1 of the song
 - A powerful God of Israel contrasted with the weak and oppressed people of Israel
 - And this situation happens every time the people of Israel reject their God
 - Israel was nothing without the Lord's strength
 - They were a small, weak nation
 - And yet somewhere along the way they began to think that their victories in the land and their strength were their own doing
 - And they took for granted that they owed their victories to the Lord
 - You may remember that the Lord told Israel that this would be their undoing even before they entered the land

Deut. 8:11 “Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; Deut. 8:12 otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them,

Deut. 8:13 and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies,

Deut. 8:14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Deut. 8:15 “He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint.

Deut. 8:16 “In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end.

Deut. 8:17 “Otherwise, you may say in your heart, ‘My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.’

Deut. 8:18 “But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

Deut. 8:19 “It shall come about if you ever forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I testify against you today that you will surely perish.

Deut. 8:20 “Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so you shall perish; because you would not listen to the voice of the LORD your God.

- Israel's pride and self-satisfaction led them to turn from their dependence on the Lord and toward idolatry
 - This a basic spiritual principle of scripture
 - The people of God must turn away from a prideful, self-satisfied heart so we may recognize our utter dependence on the Lord
 - If we forget that the Lord's strength sustains us, then He is likely to let us fail and experience discipline so we can learn the mistake of our pride
- And even when the Lord is ready to restore us, He may do so in a very humbling way to ensure our pride isn't provoked anew
 - Notice at the end of v.7 that Deborah says these sad conditions continued until she arose to fix them
 - But she adds that Deborah was just a mother in Israel
 - She's not diminishing the importance of motherhood, of course
 - But she is pointing out how unlikely a choice she was to become Israel's deliverer
 - The Lord humbled Israel at the hands of their enemies to chastise them for their haughtiness
 - And even when the time came to rescue them, the Lord delivered Israel in a way that furthered their humiliation
 - He appointed a woman to lead the nation into battle
 - Then the Lord called a military leader who lacked the fortitude to enter the fight without a woman's prodding and protection
 - In v.8, Deborah says that new “gods” were chosen
 - The Hebrew word for gods can also be translated rulers or even judges

- Deborah is referring to herself as the judge chosen by God to humiliate the prideful men of Israel
- But the Lord didn't stop there
- When the Lord assembled His army to fight, He made sure they were so poorly outfitted, they had no logical hope to prevail
 - They lacked even basic implements of war
 - Among 40,000, none brought a spear or shield to battle
 - The word for 40 thousand could also be translated 40 divisions
 - Which probably means that the 10,000 Jewish warriors were divided into 40 units of 250 men each
 - And none had a decent weapon
 - This is no accident either
 - The Lord wants everyone to know Who won this victory
 - Let there be no confusion
 - An army without weapons doesn't win a battle by their own might
 - In fact, throughout the book of Judges, the Lord equips His warriors with ridiculous weapons
 - One handed men with small daggers, ox goads, later a donkey's jawbone
 - And here we have an army lacking any weapons at all
 - But the army did possess one very powerful weapon: faith
 - Deborah sings that her heart went out to this ragtag group of soldiers
 - For obvious reasons...they had signed up for what looked like a suicide mission
 - They and their commanders were brave men, willing to die for Israel
 - They had no idea how they would win
 - They faced a vastly superior army

- We must assume they went up in the confidence that the Lord would win the battle for them
- And so He did, which is why Deborah stands amazed at their faith
- Finally, in vs.10-11, Deborah repeats the importance of testifying to the Lord's victory among every class of Jewish society
 - In v.10, she declares that those who ride white donkeys, sit on rich carpets and travel on the roads should praise to the Lord
 - White donkeys refers to leaders, since white horses and donkeys are reserved for royalty and military leaders
 - Rich carpets refer to the wealthy business and land owners who sit while others wait on them
 - Travelers on roads refers to the working class, who move goods around the countryside
 - And in v.11, Deborah asks both the shepherds and the peasants to praise the Lord
 - All members of Jewish society were to praise the Lord for He is over all
 - There was no room for pride in Israel at any layer of culture
 - Everyone was to gather at the city meeting place in the gates to testify to the Lord's power on behalf of the people
- That's what God expects from His people, both in Israel and in the Church today
 - Everyone in the body of Christ is equally dependent on the Lord for every good thing we have
 - Though we may find differences in our strength, health, wealth and peacefulness, there are no "haves" and "have nots" in the Church
 - We are all equally dependent on the Lord, no matter our station in life, and He has determined our course in life
 - And therefore we are all equally obligated to credit the Lord with our victories and to declare praises to the Lord

- So let's not allow our successes to go to our heads as happened in Israel
 - The more successful we become in this world, the harder it can be to recognize the Lord's sovereignty in our lives
 - It was Jesus Who said it's virtually impossible for a rich man to enter the Kingdom
 - In other words, a wealthy man is likely to think he has gained everything by His own hand
 - And so he is unlikely to acknowledge His need for God
- It isn't the riches that barred the man from the Kingdom
 - It was a heart attitude that interpreted his earthly success as spiritual validation
 - As if to say his worldly success blinded him to his spiritual poverty
 - But even believers are capable of slipping into a mindset that views earthly success as validation of our spiritual strength
- When everything in life is humming along, we must be pleasing God and we have no concerns or cares
 - But that's a very poor measure of pleasing God
 - And if that's where we are...self-satisfied, feeling we've arrived spiritually...then hold on
 - God is probably about to rock your world
- Anytime Israel began to trust in their wealth in the land rather than relying on the Lord, they saw the consequences of Deuteronomy 8
 - As Moses foretold, at a point Israel began to declare in their hearts, "My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth."
 - This is a consequence of pride
 - Pride causes us to forget that we are nothing without the Lord
 - How do we combat this tendency?
 - We praise Him for His provision and blessing
 - Because anytime the Lord chooses to bless us in a particular way,

- Whether financially
- Or in our physical strength
- Or in our family life or work life
- He does so with the expectation that we would praise Him
- And that isn't simply a matter of thanking the Lord
 - It means continually checking our pride
 - Not allowing our egos to take credit for God's work
- If you ever find yourself feeling self-satisfied in what you have accomplished or accumulated, whether spiritual or material, then watch out
 - The Lord may bring your world crashing down in ways you don't expect so He can expose your dependence on Him
 - And He may do so in unexpected ways
 - Men who pride themselves on their wealth or power may lose their health or their family
 - Women who pride themselves on their looks may fall to temptation
 - The Lord will find a way to rock our world so He can get our attention and deflate our pride
 - He does this for our good, because to do otherwise is to lead us toward our own destruction

Judges 5B

- The song of Deborah is a revealing commentary on the circumstances of Israel's victory
 - We've studied the first part of that song so far, and what's becoming clear is that Israel is no longer operating as a single nation under the Lord
 - Jewish society is fracturing
 - Men aren't leading as they once did
 - Women are carrying burdens they ought not bear
 - People are doing what's right in their own eyes
 - As the people enjoyed the prosperity of the land, they sank into idolatry
 - And then the Lord struck Israel with calamity with the intent to wake them from their unrighteousness
 - After a period of time, they would awake, and He would restore them
 - Yet each time, that restoration has become a bit harder to accomplish
 - Chapter 5 is Deborah's honest reflection on the way Israel obtained victory over the Canaanite king
 - In the first part, she highlighted the weakness of Israel in the face of their enemy
 - And by contrast, the Lord's overcoming power to win the battle on Israel's behalf
 - So she takes time to praise the Lord for the victory
 - Because as we will see in parts 2 and 3 today, the people certainly weren't united to win the battle
 - And in the end, the victory is credited to a woman in a tent, Jael
 - And because of her bravery, the nation will see a period of rest again

- We'll read part two in a couple of sections

Judg. 5:12 "Awake, awake, Deborah;

Awake, awake, sing a song!

Arise, Barak, and take away your captives, O son of Abinoam.

Judg. 5:13 "Then survivors came down to the nobles;

The people of the LORD came down to me as warriors.

Judg. 5:14 "From Ephraim those whose root is in Amalek came down,

Following you, Benjamin, with your peoples;

From Machir commanders came down,

And from Zebulun those who wield the staff of office.

Judg. 5:15 "And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah;

As was Issachar, so was Barak;

Into the valley they rushed at his heels;

Among the divisions of Reuben

There were great resolves of heart.

Judg. 5:16 "Why did you sit among the sheepfolds,

To hear the piping for the flocks?

Among the divisions of Reuben

There were great searchings of heart.

Judg. 5:17 "Gilead remained across the Jordan;

And why did Dan stay in ships?

Asher sat at the seashore,

And remained by its landings.

Judg. 5:18 "Zebulun was a people who despised their lives even to death,

And Naphtali also, on the high places of the field.

- Part 2 of the song is focused on who participated in the battle, starting with Deborah and Barak
 - In v.12 we're reminded that the Lord dictated the timing of the battle
 - He called Deborah and Barak to move when the time was right
 - We know already that the Lord won the battle
 - But now we're learning that the Lord selected the timing for the battle as well
 - The Lord called Deborah to "awake" and Barak to "arise"
 - Deborah is told to awake so she can sing a song

- Singing a song represents her prophesying the word of the Lord
- Her role was to speak the instructions of the Lord on cue
- And Barak was told to arise, meaning to get up in response to the word of the Lord
 - And as he arose, he would take the enemy captive
 - Meaning, he only needed to respond to the call of God's word to find success
- This is another universal pattern among all God's people
 - Every good work begins with a call from God by the word of God
 - And all the people of God are expected to do is arise to obey what they learn
 - You can't obey what you don't hear
 - And you can't please the Lord if you hear but do not obey
 - The Lord used a woman to issue the call and a man to lead Israel into obedience
- As Barak stepped forward to answer Deborah's call, his response led some men from surrounding tribes of Israel to join him
 - Notice in v.14 in addition to those expected from Zebulun, a few men joined from three other tribes
 - Ephraim joined and some from Benjamin
 - And commanders from Machir, which is the name for western portions of Manasseh
 - Then in v.15 we hear that the leaders of Issachar also participated
 - Geographically, these four tribes are more or less on the way from Ephraim to the area of the battle
 - So it seems Barak picked up support as he traveled to the valley to fight
 - The Lord brought these four groups alongside Barak to encourage him as he prepared to engage in a battle he had no idea how to win

- When you step out in response to the word of God and act in faith, you can be sure the Lord will show Himself in unexpected ways to encourage you
 - I suspect Barak needed all the encouragement he could get
 - Remember, he needed Deborah's company just to act in the first place
 - And yet the Lord did not despise his fear
 - The Lord understood his flesh was weak, so He strengthened Barak's faith
 - But pay attention to the order: insisted that Barak move forward in faith, as weak as it was
 - Once Barak was moving, the Lord was ready to bring others alongside Barak to encourage his obedience
 - But this is the order God requires
 - Hear His word, step out in faith, then receive confirmation
 - Like He said to Abraham: "Go to the place I will show you..."
 - Barak's primary army was prepared in Zebulun and Naphtali, but the Lord sent these extra recruits to make sure Barak knew the Lord was with him
 - Someone has to hear God's calling first
 - Someone has to take the first step of faith
 - God appoints men and women to serve as leaders for that reason...to get something started among His people
 - Then when the leader needs encouragement, the Lord will bring others to join the work and confirm the Lord's calling
 - For Barak, the Lord grew his army around him even as he walked to the battle
 - But unfortunately, the society of Israel wasn't united in this effort
 - In fact, most of the tribes were incapable of mustering the conviction or courage to respond to the word of the Lord
 - Notice at the end of v.15, we're told there was a great resolve of the heart among Reubenites when they heard of Barak's call

- They recognized this was an opportunity to defeat the enemy in the land
- They heard that Deborah had declared the time had come for victory
- They were all for kicking the Canaanites out!
- But in v.16 we learn they remained with their flocks and didn't join the battle
 - They were content to enjoy their life of leisure rather than do the hard work of responding to the call of the Lord
 - And like Reuben, the tribes of Gad and eastern Manasseh (called Gilead) stayed put
 - And the tribe of Dan stayed on ships, indicating they continued in their way of life in trading on the sea
 - Likewise, Asher stayed on the seashore working the docks
- This is the other side of the coin
 - We won't get everyone among God's people moving in response to God's call
 - Some simply won't make the trip
 - As a pastor and Bible teacher, I see this pattern first-hand
 - We can emphasize the call of scripture and call people to respond, but sometimes people prefer the life they have over the one God is offering
- There's something in the world they prefer
 - Maybe it's the security of their current lifestyle
 - Maybe it's a fear of the unknown
 - Maybe it's just inertia
 - In all cases, it's the mistake that Jesus described this way:

John 12:25 "He who loves **his life** loses it, and he who hates **his life** in this world will keep it to **life** eternal.

- Look at v.18, and you see Zebulun and Naphtali making the right bargain
 - Deborah says they despised their lives to the death and were willing to die on the high places
 - The high places refers to the pagan worship locations of the Canaanites
 - This was a battle over worshipping the true God instead allowing pagans gods to pollute the land
 - And these two tribes were willing to leave their lives behind - even lose their earthly lives - to answer the call of the Lord
 - That's who you want standing with you in ministry of any kind
 - You want people who make answering the call of the Lord more important than fitting into the world
 - The Lord wants those people too
 - People who will serve Him knowing that this world is in the process of passing away and not worth preserving
 - As Jesus commanded

Luke 9:62 But Jesus said to him, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

- Notice the fractured nature of the culture? A few are following, and a group are strongly committed, but many others are indifferent
 - Now you see the effect of doing what is right in your own eyes
 - God's people were making judgments of when and how to obey God based on circumstances and feelings
 - They were searching their hearts instead of searching the scriptures and doing what they read
 - When God spoke to them through a prophetess, they treated it as optional advice
 - When God's appointed military leader began to fight, some shrugged their shoulders

- We need to guard against this same kind of complacency and self-satisfaction in our pursuit of the Kingdom
 - We have battles that need to be fought
 - From time to time, the Lord will place a calls upon our lives
 - He'll speak to us from His word
- But don't evaluate your choice to obey based on feelings or circumstances
 - Don't lift your hand from the plow and look back at the farmhouse
 - Don't be distracted by the life you're leaving behind
 - Keep eyes for eternity and consider what you're gaining
- Then Deborah describes the battle and we finally learn how the people of Israel were able to defeat an army without even a single decent weapon

Judg. 5:19 "The kings came and fought;

Then fought the kings of Canaan
 At Taanach near the waters of Megiddo;
 They took no plunder in silver.

Judg. 5:20 "The stars fought from heaven,

From their courses they fought against Sisera.

Judg. 5:21 "The torrent of Kishon swept them away,

The ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon.
 O my soul, march on with strength.

Judg. 5:22 "Then the horses' hoofs beat

From the dashing, the dashing of his valiant steeds.

Judg. 5:23 'Curse Meroz,' said the angel of the LORD,

'Utterly curse its inhabitants;
 Because they did not come to the help of the LORD,
 To the help of the LORD against the warriors.'

- The battle took place in the Jezreel Valley at Taanach, which was an ancient settlement about 5 miles southeast of Migiddo
 - Remember, the army of the Canaanites had moved to the far west to the Kishon river valley, which is about 15 miles northwest of Taanach
 - That river is fed from springs and rainfall on Mt. Carmel

- In v.19 Deborah says the army didn't plunder silver
- In other words, the Israelites didn't conquer the cities of the Canaanites by overwhelming them in might
- Rather, Deborah says in v.20 that the battle was won by the "stars" of heaven
- In scripture, the word star can mean a little object or it can stand as a symbol for an angel
 - In this context, it seems to mean the angels battled for Israel
 - Specifically, they angels brought torrents of water in v.21
 - Those torrents of water rained down on Mt. Carmel causing the Kishon river valley to flood
- As the valley flooded, it made the entire valley muddy and guess what doesn't work very well in deep mud? Chariots and horses
 - In v.22 Deborah describes the hooves of the horses beating the ground
 - In the original Hebrew, it says the horses' heels were broken by the prancing in the mud
- This explains how Israel was able to triumph over a superior army
 - They Canaanites were superior because of their chariots
 - But take their chariots away, and they were just men
 - And a larger, motivated army can defeat a smaller one
 - The faith of these men was rewarded in the end
 - They entered the battle willing to die
 - But in the end the Lord had a better plan
 - Do you want to see miracles in your life?
 - Step out in faith to the Lord's call, and watch what He does next
 - Or stay on your ships or by your flocks and never see the power of the Lord working with your weakness
- But Deborah doesn't want us to forget the main theme of this section

- Not everyone in Israel responded and even among Naphtali, some failed to respond
 - She curses the town of Meroz, which was a town in Naphtali just west of the Hazor
 - Even though Naphtali was a huge contributor to the army, there were pockets of the tribe that wouldn't engage
 - Perhaps the proximity of this town to the Canaanite king's headquarters in Hazor scared them into inaction
 - Once again, they preferred this life over the kingdom of God
- This is the lesson of part 2
 - The contrast between the brave men who answered the call
 - And those who wouldn't
 - The society of Israel in the time of Judges was marked by fractures and waning willingness to hear the Lord and answer
- Here's a people only a few generations removed from those who saw the Lord part the Red Sea, and yet they are indifferent to following God
 - It's a reminder to all God's people of how easily our flesh can re-assert control over our lives
 - God has done amazing things in each of our lives, not the least is saving us by faith
 - And yet we're still prone to wandering or ignoring His call
 - If we're shaking our finger at these senseless Israelites, don't be too quick to judge
 - Let's take our own advice and be sure we're always ready for God's call to serve Him and never too comfortable to respond
- Part three of Deborah's song celebrates the woman who ultimately brought the battle to its conclusion

Judg. 5:24 “Most blessed of women is Jael,
The wife of Heber the Kenite;
Most blessed is she of women in the tent.

Judg. 5:25 "He asked for water and she gave him milk;
In a magnificent bowl she brought him curds.

Judg. 5:26 "She reached out her hand for the tent peg,
And her right hand for the workmen's hammer.
Then she struck Sisera, she smashed his head;
And she shattered and pierced his temple.

Judg. 5:27 "Between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay;
Between her feet he bowed, he fell;
Where he bowed, there he fell dead.

Judg. 5:28 "Out of the window she looked and lamented,
The mother of Sisera through the lattice,
'Why does his chariot delay in coming?
Why do the hoofbeats of his chariots tarry?'

Judg. 5:29 i "Her wise princesses would answer her,
Indeed she repeats her words to herself,

Judg. 5:30 i 'Are they not finding, are they not dividing the spoil?
A maiden, two maidens for every warrior;
To Sisera a spoil of dyed work,
A spoil of dyed work embroidered,
Dyed work of double embroidery on the neck of the spoiler?'

Judg. 5:31 "Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD;
But let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might."

And the land was undisturbed for forty years.

- Deborah retraces the steps of Jael as she courageously defeats Sisera
 - Deborah calls her the most blessed of women
 - That reminds us of what the angel says about Mary in Luke 1
 - These two women are connected in the sense that both are chosen by God to perform a role well beyond their station in life
 - Mary was a humble virgin, the last person on earth you would expect to give birth to the Messiah
 - And Jael was a wife holding down the tent, so she is the last person you might expect to win a decisive military battle
 - But by God's power, both of these women did miraculous things to free God's people from slavery to a powerful enemy
 - Jael freed Israel from slavery to the Canaanite king and his forces

- Mary gave birth to Messiah, Who frees His people from slavery to the enemy
- Deborah graphically recounts the way Jael won by killing Sisera, because we can't get enough of that story
 - But notice the imagery of the mighty warrior lying between the feet of this woman
 - The sense is of a role reversal
 - Earlier he invaded a woman's tent, which normally would have meant only one thing
 - Instead, he's the one lying between her feet
- Then to finish the song, Deborah creates the third and final contrast in the song
 - In v.28 she introduces a new imagined character to the story
 - Deborah imagines what the mother of Sisera is doing now that her son has been killed in this secret way
 - The mother is described as looking out her kitchen window waiting for her son to come home from the battle
 - She is a pitiful woman, waiting in vain for a son to return
 - When Sisera delays in returning, her handmaidens give her reassuring reasons for his delay
 - Surely he's dividing the spoil, they say
 - Dividing all the fine embroidery and dyed cloth
 - And in a coarse detail, the maidens say there must have been two Jewish maidens for every warrior
 - What they mean of course is that the raping of the Jewish women must be taking Sisera's army a little longer than usual
 - It's like they're saying, "Oh I'm sure he just got held up at work..."
 - This comment suggests that Jael's risk of being raped by Sisera was well founded
 - She was clearly acting in self-defense even if her motives were mixed

- She has taken a son from his mother
- But it was the proper response to the son's evil ways
- And his mother will suffer with him
- The contrast here is easy to see: a poor, but triumphant Jael contrasted with a rich, but devastated mother of Sisera
 - This is a reminder that those who oppose God and God's people will perish
 - But those who love the Lord and His people will triumph
 - No one would have predicted that Jael would have gained the upper hand over Sisera's mother
 - Much less over Sisera himself
 - But in the end, the tables were turned
 - Remember that as you decide between following the Lord or seeking comfort in the world
 - The world may appear to be the better option to our flesh
 - But one day the tables will be turned
 - The last will be first
 - The least among us will be the greatest
 - Those who have made serving the Lord their priority will see the reward in the Kingdom

Judges 6A

- It's time to turn the wheel once more
 - Samuel now introduces the fourth major apostasy in the book of Judges
 - This turn of the wheel will run from chapter 6 all the way to the beginning of chapter 10
 - And it will encompass four judges, though one judge in particular, Gideon, will be our focus during most of these chapters
 - As I've mentioned already, Israel's cycle of sin and redemption continues to deteriorate in Judges
 - And we're going to note that deterioration very clearly in this episode of sin in Israel
 - When Israel calls upon the Lord during their misery, He will not welcome their request for mercy
 - And the judge He raises up is a man with notable weaknesses
 - And the nation responds to God's mercy by killing each other at a point
 - Leading to even worse rebellion

Judg. 6:1 Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years.

Judg. 6:2 The power of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds.

Judg. 6:3 For it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites would come up with the Amalekites and the sons of the east and go against them.

Judg. 6:4 So they would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey.

Judg. 6:5 For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, they would come in like locusts for number, both they and their camels were innumerable; and they came into the land to devastate it.

Judg. 6:6 So Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried to the LORD.

Judg. 6:7 Now it came about when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD on account of Midian,

Judg. 6:8 that the LORD sent a prophet to the sons of Israel, and he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'It was I who brought you up from Egypt and brought you out from the house of slavery.

Judg. 6:9 'I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hands of all your oppressors, and dispossessed them before you and gave you their land,

Judg. 6:10 and I said to you, "I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But you have not obeyed Me.''''

- The story begins with that anticipated phrase Samuel uses to mark the beginning of a new cycle of sin: Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord
 - They did what was right in their own eyes by worshiping idols, but in the judgment of God, it was evil
 - And as a result, the Lord gave Israel seven years of misery under the Midianites
 - The Midianites were nomads who descended from Abraham and Keturah, his third wife
 - We often forget that Abraham had three wives, not just two
 - And here's another example of how the Bible reflects on the error of taking multiple wives
 - In every case in scripture where a man takes multiple wives, the Bible always makes clear that such a choice was wrong and contrary to God's will
 - In Abraham's case, for example, we can clearly see how taking his second wife, Hagar, was a mistake
 - Scripture makes clear that Hagar was a decision of Abraham and Sarah's flesh, not one prompted by the Spirit
 - And in the result, Abraham's decision produces severe negative consequences for him and for Israel even to this day
 - And here we see the negative consequences of Abraham taking a third wife as well
 - It produced the Midianites, enemies of Israel

- The Midianites lived in the plains east of Moab on the eastern bank of the Jordan river
 - Since they were nomads, their livelihood didn't depend on establishing cities or agriculture of their own
 - Instead, they made their living as raiders
 - At harvest time, they would descend in great number on neighboring peoples to steal their crops and possessions
 - Then they would escape back to their lands
 - In effect, the Midianites forced other peoples to do the hard work of growing crops and raising herds for them
 - They were able to accomplish these raids with the help of camels were told in v.5
 - Midianites were among the first to domesticate camels
 - A camel is large, fast and can carry significant cargo, making it ideal for raiders
- In vs.2-3 we see how the Israelites responded to the tyranny of the Midianites
 - The Israelites took to hiding their crops in the caves of mountains to conceal them from the raiders
 - The hillsides of Judea are covered with caves and dens making them perfectly suited to hiding crops
 - The Dead Sea Scrolls were hidden from the Romans just this way
 - Despite trying to hide their produce, the people of Israel were still terrorized by the Midianites
 - You can only hide so much in caves
 - And so the Midianites would ride in, take what they wanted including all livestock
 - And ride out leaving the people destitute
 - This pattern continues for seven years as God's punishment to His people for their idolatry
 - Remember, these punishments are the direct result of Israel disobeying a covenant which they agreed to keep

- And in that covenant given through Moses, the Lord warned Israel in advance of what they would experience if they disobeyed the covenant

Deut. 28:15 “But it shall come about, if you do not obey the LORD your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

Deut. 28:16 “Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country.

Deut. 28:17 “Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

Deut. 28:18 “Cursed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock.

Deut. 28:19 “Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out.

Deut. 28:20 “The LORD will send upon you curses, confusion, and rebuke, in all you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken Me. ...

Deut. 28:25 “The LORD shall cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them, and you will be an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

Deut. 28:26 “Your carcasses will be food to all birds of the sky and to the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away.

Deut. 28:27 “The LORD will smite you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors and with the scab and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed.

Deut. 28:28 “The LORD will smite you with madness and with blindness and with bewilderment of heart;

Deut. 28:29 and you will grope at noon, as the blind man gropes in darkness, and you will not prosper in your ways; but you shall only be oppressed and robbed continually, with none to save you.

Deut. 28:30 “You shall betroth a wife, but another man will violate her; you shall build a house, but you will not live in it; you shall plant a vineyard, but you will not use its fruit.

Deut. 28:31 “Your ox shall be slaughtered before your eyes, but you will not eat of it; your donkey shall be torn away from you, and will not be restored to you; your sheep shall be given to your enemies, and you will have none to save you.

Deut. 28:32 “Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, while your eyes look on and yearn for them continually; but there will be nothing you can do.

Deut. 28:33 “A people whom you do not know shall eat up the produce of your ground and all your labors, and you will never be anything but oppressed and crushed continually.

Deut. 28:34 “You shall be driven mad by the sight of what you see.

- We can see many of these things the Lord promised taking place during the time of Judges
 - In particular, notice God promised Israel would lose their hard earned crops and livestock
 - And Israel would be defeated by their enemies while still in their land
 - They would flee in every direction as an example of terror before the world's eyes
 - And in Deut 28:29 the Lord says the people will grope at noon like a blind man in darkness
 - He's referring to the way Israel will be hiding in dark caves during midday
 - Groping in darkness as they try to hide from their enemies
 - The Lord predicted exactly what Israel would experience as they suffer the consequences for their disobedience
- It's amazing how much misery Israel was willing to tolerate without waking up to the reality of their circumstances
 - They were suffering in all these many ways because they continued to live in disobedience to the clear instructions of the Lord
 - And remember, the commandments they are rejecting were given by God for Israel's benefit
 - Those commandments had the power to promote Israel's well-being
 - To bring them peace and joy
 - To prosper them under God's care
 - These weren't commandments designed to make life harsh or unpleasant
 - Nevertheless, the people disobeyed the covenant choosing to live in their flesh, seeking to pleasure themselves in unholy and destructive ways contrary to the word of God
 - And so the Lord responded as He promised with these consequences

- And I imagine at the first raid, the people of Israel rationalized the calamity as merely bad luck or a momentary tragedy
- Then as things got worse under the Midianites, the people must have decided to fight back
- But when they realize they couldn't beat the Midianites, they came up with the cave solution
- Which was no solution since they merely became self-imposed prisoners in their own land
- Then as they lived in darkness, confined to caves, scared, miserable, destitute, they began to blame God
 - You would think that as their lives deteriorated into this miserable existence, they might have stopped to ask themselves why God was permitting it?
 - Because they should have recognized that nothing happens to God's people – then or now – that isn't according to God's permissive will
 - He has permitted everything we experience in life so it may serve some good purpose in His plan
 - But if we're going to find that good purpose, we must stop and consider what circumstances say about our obedience and God's purposes
- Of course, there is a difference between trials and discipline
 - Not every bad experience is a punishment for living in disobedience to the Lord
 - Sometimes God brings us trials and persecution which can look like discipline but will always feel very different
 - When we are experiencing discipline, we'll feel conviction, we'll feel sorrow and hopefully we'll repent to seek God's forgiveness
 - But when we're being tested, we'll feel peace and even joy at the prospect of receiving persecution for the sake of the Gospel
 - Here's the rule of thumb
 - God brings trials upon children living in obedience

- He brings discipline upon children entrapped in sin
- It appears, however, that seven years go by before the people even begin that soul searching process
 - For seven long years that just accept their circumstances
 - Life has gone from blissful to atrocious, from blessed to cursed, and yet the people don't stop to ask how did we get here
 - We might expect that as they groped around in the darkness of those caves they might have had reason to stop and ask that question
 - They knew the Lord's power and how He had brought them to this land
 - So they should have asked have we done anything contrary to the Lord's will that would lead Him to cause us to suffer in this way?
 - And even after seven years, they don't ask the right questions much less arrive at insightful answers
 - Their blindness and the darkness of the caves is a perfect representation of the spiritual blindness and their darkened hearts
 - Since they can't see the reasons for their suffering, the Lord responds in vs.8-10 through an unnamed prophet to explain what should have been obvious
 - The Lord reminds His people that He was the same God who brought Israel out of Egypt, brought them into the land and defeated their enemies
 - Then He says since I am the all-powerful God, you have no reason to fear the Amorites (i.e., all the Canaanite peoples)
 - Clearly, if God can defeat Egypt, He can protect Israel from anyone, including the Canaanites
 - So Israel's enemies can do nothing to Israel...except what God allows
 - The Lord's point is that there can be only one explanation for the suffering Israel is enduring at the hands of the Midianites

- The Midianites are winning because the Lord is letting them win
- And if the Lord is letting them win, then He must have some good purpose for allowing it
- But understanding that purpose requires the Israelites to ask these questions themselves and then follow the answer wherever it leads
- We have to learn to think like this too
 - Our covenant doesn't bring guaranteed calamities like the covenant given to Israel, so we can't look at a simple list like the one in Deut 28
 - But that doesn't mean we can't see when the Lord is trying to get our attention
 - On the contrary, the discipline of the Lord is always designed to be self-evident, scripture says

Heb. 12:1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Heb. 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Heb. 12:3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Heb. 12:4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

- As the writer of Hebrews points out, sin is an encumbrance in our life
 - It holds us back from obeying and pleasing God
 - It holds us back from enjoying the peacefulness and joy of a life lived according to the Spirit and the word
 - And it stops us from accomplishing the good works He has set before us which hold opportunity for eternal rewards
 - Which is why we are told to strive against sin continually
- But if we fail or give up, the Lord will bring us discipline to help us confront our sin

Heb. 12:11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

- The Lord trains us with discipline, which is never going to be fun
 - The Israelites weren't enjoying the Lord's discipline hiding in caves and watching their crops and flocks disappear
 - But if those measures led them into greater obedience, then it was all worth it
 - Because it would lead to repentance and then obedience, which gives God opportunity to restore Israel in peace
- If we live in sin, sooner or later the happy facade of our world will start crumbling down
 - And as God brings discipline, we need to seek the full value of it by asking why is God allowing this?
 - In some cases, the answer will be because we refuse to obey Him or have stopped resisting sin
 - We gave in, we gave up, we made excuses, we got depressed, discouraged or maybe we just don't care anymore
- Even when we stop confronting our sin, the Lord doesn't give up
 - He responds with discipline so that we might get back on track and experience the peace of living in obedience
 - But we have to ask the question with an honest desire to know the truth and then do what's required
- As the time to restore Israel comes, you can see the Lord responding differently this time around in Israel than He has in the past
 - Clearly, the Lord isn't pleased with Israel so that even as He acts to free them, He does so almost reluctantly
 - And when He does respond, He selects another unlikely man, Gideon
 - What follows in chapter 6 is the commissioning of Gideon as the next judge (or captain) of Israel

Judg. 6:11 Then the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites.

Judg. 6:12 The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior."

Judg. 6:13 Then Gideon said to him, "O my lord, if the LORD 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 LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."

- Gideon is a man who personifies the state of Jewish society in his time, much in the same way Deborah and Barak were examples of their day
 - The weakness of men seems to continue, and Gideon is a good example of that weakness
 - He is man of self-doubts and poor leadership skill
 - He wishes to serve God but he remains drawn by the culture around him
 - And though Gideon wins the battles as the Lord appoints, in the end he commits idolatry and engages in sin by marrying many wives
 - There are no pure heroes left in this book, since we're dealing with a culture on the decline and a people who are corrupt
 - Nevertheless, the Lord continues to remain faithful
 - As He steers Israel from one apostasy to another
- When it's Gideon's turn to take the wheel, the Angel of the Lord appears to him by an oak tree probably in the Jezreel Valley
 - And Gideon is so meek that he is working to thresh his wheat in a wine press
 - Normally, threshing was done on a high place out in the open
 - Because the process of threshing involved beating the stalks of grain to separate the fruit from the chaff
 - By doing this on a high place, the wind could catch the lighter chaff and blow it away

- But because Gideon was so afraid of the Midianites, he has gone to a wine press
 - Wine was typically pressed in low places to keep the juice from running off
 - So he is hiding out of sight of the Midianites
- The Angel of the Lord appears calling Gideon a valiant warrior
 - The salutation is designed to cause chuckles, because Gideon is anything but a valiant warrior
 - But the Lord is addressing Gideon looking ahead to who he would become, not who he was in that moment
- The Lord's appearing must have taken the form of a human being in this case
 - Because Gideon doesn't respond in awe or terror, but with argument
 - In fact, he seems to bring accusations against the Lord
 - Gideon says if the Lord is with us (meaning with Israel), then where is He now?
 - How can we say the Lord is with us in the midst of these terrible circumstances?
 - Haven't many believers asked this very question?
 - When our circumstances get bad enough, we ask how God could still be on our side or working for our good
 - We assume that if God were on our side, He would protect us from everything negative
 - The assumption was just as wrong for Gideon as it is for us
 - God didn't forsake Israel
 - Israel was the one to forsake God
 - And God didn't leave Israel's side...He's been their everyday
 - He's been at work bringing the curses He promised
 - So instead of asking where is God, they should have been asking why did God allow this? What is He trying to tell me?

- So God explains what He means:

Judg. 6:14 The LORD looked at him and said, “Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?”

Judg. 6:15 He said to Him, “O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father’s house.”

Judg. 6:16 But the LORD said to him, “Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man.”

- The Lord orders Gideon to go in this strength, meaning to go in the strength of the Lord’s presence
 - It’s at this point that the Lord makes clear to Gideon that Gideon is in the presence of the Lord Himself
 - And then from this point, the conversation progresses something like the way Moses responded to the Lord in the desert
 - Ironically, Moses was in Midian at the time of his call, while Gideon is being called to defeat the Midianites
- When Moses was commissioned to free Israel from a powerful adversary, Moses gave three excuses, which the Lord addressed in turn
 - The first excuse Moses gave was that the Lord He should send someone else better suited
 - Likewise, Gideon is reluctant to answer the Lord’s call
 - And like Moses, Gideon begins by diminishing his abilities for this assignment
 - He says he comes from the least family of his tribe and he is the youngest in the house
- God responded exactly the way He responded to Moses earlier
 - The Lord said He would be with Gideon and that was enough
 - In fact, Gideon will be so empowered by God that it will seem as though one man defeated the Midianites
 - Remember this comment later when we learn how God equips Gideon for his battles

- Gideon isn't done with his worries and protests, but even now we're feel like asking is this the best God can do?
 - When God's people live in disobedience long enough and fail to turn back soon enough, some damage can be hard to reverse
 - In Israel, the culture is fracturing, disintegrating, weakening
 - And so even when God acts to bring it back, recovery isn't assured
 - And the best of society are a step lower than previous generations
 - The new norm is weakness as we see in Gideon
 - Similarly, if we endure in our sin long enough despite the discipline of the Lord, we are playing with fire
 - We are at risk of going so far that no degree of discipline will bring us back
 - Or even worse, that the Lord may leave us where we've put ourselves
 - But I hope for better things for us
 - As Hebrews says

Heb. 6:9 But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.

Judges 6B

- Last week we were introduced to Gideon, the fourth judge in the book of Judges
 - This week we get to know this man personally
 - And as we do, let's remember the age in which he lives
 - The people of Israel are in trouble
 - The men are weak, the women are forced to compensate and the people are increasingly prone to idol worship
 - Gideon's nature and character reflects Jewish society in one way or another
 - As we'll see, he lacks self-confidence
 - He has trouble recognizing the word of the Lord as if he's unfamiliar with the voice of the Lord
 - He needs reassurance
 - Nevertheless, the Lord patiently works with him as He does with all of us
- So we rejoin Gideon as the Angel of the Lord meets him as he threshes grain in the wine press
 - The Angel of the Lord has appeared as a man, but now Gideon has begun to suspect the Angel is something more than merely a man

Judg. 6:16 But the LORD said to him, “Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man.”

Judg. 6:17 So Gideon said to Him, “If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who speak with me.

Judg. 6:18 “Please do not depart from here, until I come back to You, and bring out my offering and lay it before You.” And He said, “I will remain until you return.”

Judg. 6:19 Then Gideon went in and prepared a young goat and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour; he put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, and brought them out to him under the oak and presented them.

Judg. 6:20 The angel of God 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.

Judg. 6:21 Then the angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight.

Judg. 6:22 When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the LORD, he said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face."

Judg. 6:23 The LORD said to him, "Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die."

Judg. 6:24 Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it The LORD is Peace. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

- After hearing that this "man" will be with him in battle, Gideon asks for a sign that this is truly the Lord speaking to him
 - Gideon instructs his guest to stay put while Gideon takes time to prepare an offering
 - The word for offering in Hebrew can also mean gift or tribute
 - So Gideon is preparing a meal as a tribute to his guest
 - Then Gideon goes about several hours of work
 - He prepares a young goat for dinner
 - He makes a large quantity of unleavened bread
 - It was unleavened because he was in a hurry
 - When the goat was ready to eat, Gideon brought the meat in a basket, and the bread and the broth from boiling the goat
 - Rather than eat the mean, the Angel instructs Gideon to set the bread and meat on a large rock, which becomes an impromptu altar
 - Then the pot of broth is poured out on the meat and bread
 - And Angel of the Lord ignites the sacrifice with his staff
 - The entire offering is consumed by the fire,
- As the meat and bread and broth are burned up, the Angel of the Lord vanishes in that instant
 - Between the burning up of the soggy sacrifice and the sudden disappearance of the man, Gideon gets his sign

- At that moment, Gideon understand this was no ordinary man
- In fact, Gideon instantly grows fearful of what he's witnessed
- He knows he's seen the Angel of the Lord and to see the Lord was to die, Gideon thought
- The Lord speaks to Gideon at that moment to reassure him he won't die
 - Gideon didn't see the glory of the Lord
 - He saw a theophany, a physical manifestation of God, similar to the dove that descended on Jesus
 - A theophany does not pose a problem for sinful man, which is why God uses them in place of revealing His full glory
- So having been reassured, Gideon turns from fear to worship
 - He builds an altar for another sacrifice
 - And he named the location the Yahweh Shalom, the Lord is Peace
- Gideon's request for a sign sounds similar to the requests Jesus received while He walked in the Galilee
 - In most cases, the Lord refused to grant a sign when asked in that day

Matt. 12:38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You."

Matt. 12:39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet;

- The religious leaders asked for a sign, but the Lord rebuked them for doing so
- But in this case, the Lord concedes to Gideon's request
- Why the difference now?
 - In the Pharisees' case, Jesus had performed miracles already which they rejected
 - And Jesus' identity was clearly known and His qualifications to be Messiah were easy to verify

- Nevertheless, the leaders refused to believe Him
- So Jesus knew that even had He performed more signs, they would not have accepted them anymore than the previous signs
- That's why Jesus told them that they would only have the sign of Jonah, which was Jesus' resurrection from the dead after three days
 - And when Jesus performed that sign for all Israel to see, it still didn't impress these men
 - They refused to accept the truth even after a resurrection
 - So certainly they would have rejected any other sign Jesus could have given them
- Gideon's request was very different
 - He was inclined to accept the words of the Angel of the Lord, and everything he said and did demonstrated that
 - First, he asks the Angel of the Lord to stay put because he wanted time to honor his guest
 - The Pharisees never gave Jesus even a moment of honor
 - Secondly, Gideon prepared a lavish meal for Jesus
 - The Pharisees used meals with Jesus merely as opportunities to trick or deceive Jesus
 - Thirdly, when Jesus performed the sign, Gideon was quick to respond in faith and acceptance
 - The Pharisees credited Jesus' miracles to the devil rather than admit they came from God
 - Finally, Gideon exhibited fear of the Lord
 - The Pharisees openly mocked and hated Jesus for what He did
 - Nevertheless, we must also acknowledge that Gideon's need for a sign was an indication of his spiritual weakness
 - Scripture never looks positively at the demand for a sign from the Lord

- Even when signs are granted on occasion to bolster weak faith, those concessions are not to the praise of the individual
- Consider Jesus' words to Thomas

John 20:24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

John 20:25 So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

John 20:26 After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you."

John 20:27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing."

John 20:28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

John 20:29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

- Thomas required a sign of Jesus' resurrection, which the Lord ultimately provided
 - But even as Jesus gave the sign to Thomas, He rebukes the apostle
 - Paul indicates in 1Cor 1 that seeking signs from God in place of accepting His word is indicative of the unbelieving world
- When a believer requires signs and wonders to strengthen his or her relationship with the Lord instead of relying on the word of God, it's a sign of spiritual immaturity
 - Signs and wonders are spiritual crutches
 - They are like spiritual cotton candy
 - It's excites us and looks substantial
 - But once we take it in, it evaporates and we come to recognize its emptiness
 - Even so, once we get a taste for it, we keep going back for more
- Gideon's need for signs is a measure of his spiritual weakness and an indication that he was unaccustomed to hearing the voice of the Lord

- Obviously, Gideon didn't receive a visit from the Angel of the Lord every day, but like all Israel he did have the Law to mediate upon
 - But it seems he wasn't accustomed to hearing the voice of the Lord in His word
 - Believers who are unfamiliar with the Lord's word are usually unprepared to hear the Lord when He speaks (in whatever way)
 - Jesus said the sheep know the voice of their shepherd
 - He was stating a spiritual principle that the people of the Lord will come to know Him by His word
 - So that when He calls, we will know it
 - But believers who stray from the Lord, we can have difficulty knowing His call when it comes
- I often field questions from believers who ask how they can know when the Lord is calling or directing them
 - That question is so hard to answer because it's not something you can switch on when you want
 - You are either practiced at listening to the Lord by study of His word, by prayer and by a general sensitivity to His leading...or you aren't
 - And if you aren't, you're going to miss His voice at times
 - The only solution is to spend time with Him in His word and in prayer
- Gideon is the man God has chosen to lead Israel out of this cycle of sin, but he has difficulty hearing the Lord in confidence
 - He has difficulty in recognizing the Lord's voice and having courage to follow
 - And this tells us how far the culture of Israel has fallen
 - When even Israel's heroes are struggling to hear the Lord
 - So they must depend on spiritual crutches before acting

- And even when Gideon did hear, he acted in fear and with doubts

Judg. 6:25 Now on the same night the LORD said to him, "Take your father's bull and a second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it;

Judg. 6:26 and build an altar to the LORD your God on the top of this stronghold in an orderly manner, and take a second bull and offer a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you shall cut down."

Judg. 6:27 Then Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had spoken to him; and because he was too afraid of his father's household and the men of the city to do it by day, he did it by night.

- On the same night that the Lord appeared to Gideon, the Lord tells Gideon it's time to begin the mission God gave him
 - Gideon doesn't even get a day to contemplate God's call
 - His mission begins right away with a raid against the Midianite high places
 - In this case, the altar of concern is Gideon's father's personal family altar
 - Gideon is told by the Lord to take a team of bulls to pull the altar down
 - And then once the altar is torn down, he is to take one of the bulls and sacrifice it to the Lord on a new altar built to replace the idol altar
 - The wood for the fire would be the wooden idols of the goddess Asherah
 - The symbolism couldn't be clearer
 - Baal was a idol in the shape of a bull
 - So the bull god's altar would be torn down by a pair of bulls
 - And Asherah was the fertility goddess carved from young trees
 - So this tree goddess of life will be burned up in service to the living God
 - And for Gideon, the act testified that he was breaking from his father's worship of idols and aligning himself with the God of Israel

- As Joshua declared, as for me and my house, we will worship the Lord
- The moment was similar to the way Moses had to circumcise his own son before he could call upon Pharaoh to obey the Lord
- As Gideon undertakes his mission, his fear still influences his thinking
 - He takes men from his household and goes out under cover of darkness
 - He's afraid of his father's household and the men of the city
 - What might they do to Gideon if they discover him taking down the altar?
 - What might have happened if Gideon had gone out in the day?
 - Maybe the men of the city would have seen it
 - Maybe they would have charged up to stop Gideon
 - And what can we suppose would have happened next?
 - We can't know for sure, but given what God has asked Gideon to do, we can safely assume that the Lord would have defended Gideon
 - But Gideon doubted the Lord's strength, and his fear resulted in robbing the Lord of a chance to receive glory in broad daylight
 - That's what happens when we obey in the shadows but shrink back in the daylight
 - If you hesitate to speak up for your faith when people are watching or try to blend in when persecution is possible, you miss an opportunity
 - Then you're failing to fulfill the very purpose for your calling

Matt. 5:13 “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

Matt. 5:14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;

Matt. 5:15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

Matt. 5:16 “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

- Well, even though Gideon did these things at night, day comes eventually

Judg. 6:28 When the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was torn down, and the Asherah which was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar which had been built.

Judg. 6:29 They said to one another, "Who did this thing?" And when they searched about and inquired, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash did this thing."

Judg. 6:30 Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has torn down the altar of Baal, and indeed, he has cut down the Asherah which was beside it."

Judg. 6:31 But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Will you contend for Baal, or will you deliver him? Whoever will plead for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because someone has torn down his altar."

Judg. 6:32 Therefore on that day he named him Jerubbaal, that is to say, "Let Baal contend against him," because he had torn down his altar.

- The men discover the altar to Baal and Asherah is gone and an altar to Yahweh has been put in its place
 - Notice they are not pleased to find their idol altar gone
 - These are not Midianites, these are Jews
 - You can see how corrupt Jewish society has become in this time
 - When word gets around that Joash's son was responsible, the men of the city demand that Joash deliver his son to them
 - Joash responds in defense of his son
 - Joash says anyone who wants to defend Baal will be put to death
 - In other words, Joash says you can have my son over my dead body
 - And then he smartly says why should anyone die defending a god over a fallen altar?
 - Let Baal defend himself
 - If Baal is really a god with power worth worshipping, then surely he can defend his own altars?
 - Obviously, Joash knew that no such defense was coming

- And so he saves his son and seems to return to Yahweh as well
- And on that day, Joash renames his son Jerubbaal, which means he contends with Baal
- Gideon's first mission teaches us a several lessons clearly
 - First, the defeat of Midian must begin with returning to Yahweh
 - Israel was in this predicament because they have been worshipping idols
 - And yet they continue to worship idols even after seven years of misery under the Midianites
 - So before the Lord will free them from the Midianites, they must step back from the idols
 - Before they can build up a relationship of worshipping God, they must tear down the altars of worship to false gods
 - God is a jealous God, and He will not share His people with anything or anyone else
 - Secondly, when the time comes for God's people to turn from their sin and disobedience, the change begins in our own homes
 - Gideon couldn't expect to lead God's people out of darkness until his own family had come into the light
 - That's the reason behind the NT's requirement for elders and other leaders to be men of high character
 - We can't expect to make it where God is taking us if we're lead by men and women who won't make the trip themselves
 - Finally, we have to go out in confidence that the Lord will win our battles for us
 - Gideon had nothing to fear, as the next morning demonstrated
 - If Gideon's father could keep the men from killing Gideon the next morning, then he could have done it at anytime
 - For although Baal couldn't defend his altars, the Lord God of Israel can certainly defend His

- But by operating in fear under darkness, Gideon lost the opportunity to give the Lord His desired platform

Judg. 6:33 Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the sons of the east assembled themselves; and they crossed over and camped in the valley of Jezreel.

Judg. 6:34 So the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; and he blew a trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called together to follow him.

Judg. 6:35 He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, and they also were called together to follow him; and he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they came up to meet them.

Judg. 6:36 Then Gideon said to God, "If You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken,

Judg. 6:37 behold, I will 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 will know that You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken."

Judg. 6:38 And it was so. When he arose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he drained the dew from the fleece, a bowl full of water.

Judg. 6:39 Then Gideon said to God, "Do not let Your anger burn against me that I may speak once more; please let me make a test once more with the fleece, let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on all the ground."

Judg. 6:40 God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground.

- Most people have heard of the story of Gideon's fleeces
 - Notice it begins with the assembling of a huge number of Midianites who were preparing to enter the land for a mass raid of the Jewish cities
 - This pattern had been going on for seven years
 - We learn later in chapter 8 that the number of this invading horde was 135,000 men
 - Now we understand why the people of Israel have been powerless to stop them
 - The Lord clothed Gideon with His Spirit causing Gideon to determine to fight this horde
 - He blows a trumpet which is a signal for troops to assemble
 - The first to respond were a family of Benjamites

- Later, members of other tribes came as requested to stop the invasion
- But then we see Gideon's fears return leading him to indecision and doubt
 - In this well-known test, Gideon asks God for another sign
 - He places a woolen fleece out in the open overnight and asks God to perform a miracle
 - The fleece will be wet with dew, but the ground will be dry
- The Lord grants the miracle, and Gideon sees it clearly, but then he asks for a do over
 - He asks for the opposite condition this time
 - Either way, it's a miracle for one to be dry and the other wet
 - And once more, the Lord grants it
- Sometimes we remember Gideon's actions as an example of faith, but as we've studied it in context, we can clearly see it's the opposite
 - Gideon is a weak man, a man who reflects the spiritual weakness of Israel's society as a whole
 - He isn't accustomed to hearing the Lord
 - He hears and then doubts
 - He asks for signs even when the Spirit of the Lord has delivered clear instruction
 - And he doubts even the signs God gives
 - He is a man trying to obey, which is certainly notable
 - But to quote the esteem philosopher, Yoda, "There is no try. There is only do."
 - In the end, Gideon's hesitation and inability to act in confidence having heard from the Lord is a testimony against him

Judges 7A

- Have you ever wondered why God bothers to work through mankind to accomplish His purposes?
 - God has all the power to do anything He wishes without anyone else involved
 - He made the entire universe merely by speaking it into existence
 - He holds it together by the power of His word
 - So why bother partnering with weak, sinful humanity?
 - Clearly, the reason God works through men *can't* be because we bring something useful to the process
 - We aren't invited into God's work to improve the outcome
 - God invites us to join Him at work so He can improve us
 - This is exactly the plan for Gideon
- We know the Lord is working to free Israel from the Midianites
 - That's the cycle of the period of Judges
 - Israel falls, God punishes, the people repent, the Lord rescues
 - So we know a rescue is coming
 - But we also know the people of Israel are becoming increasingly weak spiritually
 - So all that remains to be seen is how the Lord will accomplish His purpose through this weak people
 - So far, Lord has chosen His hero: a weak, wavering man named Gideon
 - As we saw last week, Gideon is unaccustomed to hearing the Lord
 - When the Lord spoke to Gideon, he was unsure if it was the Lord
 - And then when Gideon received confirmation the Lord was calling him, he doubted the Lord's commitment to be with him

- So Gideon demanded a sign
- And then when a sign was given, Gideon doubted the Lord's sincerity
- Gideon was about as weak a follower of the Lord as we might find in all the Bible
- And yet here's the Lord endeavoring to work through him
- So back to our question for the morning
 - Why does the Lord need Gideon?
 - Well, as we can see, it's actually Gideon that needs the Lord
 - Gideon needs to learn to hear and trust the Lord
 - He needs to recognize that the Lord's word can be trusted
 - He has to understand that the Lord has the power to keep His promises
 - And that Gideon's success doesn't depend on his own strength
 - So if the Lord is going to demonstrate these things to His servant Gideon, how best can God teach this lesson?
 - Wouldn't we expect the Lord to put Gideon in situations where his weak faith can be strengthened?
 - Shouldn't we expect the Lord to expose the error of Gideon's fearful nature?
 - And through these circumstances, the Lord can teach Gideon to trust in Him without reservation or doubt
- That's exactly what the Lord intends to do even as He works to free Israel
 - Remember at the end of chapter 6 last week, the Midianites were raiders were massing on the eastern border of Canaan
 - They were preparing to ride into the land, as was their pattern every year, to pillage the people of Israel
 - But this year the Lord has called Gideon to lead the defense of Israel against this imposing enemy
 - So now Gideon begins to recruit his army to fight the Midianites

Judg. 7:1 Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him, rose early and camped beside the spring of Harod; and the camp of Midian was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley.

Judg. 7:2 The Lord said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, for Israel would become boastful, saying, 'My own power has delivered me.'

Judg. 7:3 "Now therefore come, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever is afraid and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead.'" So 22,000 people returned, but 10,000 remained.

- The one who contends with Baal (Jerubbaal), the one who mows down adversaries (Gideon) assembled an army in northern Canaan in the Jezreel Valley
 - The camp of the enemy had now crossed the Jordan River from their home territory in Ammon and Moab
 - They are staging near the hill of Moreh
 - From this position they can proceed southward by way of valleys leading through the heart of the land
 - Every major settlement in the land would be vulnerable to their marauding
 - All that stands between them and the people is Gideon's fledgling army
 - We learn in v.3 that Gideon has succeeded in recruiting 32,000 men into his army
 - That number sounds impressive until we remember that the Midianites have 135,000 men in their army
 - So Gideon is outnumbered by more than 4:1
 - And don't forget the Midianites have camels, which Israel doesn't
 - And the Midianites are experienced fighters, while Israel has no standing army
 - So by any assessment, Israel is at a significant disadvantage in this fight
 - But we're not worried, are we?

- We know the Lord is on Israel's side
- So although those numbers aren't very reassuring, we know the Lord can win the battle anyway
- But then in v.2 the Lord declares that Gideon has *too many* men for this battle
 - The Lord says that the people of Israel might be inclined to see their victory as a result of their own hands
 - And of course if they were come to that conclusion, then they would miss the point of what the Lord was doing
 - More over they would deny the Lord the glory that was rightfully His
 - But wait a minute, the odds are already stacked against Gideon and Israel?
 - If his ragtag army of 32,000 beats 135,000 warriors on camels, then certainly the Lord would receive the glory, no?
 - The Lord has allowed Israel to win battles with even stronger odds under Joshua or other judges
 - So the Lord isn't opposed to winning with strong armies
 - But for some reason in this case, Israel's army is still too strong
 - So the Lord instructs Gideon how he will whittle down his forces
 - He tells Gideon to release those from service who are fearful and trembling at the notion of the fight
 - We might assume every man facing battle against a superior foe might be fearful
 - But obviously, some men are more prone to fear
 - While everyone was feeling fear, some men were allowing their fear to control them, leading them to tremble
 - This was in keeping with the Law in Deut 20 that says Israel may not force the fearful into battle but should offer them the opportunity to return home
 - These are the men Gideon is to release, and when he did, he suddenly found his forces reduced by nearly 70%

- Rather than 32,000 men, he now had only 10,000 men
- Now Gideon is outnumbered by more than 13:1
- Surely now Gideon's odds are sufficiently long enough to ensure God gets the credit when Israel wins the battle

Judg. 7:4 Then the Lord said to Gideon, "The people are still too many; bring them down to the water and I will test them for you there. Therefore it shall be that he of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go with you; but everyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go."

- The Lord tells Gideon He must reduce their numbers even further!
 - In fact, the Lord is about to reduce Gideon's army to a ridiculously small size
 - Gideon is already working with a skeleton group, so what does God accomplish by making it so pitiful?
 - Once again, we can only assume the Lord has some other purpose at work here
 - We begin to get our answer in the next part of the story
 - He orders Gideon to take his troops down to the waters of the Springs of Ein Harod to "test" them, the Lord says
 - In the course of this test, the Lord says He will tell Gideon which men to keep and which to dismiss
 - In other words, the Lord will choose His army according to His standards
 - And what standard do you think the Lord will use to select His army?
 - Perhaps He will apply a test of strength so that only the strongest will remain
 - Or perhaps the Lord will test their warfare skills or their bravery
 - Or perhaps the Lord will test their spiritual strength and faith
 - But the Lord's test focuses on none of these things
 - Instead, the Lord devises a curious almost nonsensical test

Judg. 7:5 So he brought the people down to the water. And the Lord said to Gideon, "You shall separate everyone who laps the water with his tongue as a dog laps, as well as everyone who kneels to drink."

Judg. 7:6 Now the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was 300 men; but all the rest of the people kneeled to drink water.

Judg. 7:7 The Lord said to Gideon, "I will deliver you with the 300 men who lapped and will give the Midianites into your hands; so let all the other people go, each man to his home."

Judg. 7:8 So the 300 men took the people's provisions and their trumpets into their hands. And Gideon sent all the other men of Israel, each to his tent, but retained the 300 men; and the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

- The Lord's test will examine the way men chose to drink from the water of the Spring
 - The Lord says those who drink water in a conventional manner would be separated from those who drank in an unconventional way
 - When you don't have a cup or canteen, the natural way to drink water from a stream is to kneel down next to water, placing your mouth into the stream
 - Or perhaps even to wade into the water and drink by cupping your hands
 - But the Lord says some men will chose to drink the water like a dog, lapping at the water in their hands
 - In v.6 the Lord describes the process of these men as lapping at the water in their hands, as they bring their hands to their mouth
 - Now why would someone drink in such a strange way?
 - If you have brought your hand to your mouth, why lap at it?
 - Why not just drink the water in a natural way?
- Some have suggested that this was a tactic to maintain awareness of your surroundings
 - They propose that by lapping the water a person could maintain a clear view of the horizon
 - In this way they were wise to maintain vigilance against the enemy's attack

- Unfortunately this conjecture is not only wrong, it's the opposite of what the Lord is trying to accomplish by His test
- In Jewish culture, the lowest animal was not the pig (as we might assume)...it was the dog
 - Remember, when the Jews wanted to cast an insult upon the Gentiles, they didn't call them pigs
 - Israel called Gentiles dogs
 - Even scripture uses the term to describe the most ungodly of men
 - For example, speaking of those in the Lake of Fire, the Lord says

Rev. 22:15 Outside are the **dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.**

- Further proof that poodles will not be present in the New Jerusalem (can I get a Amen?)
- So in v.5 God specifically describes these men as drinking "as a dog"
 - In later generations when the children of Israel read this story and heard the Lord compare these men to a dog, they would have interpreted it as the worst possible comparison
 - That's how we should understand it
 - These men aren't the most savvy warriors...they are the dogs, the least of the men
- So out of Gideon's 10,000 men, the vast majority chose to drink water from the brook in a conventional manner
 - But 300 men took to drinking out of their hands lapping like dogs
 - The Lord said *these* are the guys He wants on Gideon's team
 - Even the perfect number of the them (300) confirms for us that this is the Lord's doing
 - So now thanks to the Lord's efforts Gideon's army is out numbered 450:1
 - As the Lord declared, this is a number guaranteed to bring God all the credit once the victory is won

- Nevertheless, had the victory been won by 10,000 men or even 32,000 men, we would still have reason to credit God with the outcome
- Obviously, this ridiculously small force only serves to reinforce that truth
- But my point is that the reduction in force wasn't merely a matter of increasing the degree of difficulty for God
- There must be something else at work here...
- Notice that God's first step of diminishing Gideon's army centered on removing those who were fearful
 - God was indicating that fear has no part in following the Lord to victory
 - Then the Lord told Gideon to remove those who thought and acted in conventional ways, according to man's normal tendencies
 - Leaving behind the weak, the despised, those who weren't like the world
- The Lord constructed an impossibly small force by removing fear, eliminating human convention and personal honor
 - The message the Lord is sending is starting to become clear
 - Those who wish to serve the Lord and see the victory can't serve in fear
 - Those who God calls must be willing to set aside human conventions about success and strength
 - God will do impossible things in ways only He can, so when we fear we're saying we don't have faith in His power or goodness
 - And when we rely on human standards of wisdom and strength, we're pushing the Lord off His throne as it were
- The Lord constructed this entire exercise to expose the weaknesses in Gideon's faith, especially his tendency to live in fear rather than in faith in God's strength
 - The Lord has taken Gideon's army down to the point that Gideon couldn't have helped but experience fear and doubt

- Even the bravest man would have felt the pressure as the Lord took more and more men away
 - And even the most faithful follower would begin to doubt in his ability to win this war
 - But that fear was completely unnecessary when you remember the Lord could have defeated the Midianites with even zero men
 - The size of the human army is completely irrelevant to the outcome
 - The Lord is systematically diminishing the army's size merely to trigger Gideon's fear so He can teach Gideon to put it aside
 - Gideon needed to see that human limitations are irrelevant when considering what God can accomplish through us
 - If God's people allow fear to guide our choices for when and how to follow God, we're going to spend a lot more time worrying and a lot less time following
 - If we decide what God can accomplish based on human convention or personal abilities, then we're never going to see miracles
 - Remember, Gideon was ready to turn down his opportunity to serve God because he thought he didn't possess the proper pedigree
 - And he was so afraid to follow the Lord into battle that he required multiple signs to be convinced
 - Think what he would have missed out on experiencing had the Lord not addressed His fears?
 - Spiritual maturity requires that we move beyond seeing our weaknesses as barriers for God
 - Who we are or what odds we face in ministry or life in general are merely opportunities for God to demonstrate His power through us
 - Assuming we are walking with the Lord and answering His call, then we can be sure He will show up to win the battles we face
 - But if that's the kind of walk you want, then you need to be prepared to see the Lord expose and test those weakness standing in your way

- The Lord reduced Gideon's number to a point where Gideon experienced a crisis of faith
- So that Gideon could face his fears and realize they were barriers to faithful service
- Whatever stands in the way of your service to God needs to be exposed as well...and the Lord is an Expert at exposing weakness
- So in the face of fear, Gideon hears the the Lord say in v.7 that He was now ready to deliver the Midianites into Gideon's hands
 - This man, a man full of doubt, a man lacking the proper pedigree, a man accompanied by 300 "dogs" was going to defeat an army of 135,000
 - I would have loved to see the expression on the 300 men remaining – to say nothing of Gideon himself – when God gave His final order
 - I'm sure every man was trying to put on a brave face
 - And then to make matters worse, we hear in v.8 that the entire camp of the Midianites is visible down below in the valley
 - The Jezreel valley is surrounded by five high peaks
 - From each peak, you have a spectacular view of a wide open plain miles wide
 - This army of Midianites with their camels and tents would have virtually filled this valley
 - Imagine 300 men standing atop one of these peaks looking down on such a force
 - What is going on in their hearts? Once again, the answer has to be fear
- So to reassure the men, the Lord extends His grace to the men

Judg. 7:9 Now the same night it came about that the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hands.

Judg. 7:10 "But if you are afraid to go down, go with Purah your servant down to the camp,

Judg. 7:11 and you will hear what they say; and afterward your hands will be strengthened that you may go down against the camp." So he went with Purah his servant down to the outposts of the army that was in the camp.

- Notice the Lord says to Gideon go into battle, but then He qualifies the command
 - He says I don't want you to enter my service in a fearful spirit
 - The emotion of fear is not an irrational response to circumstances
 - It is highly rational
 - Fear says something about what we believe about our situation
 - Fear means we have considered possibilities and have an expectation of the worst case outcome
 - For example, imagine you hear a strange noise while lying in bed one night
 - You could conclude it's just the sound of the house settling or an animal running across the roof
 - Or you could assume a thief has entered your house and is preparing to enter your bedroom and attack you
 - One assumption will allow you to fall back asleep easily
 - The other assumption will leave you in a breathless panic fearing what follows
 - If you experience fear, then you know you have determined that the thief explanation is the more likely possibility
 - Fear isn't raw, irrational emotion; it's based on considered assumptions, however unlikely
 - So when we fear in the face of God's call, we're saying something about our view of God and our trust in His power and goodness
 - If you fear what may happen to a son or daughter sent into mission work, then you are demonstrating a lack of confidence in God's ability to care for them no matter what they face
 - Or else you are indicting God's wisdom and purposes should He decide to allow your children to experience difficult times
 - Either way, our fear of what may follow from obeying God's call indicts either God's sovereignty or God's goodness

- Fear in our relationship with the Lord is a sin
 - And that's why the Lord has been at work to expose Gideon's fear in these circumstances
 - God wants Gideon to walk with Him in confidence
- Having said that, the Lord is not without mercy for His fearful, doubting children
 - And so the Lord makes accommodation for Gideon's fear
 - He says if you fear, sneak down into the camp with Purah, another member of the 300
 - His name means fruitful, so will he be for Gideon's faith
 - I love the way the Lord sends Gideon a friend to help him in his time of fear
 - The Lord could have just easily told Gideon to go down by himself
 - But the Lord knew that when we're fearing, we are strengthened by friends working with us
 - And the Lord promises that when they go into the camp, they will hear something that will strengthen their confidence
 - What could they possibly hear that would make them more confident in defeating 135,000 men?
 - The only thing we might imagine could be cause for confidence would be a report that exactly 134,700 of the Midianites were going on vacation
 - We'll learn what they hear next week, but even now we can see God's lesson to Gideon
 - If the Lord can deliver a message of courage through the mouths of the enemy, then surely He's in control of everything and everyone
 - No man's actions or outcomes in life are outside God's control
 - And therefore, on what basis do we have to fear?
 - If God is for us, who can be against us?

Judges 7B

- Gideon is the fearful leader of a pitiful army of 300 nonconformist water lappers
 - The Lord has called him to enter battle against 135,000 Midianites and Amalekites with hordes of camels
 - They have no chance, humanly speaking
 - Still, the Lord has promised a victory
 - And as we studied last week, the impossibility of this battle was intended to expose Gideon's fearful nature
 - Gideon's fear may be natural, but it's also an impediment to trusting the Lord
 - Gideon is guilty of a mistake every believer will make from time to time
 - He's judging his circumstances with worldly understanding
 - He's not applying the God multiplier
 - He isn't giving proper consideration to what God can do
 - One commentator observed that no character in the Bible receives more divine assurance than Gideon and yet no one displays more doubt
 - In fact, Gideon is the only judge that the Lord speaks to directly by way of the Angel of the Lord
 - He's the closest to the Lord in that sense
 - Yet Gideon's prone to acting like the Lord is nowhere to be found
- Perhaps it's because of Gideon's weakness that the Lord is working so hard to reassure the hesitant warrior
 - Last week, the Lord offered a measure of reassurance to fearful Gideon
 - The Lord told Gideon to go attack, with only a few hundred men and no real weapons
 - But the Lord added that if Gideon was too afraid, he shouldn't go
 - Rather the Lord would give him confidence from the camp of the enemy

- Let's back up a few verses to get that context again

Judg. 7:9 Now the same night it came about that the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hands.

Judg. 7:10 "But if you are afraid to go down, go with Purah your servant down to the camp,

Judg. 7:11 and you will hear what they say; and afterward your hands will be strengthened that you may go down against the camp." So he went with Purah his servant down to the outposts of the army that was in the camp.

Judg. 7:12 Now the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the sons of the east were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as numerous as the sand on the seashore.

- As we saw last week, the Lord told Gideon to venture into the camp of the enemy to receive a word of confirmation
 - Even this step of assurance is a test of Gideon's trust
 - If the guy is already afraid of going into battle against the Midianites, then surely he fears approaching their camp too
 - The Lord could have given Gideon a sign right then and there
 - Instead, the Lord asks Gideon to take a small, manageable step of faith
 - And in grace, the Lord has allowed Gideon to go by cover of darkness
 - And the Lord provides a friend, Purah, to accompany Gideon
 - Once more we see the Lord paving the stepping stone for Gideon to follow in faith
 - The Lord is leading Gideon in the direction He wants Gideon to go
 - And He's merciful to give Gideon stepping stones to get there
 - And with each stone, the Lord asks Gideon to meet Him halfway with a degree of trust and faith
 - In this case, the Lord asks Gideon to walk down the hill to the camp trusting the Lord to make good on His promise to encourage Gideon

- This is the essence of faith in the face of calamity
 - We have to place our trust in the character and goodness of God
 - We say to ourselves, "I know the situation leaves me fearing and tempted to run away, but I trust the Lord is up to good somehow I can't see yet."
 - As Jeremiah said to Israel centuries later:

- **Jer. 29:11** 'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.

- And just to reinforce for us how reasonable Gideon's fear was, Samuel records just how great his adversary was
 - The army filling the Jezreel Valley was beyond number
 - They are as laying in the valley like locusts
 - And just trying to count all their camels was like trying to count the grains of sand at the seashore
 - How will 300 men defeat this army?
 - Only by faith in the Lord
 - Remember the Lord is the One Who assembled this enemy in the first place as a measure of judgment against Israel
 - And now the Lord has hand-picked the men in Israel to battle this enemy
 - The Lord decided it would be a fight of 135,000 vs. 300
 - It's not a fair fight for the Midianites
 - That's where faith in trust comes in for Gideon and for us
 - Do you believe that the Lord is in control
 - Then you can sit back with the popcorn and enjoy the show that the Lord has planned
 - Or you can worry about things you can't control, and that worry gets you nowhere
- Then it comes time for the moment of encouragement the Lord promised

Judg. 7:13 When Gideon came, behold, a man was relating a dream to his friend. And he said, "Behold, I had a dream; a loaf of barley bread was tumbling into the camp of Midian, and it came to the tent and struck it so that it fell, and turned it upside down so that the tent lay flat."

Judg. 7:14 His friend replied, "This is nothing less than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given Midian and all the camp into his hand."

- Somewhere on the edge of the enemy's huge camp, Gideon and Purah are hiding nearby a couple of Midianites
 - As they hide in the bushes or perhaps a boulder, they overhear the men talking
 - These men were probably reclining after the meal, perhaps near an open fire
 - Maybe they were inside their tent with Gideon listening outside the tent walls
 - As Gideon eavesdrops, he hears one man telling a dream to the other man
 - In the Bible, the Lord periodically uses dreams to reveal things to men and women
 - We remember Joseph's dreams of course
 - Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar received dreams
 - Later in the New Testament we see Pilate's wife receive a dream concerning Jesus
 - When these dreams are properly interpreted, they lead to a revelation from the Lord
 - Not every dream is a message from God, so we can't expect to interpret every dream with an expectation that it leads somewhere meaningful
 - Moreover, the Lord is no longer speaking through dreams and prophets
 - As Hebrews 1 reminds us, the Lord has moved to speaking to humanity through His greatest Messenger, Christ
 - And no other method is needed at this point

- But in Gideon's day, dreams were still an instrument God used, so through this conversation the Lord relates to Gideon both a dream and its interpretation
 - The dream is of a barley loaf barreling down a mountainside into the camp of the Midianites
 - And this barley loaf bowls over the tents leaving them turned upside down
 - Barley was the grain commonly eaten by the poorest of Israel
 - And it very well may have become the primary grain for the people since the Midianites were taking the wheat for themselves
 - The interpretation of the dream comes from the soldier's neighbor in the camp
 - He says the barley loaf is a symbol of Gideon
 - And the knocking over of the tents is a premonition that that Gideon's army will defeat Midian
 - How did this soldier know to connect the barley with Gideon?
 - Humanly speaking, news may have reached the camp that Gideon was assembling a force to oppose the Midianites
 - Of course, we know the whole thing is being orchestrated supernaturally by the Lord
- The Lord uses enemy soldiers to bring both the dream and its interpretation to Gideon
 - If you read scripture with a proper appreciation for the sovereignty of God, then you won't miss the significance of moments like this
 - First, remember that Gideon was not given any direction on where to go in the camp
 - He just went to whatever spot he came upon first
 - And yet he happened upon the exact tent out of 135,000 men where this dream was being discussed
 - And he arrives at the perfect moment to hear the conversation

- This reminds us of God's omnipotence to orchestrate all events according to His will
- Including bending the will and actions of men to fit God's preordained plan
- Secondly, the man Gideon happens upon has *already* experienced the dream, whether earlier that night or perhaps the night before
 - In fact, this man was having his dream even before Gideon was told to go into the camp
 - We might ask how the Lord knew that Gideon would take Him up on the offer to spy on the camp
 - This reminds us of God's omniscience to look into the future and anticipate all events to fit His purposes
 - He's always working even on events that have yet to materialize in our experience
- Finally, there was a soldier with the proper interpretation to understand the revelation of the dream and speak it out loud for Gideon to hear
 - Clearly, the man didn't arrive at such an obscure interpretation on his own
 - There is nothing obvious about associating Gideon with barley loaves
 - And in fact, it's remarkable that this particular man even knew Gideon's name at all
 - This reminds us of God's omnipresence by His Spirit to be working in every place at all times to accomplish His will
 - In this case, the Spirit was working in the heart of this soldier to reveal God's will
 - Even as He was working in Gideon's heart to steady his nerves and lead him to the right tent
- If you want to follow the Lord in strength of faith and confidence, you need only remember you serve a God Who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent
 - I think it's a rule of scripture that our strength of faith is proportional to our understanding and acceptance of God's sovereignty

- When you have a high view of God's sovereignty, you'll worship Him more earnestly, follow Him more faithfully, and acknowledge Him more boldly
- You'll find courage in the face of trials more easier when we understand that every detail you're facing was planned by God before you even knew what was coming
 - That's the primary source of encouragement for Gideon here
 - Notice what Gideon does immediately after hearing this message

Judg. 7:15 When Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship. He returned to the camp of Israel and said, "Arise, for the LORD has given the camp of Midian into your hands."

Judg. 7:16 He divided the 300 men into three companies, and he put trumpets and empty pitchers into the hands of all of them, with torches inside the pitchers.

Judg. 7:17 He said to them, "Look at me and do likewise. And behold, when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do.

Judg. 7:18 "When I and all who are with me blow the trumpet, then you also blow the trumpets all around the camp and say, 'For the LORD and for Gideon.'"

- When Gideon hears this exchange, he bowed right then and there in worship to the Lord
 - Can you imagine the relief Gideon felt?
 - The fear left him, the tension and worry evaporated
 - I imagine he had tears of gratitude and joy welling up
 - Spontaneously, he enters into a moment of worshipping the Lord God
 - But notice that there was nothing knew in the information Gideon hears
 - Even before he traveled down this mountain, he heard the Lord say in v.9 that He had given the camp into Gideon's hand
 - What Gideon heard from the soldiers was exactly the same thing, that Gideon would destroy the camp
 - So why did Gideon worship now and not earlier in v.9?

- Because that's exactly how you feel when you have an encounter with the sovereignty and power of God
 - In an instant Gideon began to grasp the power of a God Who could bring all these details together for Gideon's sake
 - I've been in moments like this...perhaps you have too
 - The Lord pulls back the curtain a little to show you how much of life's seeming randomness is following a script God wrote
 - When the full force of that recognition hits you, you can't help but worship
- That's the encouragement the Lord wanted to offer Gideon, and the basis of that encouragement was to come to know the power of God
 - There is only one answer God gives to those who doubt Him or fail to follow Him in trust and obedience: a display of His power
 - When Jacob feared, the Lord showed him a ladder of angels coming to help him
 - When Moses doubted, the Lord made his hand white with leprosy
 - And to Gideon He shows His power to control the enemy
 - Gideon didn't receive proof he would win or even how the battle would proceed
 - But what he did receive was evidence that God is more than capable of doing what He promised
 - And if case you've been left out, you've received an even greater display of God's power to keep His promises

2Cor. 4:13 But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE," we also believe, therefore we also speak,

2Cor. 4:14 knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you.

- The Father raised Jesus before the apostles' eyes so that we would have that proof of God's power to keep His promises
- Death is not to be feared...it is not the end of you and it leads to your glory

- Live your life for God without fear of what might come, because nothing can harm you when the Lord is on your side
- That's the message Gideon received
- So emboldened by his confidence in God's power to deliver him, Gideon jumps into action

Judg. 7:19 So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and smashed the pitchers that were in their hands.

Judg. 7:20 When 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 cried, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!"

Judg. 7:21 Each stood in his place around the camp; and all the army ran, crying out as they fled.

Judg. 7:22 When they blew 300 trumpets, the LORD set the sword of one against another even throughout the whole army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the edge of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath.

- As it turns out, Gideon had a plan, and a pretty good one
 - Perhaps the Lord gave Gideon this military maneuver directly or simply lead him to this idea through the advice of other men
 - Regardless, it was a daring idea and it would have given the men a reason to hope for a positive outcome
 - We know Gideon is leading the fight on the basis of the confidence the Lord gave him through the dream
 - But it's another thing to convince 300 men to enter battle against such long odds
 - What Gideon proposed to gain their confidence was a surprise attack designed to convince the enemy that a vast Jewish army was descending upon them from the hills
 - Gideon split the 300 men into three groups of a hundred each
 - In v.19 we're told that Gideon takes his hundred men and moves to the outskirts of the camp at the middle watch of the night
 - The middle watch was midnight, when the Midianites would have been sleeping

- They attack right after the watch was posted, so the new guards were still settling in
 - The other two groups of one hundred men each moved left and right from Gideon on the hillside so that they spread out around the valley
 - Then Gideon's group initiated the launch
 - Simultaneously, each man blew a shofar, a ram's horn that makes a loud, resonating tone
 - Secondly, each man carried a lit torch, but the light of the torch was hidden inside the pot
 - Then at the moment of the attack, they smashed their pots and the light in the pot suddenly became visible
 - Typically, in battle only the commander of a squad of men carried a shofar and a torch into battle
 - He would use them to direct the attack of his unit
 - But in Gideon's army all 300 men possessed both a torch and a shofar
 - So that at Gideon's sign, all 300 blew their horns and exposed the light of their torches
 - There's a beautiful picture being created by Gideon's brilliant plan
 - The blowing of a horn announces the appearance of God in scripture
 - Particularly in the feast of Trumpets at the inauguration of the Jewish New Year and the picture of the Resurrection of the Church
 - And the light of these torches pictures the light of the Spirit in the world through the lives of God's children

2Cor. 4:6 For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

2Cor. 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;

2Cor. 4:8 we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing;

2Cor. 4:9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

2Cor. 4:10 always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

- These 300 men were earthen vessels carrying the light of God in their faithful obedience to the Lord's call
 - But before that light could shine in the darkness, the earthen vessels had to be shattered
 - As long as the men lived in their fearful flesh, the light of God in them remain hidden
 - God had to smash their dependence on flesh and expose His light in them
 - Only then could they achieve victory
- The enemy in the camp awakes in a groggy state to see the hillsides alive with points of light and the sounds of many horns
 - Assuming that each point of light and horn represents an entire unit of soldiers, the Midianites conclude that a great force was descending upon them
 - But in v.21 we're told that Gideon's 300 men just stood in their place on the hillside
 - They don't run into the battle
 - They let the Lord win the battle for them
 - Immediately, the Midianites react in panic and confusion by killing each other
 - Why would they do this?
 - Well, the camp was actually three marauding armies of Midianites, Amalekites and other Arabians
 - And these different groups didn't share the same language
 - So perhaps in the confusion, they mistook each other for the enemy
 - The bottom line is the Lord was directly this outcome, and Gideon and his troops didn't need to do anything at all
 - Once again, the Lord had this plan from the beginning
 - Which explains why he only needed 300 men for the battle
 - And they didn't need to be particularly strong warriors either

- They just had to be men willing to follow the instructions of a man following the Lord
- If you were a soldier evaluating this situation with human logic, you would have given up on God and Gideon long ago
- You would never have gone along far enough to get this moment, to see this miracle take place
- Faith will take you places that sight can never reach
- Very soon, the panic drives the enemy to retreat out of the valley
 - And Gideon's forces see their opportunity to finish these guys off once and for all
 - But clearly 300 soldiers aren't going to destroy such a large force on their own
 - So they call for help

[Judg. 7:23](#) The men of Israel were summoned from Naphtali and Asher and all Manasseh, and they pursued Midian.

[Judg. 7:24](#) Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against Midian and take the waters before them, as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan." So all the men of Ephraim were summoned and they took the waters as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan.

[Judg. 7:25](#) They captured the two leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb, and they killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and they killed Zeeb at the wine press of Zeeb, while they pursued Midian; and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon from across the Jordan.

- Immediately, Gideon summons support from the surrounding tribes of Israel
 - And the tribes respond by sending men to prosecute the battle
 - Gideon makes another sound tactical maneuver
 - He calls for the men of Ephraim on the eastern border of Canaan to guard the way to the Jordan
 - The hill country of Ephraim included all the escape routes to Midian by way of the Jordan River through wadis or deep canyons
 - By controlling these canyons, the Israelites could prevent the enemies of God from fleeing to fight another day

- So Gideon calls for Ephraim to secure their border from Jezreel to Beth-barah, which is directly East of Bethlehem
 - That's a distance of 60 miles through the heart of Canaan to the northern border of the Dead Sea
 - By preventing an escape, the Israelites capture and kill most of the Midianite army including the two leaders
 - The two leaders' names mean Raven and Wolf
 - Their names reflect the way the Midianites were scavengers and predators, but now they become the hunted
 - The places of their death still carried their names in Samuel's day
- In the end, this victory is nothing if not a testimony to the power of God to do anything through the feeble hand and feet of faithful servants
 - It began with a call and progressed to signs of encouragement
 - It moved to removing fear and dependence on human wisdom and strength
 - And it included signs of encouragement and displays of God's authority
 - Once God's servants were willing to worship the Lord who called them, then the work began
 - And in the Lord did all the work
 - So why did He even need Gideon in the first place?
 - We already answered that...God never needed Gideon
 - Gideon needed the Lord even more than Gideon understood
 - And so Gideon was invited into the battle to build his faith
 - How is the Lord testing your faith? Because He's certainly at work in your life at all times
 - Has He placed a certain call on you? Are you hesitant to obey?
 - You may have your reasons, but perhaps reason is the problem
 - Let the Lord show His sovereignty in your life and worship and follow Him

Judges 8A

- Last week Gideon won an improbable victory against a much stronger army
 - His tactics were inspired despite having virtually no army
 - And the Lord ensured his victory would be complete
 - Because the Lord intended to push the Midianites out of the land once and for all
 - As we've observed Gideon responding to the Lord's call, we've taken note of Gideon's weaknesses
 - His fearfulness to follow the Lord
 - His unfamiliarity with hearing and obeying the word of the Lord
 - His need for repeated reinforcement to trust the Lord's faithfulness
 - In that way Gideon is a poster child for the declining state of Israel in these days of judges ruling
 - Men do what is right in their own eyes, which means they are self-centered, self-righteous and far from God
 - Men are unwilling and unable to unify in service to God
 - And ungodliness and sin is continually present among the people
 - Only the Lord's grace and mercy has saved Israel from complete destruction or apostasy
- Given that this is the backdrop of Gideon's story, then it won't surprise us to learn that Gideon's success on the battlefield didn't transfer to his walk with the Lord
 - In fact, Gideon and his countrymen are going to quickly return to their true nature
 - And we see that slide beginning even as the battle is still raging
 - Let's rejoin Gideon's army as they press the fight against the Midianites

Judg. 7:24 Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against Midian and take the waters before them, as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan." So all the men of Ephraim were summoned and they took the waters as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan.

Judg. 7:25 They captured the two leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb, and they killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and they killed Zeeb at the wine press of Zeeb, while they pursued Midian; and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon from across the Jordan.

Judg. 8:1 Then the men of Ephraim said to him, "What is this thing you have done to us, not calling us when you went to fight against Midian?" And they contended with him vigorously.

- As we read last week, Gideon calls the men of Ephraim to join the battle against the fleeing Midianites
 - Ephraim was the tribe on the eastern-most border of Israel's land
 - So they were in the best position to stop the retreating enemy and put an end to them
 - They responded to Gideon's call and quickly dispatch with most of the army
 - Most importantly, they kill the two leaders of Midian
 - When the Ephraimites delivered the heads of the enemy to Gideon, they come with a complaint
 - In v.8:1, they ask Gideon why he hadn't included them in the original call to arms to battle the Midianites
 - Back in chapter 7 we read about Gideon calling up an army in response to the Angel of the Lord's instructions

Judg. 6:34 So the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; and he blew a trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called together to follow him.

Judg. 6:35 He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, and they also were called together to follow him; and he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they came up to meet them.

- Notice the tribes that Gideon called were the tribes geographically located around the Jezreel valley
- Absent from the call was the tribe of Ephraim

- And they are now upset that they weren't included in the glory of this victory
- At this time in Israel's history, tribal leadership had yet to fully emerge
 - Some tribes were certainly larger than others and some had more resources than others
 - But we don't see one or two tribes leading the rest as will happen in later generations
 - And since this was a time when men did what was right in their own eyes, we can expect that some tribes were beginning to set their sights on power
 - There is no centralized leader, and nature abhors a vacuum
 - Perhaps the most politically ambitious tribe was Ephraim
 - It was one of the larger tribes and it was located in the middle of the land rich with resources
 - It fancied itself a contender
 - So as Israel wins this great victory over a hated enemy, Ephraim felt slighted to have been left out
 - So they contend with Gideon to reassert their power against this rising leader
- Let's pause for a moment to put their concerns in perspective
 - First, Ephraim had every opportunity to fight against the Midianites for the past seven years
 - No one prevented them from rising up to defend Israel
 - Or from organizing an army to defend the land
 - Of course, the Lord wouldn't have allowed them to do so if they had tried
 - But the point is they are only complaining after someone else had already done the hard work without them
 - And speaking of the Lord, they are ignoring the obvious fact that this wasn't a victory won by a large army that they were excluded from joining

- On the contrary, it was an army that God chose, not Gideon
- God made it purposely tiny and absent strong warriors
- So they can't act as if they were slighted by Gideon
- Finally, they are contending with Gideon as if they were the victims of unfair treatment by their brothers, having been left out in the battle
 - But in reality, the Ephraimites were the ones who were trying to gain the upper hand on their brothers
 - In a sense, they were upset at having been beaten at their own game
 - They wanted to be the dominant tribe in Israel, and this set of circumstances puts a kink in their plans
- Now remember all this contention happens while the fight is still unfinished, so Gideon can little afford to waste time deal with a mutiny in his own army
 - So let's look at how Gideon deals with the situation

Judg. 8:2 But 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?"

Judg. 8:3 "God has given the leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb into your hands; and what was I able to do in comparison with you?" Then their anger toward him subsided when he said that.

- Gideon uses psychology to win them over
- Is not the harvest of Ephraim better than the harvest that Abiezar
- Abiezar is a common family name among the tribe of Manassah, which was one of the tribes that fought with Gideon in the Jezreel Valley
- So Gideon is asking who has obtained the better part of this victory, Gideon's army or Ephraim?
- And then Gideon points out that the Lord gave Ephraim the opportunity to take the lives if the two great leaders of Midian
 - So appealing to their pride, Gideon says didn't you get the better end of the deal?

- Instead of fighting the common soldiers in the valley, you fought the mighty leaders
- So consider yourselves as having been given the greater honor
- Clearly Gideon is appealing to their pride, using a little psychology to soothe their damaged egos
- And we're told it worked, and the Ephraimites go away satisfied
- At first, we might think, "Well done, Gideon."
 - After all, he diffused the situation and did so quickly
 - And while that's true, we need to notice how Gideon chose to respond
 - The request of these men was clearly wrong
 - They were thinking in a selfish, humanistic way about a great victory won by the Lord
- Remember what the Lord said before he selected his final group of "warriors"

Judg. 7:2 The LORD said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, for Israel would become boastful, saying, 'My own power has delivered me.'

- So the Lord selected 300 pitiful characters and sent them into battle without weapons
- And yet here we are with tribes arguing about who was more important in the fight
- Gideon does have the presence of mind to mention that the Lord delivered the leaders into the hands of Ephraim, but still he misses an opportunity here
 - Gideon should have turned the men's attention back to the Lord, as the Lord Himself was clearly intent on doing
 - Gideon could have told Ephraim you were not called to the battle because the Lord chose His army

- He could have called them to repent and seek the Lord's forgiveness for their pride and contention against the Lord's anointed
- As Moses told a group of Israelites who contended with his leadership in the desert

Num. 16:28 Moses said, "By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these deeds; for this is not my doing.

Num. 16:29 "If these men die the death of all men or if they suffer the fate of all men, then the LORD has not sent me.

Num. 16:30 "But if the LORD brings about an entirely new thing and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that is theirs, and they descend alive into Sheol, then you will understand that these men have spurned the LORD."

Num. 16:31 As he finished speaking all these words, the ground that was under them split open;

Num. 16:32 and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with their possessions.

- This is the way a man under the authority of God responds to those who contend with that leadership
 - And here we see that critical flaw of Gideon's walk emerge again
 - He doesn't live with a confidence in the Lord's power and might
 - He works to solve problems with human thinking and human logic
 - Psychology replaced scripture
 - Reliance on God's power was set aside and in its place, Gideon sought the power of his own wisdom and rhetoric
 - Meanwhile, the battle is still underway and the enemy isn't completely defeated as yet
 - So Gideon returns to the battle with a weary army
 - And amidst a contentious, ungodly culture seeking selfish needs above serving God

Judg. 8:4 Then Gideon and the 300 men who were with him came to the Jordan and crossed over, weary yet pursuing.

Judg. 8:5 He said to the men of Succoth, "Please give loaves of bread to the people who are following me, for they are weary, and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian."

Judg. 8:6 The leaders of Succoth said, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hands, that we should give bread to your army?"

Judg. 8:7 Gideon said, "All right, when the LORD has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, then I will thrash your bodies with the thorns of the wilderness and with briars."

Judg. 8:8 He went up from there to Penuel and spoke similarly to them; and the men of Penuel answered him just as the men of Succoth had answered.

Judg. 8:9 So he spoke also to the men of Penuel, saying, "When I return safely, I will tear down this tower."

- Notice that Gideon is still working with just the 300 men he started with
 - Remarkable, he hasn't lost a man even in the midst of battles and a long walk through the hill country
 - Now he has reached the Jordan river,
 - After such a long and fast movement, Gideon's men are exhausted
 - And in particular, they are weak from a lack of food on the March
 - So as they cross the Jordan they reach Succoth, which is a city on the East side of Jordan in the territory of Gad, and they ask the Gadites for support
 - Gideon's men were refused any bread at Succoth and again at another town called Penuel, which is another 5 miles east
 - The people living in these towns were Israelites
 - But they lived close to the tribal territory of the Midianites
 - So it's not terribly surprising these Jews wouldn't help Gideon's army
 - Helping Gideon meant to make enemies with the Midianites
 - The Israelites in these towns must have taken one look at Gideon's 300 weary men and concluded that there was no way Gideon was defeating the Midianites

- So they decided to cast their lots with the Midianites on the presumption that Gideon would be defeated in the end
- With his pride wounded, Gideon reacts in anger and making threats against the people in these towns
 - He says he will beat the elders of the city with thorns and briars
 - We're talking about a scourging that would have left them bloodied and their flesh torn
 - The thorns of Palestine are cruel and capable of tearing skins in deep gouges
 - And the people of Penuel would see their city defenses torn down which would leave the people vulnerable to attack
- Moments earlier, Gideon had confronted the rash and impulsive pride of the Ephraimites, and now he's displaying much the same weakness himself
 - His pride has got the better of him
 - His army is pitiful, since that's the way the Lord wanted it
 - And their success has come entirely because the Lord willed it
 - But now's he's acting as if his army is deserving of respect
 - And when the respect fails to materialize, he doesn't point the people to the Lord
 - He boasts of his ability to conquer and defeat and makes threats to prove his strength
 - Do you notice how the Lord is farther and farther from Gideon's mind and ways?
 - Once the Lord granted the victory, Gideon's perspective begins to change
 - From meek and insecure servant of God, he's now become a arrogant and boastful man
 - In both cases, he was forgetting the power and pre-eminence of God
 - In the first case, he couldn't muster confidence in the Lord's power to accomplish great things with him

- And now he can't see how he needs the Lord's help for anything
- Instead of threatening the people for bread, Gideon could have appealed to the Lord for that help
 - And when the people frustrated the needs of his army, Gideon could have looked to the Lord for retribution
 - Instead, Gideon is simply acting like the very enemy he's working to defeat
 - Given that Gideon is a judge in this time, you might think he would react with a little more mercy to his own people
 - After all, didn't the Lord react in grace and mercy to Gideon when he couldn't see the potential for the Lord to defeat a stronger army?
- Gideon's missteps are good examples of how anyone can operate outside the counsel of the Lord
 - Some fail in the beginning
 - Like Gideon, they lack confidence in the Lord's power to work great things through weakness
 - They make excuses, demand proof, hesitate in the face of clear direction
 - And when they do this, these brothers and sisters lose an opportunity to demonstrate faith and testify to the Lord's power
 - Other fail in the end
 - They start well, confident in the Lord and His faithfulness
 - They know His power and are content to work in it
 - But then success comes as God permits
 - And somewhere along the way, they stop seeing their successes as the product of God's grace
 - And they start assigning that success to themselves
 - In the first case, we lack the faith to see suppress fear and doubt
 - In the second case, we lack faith to suppress our pride and arrogance

- Gideon unfortunately has been guilty of both
- He lacked faith in the beginning and he lacks humility now

Judg. 8:10 Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor, and their armies with them, about 15,000 men, all who were left of the entire army of the sons of the east; for the fallen were 120,000 swordsmen.

Judg. 8:11 Gideon went up by the way of those who lived in tents on the east of Nobah and Rogbehah, and attacked the camp when the camp was unsuspecting.

Judg. 8:12 When Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued them and captured the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and routed the whole army.

Judg. 8:13 Then Gideon the son of Joash returned from the battle by the ascent of Heres.

Judg. 8:14 And he captured a youth from Succoth and questioned him. Then the youth wrote down for him the princes of Succoth and its elders, seventy-seven men.

Judg. 8:15 He came to the men of Succoth and said, "Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, concerning whom you taunted me, saying, 'Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your men who are weary?'"

Judg. 8:16 He took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briars, and he disciplined the men of Succoth with them.

Judg. 8:17 He tore down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city.

- From this point, Gideon pursues the remaining 15,000 men of the Midianite army
 - He and the rest of Israel have already killed 120,000 men
 - So these final 15,000 will not be a problem as the Lord appoints
 - Once again Gideon uses sound tactical judgment when attacking a superior force
 - He performs a flanking maneuver to attack from the east rather than from the west as the Midianites expected
 - And he routs the rest of the Midianite army
 - Now he captured the two kings of Midian
 - Earlier Ephraim killed the two leaders or captains of the army
 - Now they've captured the kings of the people
 - Their names mean Victim and Protection Refused, which sound like descriptions of the cities that refused to help Gideon

- Perhaps Gideon changed their names to memorialize what he's planning to do to the cities that refused him aid
- As Gideon goes back, he takes a route called the Ascent of Heres, which is a road that runs nearby the two tones he visited earlier
 - As he approaches the town, he captures a boy from the town of Succoth
 - Gideon forces the youth to tell him the names of the elders of the town
 - Then Gideon appears outside the town with the two captured kings in chains
 - And then Gideon reminds the town what they said earlier, taunting Gideon
 - In effect, Gideon is pointing out that they doubted his ability to capture the Midianite kings
 - And so now he was proving he could do it
 - Once more, does this look like the actions of a man who recognizes that God won this battle?
 - It's helpful to remember that these Israelites didn't express a lack of confidence in God
 - They had no confidence in Gideon, and they shouldn't have had much confidence in Gideon as long as Gideon was pointing to his own power
 - Had Gideon pointed to God and demanded they have faith in God, then his indignation would have been justified
 - As it was, it was merely a wounded ego at work
 - So Gideon takes his revenge against both cities, including putting to death the men in Penuel, which is a severe penalty
 - Gideon is looking more and more like a man drunk on power and success
 - And certainly not like a man living in the grace and counsel of the Lord
 - Notice that the Lord is never heard to give Gideon any instructions concerning these cities

- Gideon appears to be going rogue here
- Next, Gideon takes the kings back into Canaan to Ophrah

Judg. 8:18 Then he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, "What kind of men were they whom you killed at Tabor?" And they said, "They were like you, each one resembling the son of a king."

Judg. 8:19 He said, "They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As the LORD lives, if only you had let them live, I would not kill you."

Judg. 8:20 So he said to Jether his firstborn, "Rise, kill them." But the youth did not draw his sword, for he was afraid, because he was still a youth.

Judg. 8:21 Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Rise up yourself, and fall on us; for as the man, so is his strength." So Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and took the crescent ornaments which were on their camels' necks.

- Gideon interrogates the kings asking them about some Israelites they killed at Mt. Tabor
 - We don't know more about that moment except what's said here
 - From the kings' testimony, it appears that the Midianites executed some of Gideon's own brothers in Tabor at a time in the past
 - They describe the brothers as being like Gideon, as men resembling sons of a king
 - That phrase indicates that Gideon was a man with an imposing stature
 - Not small and weak but tall and statuesque
 - It would seem his physique contrasted with his inward weaknesses
- That's a theme in the book of Judges and into 1 & 2 Samuel
 - The outward appearance of men is not a fair measure of their inward strength
 - Outward strength is a matter of the flesh
 - But inward strength is a matter of spiritual strength
 - As we move through the judges we're going to see great physical strength at times

- Nut that outward strength will be coupled with spiritual weakness
- But now the strong Gideon sees an opportunity to exact revenge on the Midianite kings for their deaths
 - So Gideon orders his own son to kill these men to revenge the honor of his brothers
 - In that ancient east, it was considered great dishonor for a man to die at the hands of a woman or youth
 - Since these men had killed Gideon's brothers without provocation, Gideon was seeking to end their lives in a dishonorable way
 - But when he ordered his son to kill the men, his son was too afraid to do it, since he was a youth
 - The Hebrew word for youth can be translated child
 - Even allowing for cultural differences, Gideon's choice to involve his young child in this brutal act was an indication of his bloodlust and poor judgment
 - He's so absorbed in defending his dead family that he puts his living family in jeopardy
 - And when his young son recoils, Gideon has no choice but to act himself
 - After the kings are dead, Gideon takes a booty the two crescent shaped ornaments hanging around their camels' necks
 - These would have been valuable since they belonged to kings
 - So they make for reasonable compensation
 - But they also a premonition of things to come for Gideon
- Gideon is a judge over a freed Israel and he has won a decisive victory by the hand of God
 - But he's a man deceived by pride and drunk on power
 - And though he is still seeking to follow God, his spiritual immaturity is impeding his walk

Judges 8B

- There's an old saying about power
 - Power corrupts and absolutely power corrupts absolutely
 - In some ways, Gideon is a good illustration of this adage
 - The complicated hero of our story began in a meek manner
 - He described himself as the least in his family
 - And he described his family as the least in his tribe
 - But then the Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and called him valiant warrior
 - And certainly Gideon was valiant
 - But we remember he found his courage only after the Lord had to persuade him in a variety of ways
 - Still, he entered into difficult circumstances and acted bravely
 - Then last week we found Gideon heady with his amazing victory
 - We might think Gideon would be quick to cite the Lord for his success
 - But instead, Gideon looked like a man drunk with power
 - He threatened his Jewish brothers and ultimately made them pay for defying his authority
 - Certainly, he should have held them accountable
 - But his manner and words are troubling to say the least
- And when we stopped last week, Gideon had killed the two leaders of Midian and taken their valuable medallions
 - These items were valuable and a minimum reparation for the wars of the Midianites
 - But it's also a bad omen for what will follow in Gideon's life and the people of Israel

- Gideon is about to create a stumbling block for the people

Judg. 8:22 Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, “Rule over us, both you and your son, also your son’s son, for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian.”

Judg. 8:23 But Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you.”

Judg. 8:24 Yet Gideon said to them, “I would request of you, that each of you give me an earring from his spoil.” (For they had gold earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.)

Judg. 8:25 They said, “We will surely give them.” So they spread out a garment, and every one of them threw an earring there from his spoil.

Judg. 8:26 The weight of the gold earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple robes which were on the kings of Midian, and besides the neck bands that were on their camels’ necks.

Judg. 8:27 Gideon made it into an ephod, and placed it in his city, Ophrah, and all Israel played the harlot with it there, so that it became a snare to Gideon and his household.

Judg. 8:28 So Midian was subdued before the sons of Israel, and they did not lift up their heads anymore. And the land was undisturbed for forty years in the days of Gideon.

- After the death of the kings, some of the leaders of Israel who had accompanied Gideon east of the Jordan make a proposal
 - They see Gideon as the clear leader of the nation at this point
 - He’s led a daring defeat of their chief rival
 - He’s the hero of the moment, and they’re ready to begin a dynasty around Gideon
 - In v.22 these men ask Gideon to rule of them
 - But not only Gideon, but also his sons
 - The reference to Gideon’s sons implies a dynasty, a monarchy in which the family would continue to rule from generation to generation
 - This is the first time in the history of Israel that any man has been offered the opportunity to be a king over Israel
 - This is a sentiment that’s going to grow over time among the people
 - As they get farther from the Lord in their hearts, they will seek for a human leader instead

- Notice in v.24 we're told they are Ishmaelites
 - But earlier in v.22 we're told they are the men of Israel
 - How can they be both?
 - The answer is these are Jews, probably of Gad or Reuben
 - They have been living east of the Jordon for some time as nomads
 - And over time, they began to associate themselves with the Midianites rather than with the people of Israel
 - They are called Ishmaelites because the term was a general reference to any nomad living east of the Jordan
- When Gideon rides into town and defeats the Midianite kings, these estranged Jews have no country any longer
 - So naturally, they express devotion to the new kid in town
 - They are trying to appease Gideon by pledging their support to him as their new king
 - So they are Jews, but they have been living in Midianite lands and in a nomadic lifestyle like Ishmaelites
 - And they are bargaining to rejoin Israel under Gideon's authority
- Now to his credit, Gideon refuses the offer from the outset
 - He recognizes that the Lord desires to rule His people without an earthly monarch
 - Or perhaps Gideon knew that the Lord would appoint His own man for that role in a time to come
 - In any case, Gideon isn't interested in the power trip
 - Now, had Gideon stopped at this point, he would have done very well
 - But instead he takes the additional step of asking for payment
 - In other words, he won't accept the position of king, but he's still willing to consider the riches that accompany power
 - He asks them to each give one of their earrings, which was the common feature of nomads

- The men are ready to grant Gideon his request
 - They were probably worried about what Gideon would do to them for having lived among the Midianites
 - They probably saw (or at least heard about) what Gideon did to the two Jewish cities that refused him aid
 - So they're ready to appease Gideon with a single earring apiece
- Gideon's haul was as much as 75 lbs of gold, which is about \$1.4M today
 - Additionally, Gideon took the ornaments of the kings and their camels
 - These additional pieces could have added an additional 20-30 lbs of gold
 - For a total value of somewhere around \$1.8M
 - Not bad for a day's work
- Taking so much wealth isn't a problem in itself, and in fact Gideon doesn't appear to be a person driven by the wealth
 - The real problem is what his interest in this wealth says about his heart
 - We remember Jesus' words:

Matt. 6:24 “No one can serve **two masters**; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

- Gideon is trying to serve two masters: himself and God
- On the one hand, he refused to be made king saying that God alone rules
- On the other hand, he believes he is due reward for defeating the enemy
- Yet we know the Lord won this battle, not Gideon
- If you want an example of a better way, consider how Abraham responded under similar circumstances
 - Abraham took a small force of 318 and defeated the kings of the north who came up against Sodom and took his nephew Lot

- After he won a miraculous victory, Abraham was offered war booty just like Gideon
- But here's what Abraham said

Gen. 14:21 The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself."

Gen. 14:22 Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth,

Gen. 14:23 that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, for fear you would say, 'I have made Abram rich.'

- That's the response of a man serving only God and not himself
- But Gideon's heart is divided, and as proof he wasn't serving God consider what he does next with the wealth he obtained

Judg. 8:27 Gideon made it into an ephod, and placed it in his city, Ophrah, and all Israel played the harlot with it there, so that it became a snare to Gideon and his household.

Judg. 8:28 So Midian was subdued before the sons of Israel, and they did not lift up their heads anymore. And the land was undisturbed for forty years in the days of Gideon.

- In v.27 we're told Gideon takes it (i.e., all the gold he obtained) and uses it to make an ephod
 - An ephod is long, sleeveless robe woven from fine linen and gold thread worn only by the High Priest of Israel
 - On top of the ephod the priest word a jeweled breastplate over the shoulders
 - Gideon makes such a garment using nearly 100 lbs of gold
 - So it must have been large and incredibly ornate
- The garment is then displayed in Gideon's hometown of Ophrah
 - We're not sure how Gideon displayed it
 - Since it's a garment, some suppose that Gideon may have worn it from time to time
 - In a sense, Gideon was setting up an alternative priesthood and an alternative seat of worship to compete with the tabernacle

- Remember, the priest of Israel was the intercessor for God's people within the sacrificial system
- And yet here's Gideon taking that role upon himself, or so it would seem
- It's it ironic that Gideon didn't want to be king, but he aspires to an equally impressive role as priest
- As a result of drawing the people away from the true tabernacle and true priesthood of Israel, Gideon is guilty of leading the people back into idolatry
 - The ephod becomes an idol to the people of Israel and to Gideon himself and to his family
 - It becomes a relic that ensnares Israel into false worship
 - And though Gideon continues as a judge in the land of Israel, he's a severely compromised leader
- Gideon becomes only the second Jew in Israel's short history to encourage the people to worship an image
 - The first was Aaron in the desert and now we have Gideon
 - In both cases, an idol takes the place of reliance on God's word
 - Superstition replaces a relationship with the Lord
 - We can clearly see a new cycle of sin in Judges starting even as the Lord is freeing His people from the previous cycle
 - Gideon's return to idolatry also reflects his personal cycle of sin
 - Remember, he began his service to God by removing his father's personal altar to Baal
 - Now he's setting up a new altar
 - This altar isn't to a foreign god; it's to Yahweh
 - The people of Israel are so spiritually weak they are easily drawn away into worshipping physical representations of God in violation of the second commandment and the rest of the Law

- As we've said from the beginning, Gideon is a servant of God but a deeply flawed one
 - His spiritual weakness has never been far from the surface in every decision he makes
 - In many ways Gideon is a classic study of the danger of spiritual weakness and immaturity in a child of God
 - He is a saint, saved by His faith, but he is handicapped by his lack of familiarity with God's word and reliance on His power
 - He hesitates to move forward when he hears the word of God
 - And after he does move and finds success, he lets it go to his head, forgetting how he obtained his success
 - These behaviors are like canaries in a coal mine in our spiritual life, early warning signs that tell us we aren't as spiritually mature as we think
 - Everyone hesitates to follow the Lord from time to time
 - But if you live in a perpetual state of hesitation or doubt in God's word power, then you in need of greater spiritual maturity
 - And everyone sins from time to time
 - But if you stray from godliness into fleshly living in consistent or dramatic ways, then your spiritual allegiance is divided
 - You can't serve two masters, regardless of what that other master may be in your life
 - You've been saved by God's grace so you can serve Him alone
 - Perhaps the Lord is exposing these traits so He can scrape them off through trials
 - But it requires we recognize our needs and pursue the sanctification we need and scripture demands
- Despite Gideon's apostasy, the Lord remained faithful to His purposes in freeing Israel
 - We're told in v.28 that the nation was delivered from Midian for 40 years
 - The people of Israel lived in peace, not needing to lift their heads any longer

- Lifting their heads refers to the way someone who is fearful constantly watches the horizon for an attacker
- The people no longer feared such an attack
- This is the final mention of a period of peace in the time of Judges
- As the Judges' cycle of apostasy and repentance continues to deteriorate, the opportunities for peace disappear as well
 - There's a degree of irony here
 - At the start of Gideon's story, we see the people of Israel hiding in caves
 - And Gideon was so fearful, he was hiding in a wine press
 - He couldn't thresh grain out in the open for fear of discovery
 - Now the people are secure and without fear
 - And yet they are still engaged in idolatry, albeit a different form than Baal worship
 - Gideon's immaturity had consequences for others around him of course

Judg. 8:29 Then Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and lived in his own house.

Judg. 8:30 Now Gideon had seventy sons who were his direct descendants, for he had many wives.

Judg. 8:31 His concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he named him Abimelech.

Judg. 8:32 And Gideon the son of Joash died at a ripe old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

Judg. 8:33 Then it came about, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the sons of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-berith their god.

Judg. 8:34 Thus the sons of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side;

Judg. 8:35 nor did they show kindness to the household of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in accord with all the good that he had done to Israel.

- With the cycle of Gideon's judgeship now at an end, the writer explains how Gideon's reign sowed the seeds for the next cycle of sin among the people
 - Gideon was powerful and wealthy as a result of his victory

- And that wealth continued to weigh on him as it does for Solomon later
- He has enough wealth to afford many wives and concubines as well
- These additional sexual relationships were all sinful and evidence of a divided heart
- He fathered many offspring, including 70 sons
- He had multiple households, including a stable of concubines in Shechem, which was a Canaanite city at this time
- Gideon may have declined to be king, but in effect he lived as one anyway
 - In fact, you would be hard pressed to make much of a distinction between Gideon and Solomon
 - Both had wealth in gold taken from the people
 - Both displayed their wealth in ostentatious ways
 - Both led Israel into idolatry
 - Both enjoyed the fruits of power, including many wives and slave wives
 - And both men pass ruling power to a son, whom Gideon gives a name that means "My father is King"
 - In virtually every way possible, Gideon became the king he claimed not to be
- Sin has consequences, and we see the consequences of Gideon's poor choices in the next chapter
 - We're introduced to the next judge in the timeline of Judges, Abimelech, Gideon's son by a concubine
 - The concubine is a Canaanite woman from Shechem
 - And the product of this sinful relationship is a man who will bring treachery, war and bloodshed to Israel
 - Gideon's reign ends in peace, but it leads to a period of distress

- Meanwhile, the story of Gideon himself ends with his death and the rapid return to sin in Israel
 - After Gideon's burial, the people quickly return to worshipping Baal
 - Notice specifically they did not remember that it was the Lord Who delivered them from their enemies
 - They followed Gideon's example and took it a step further
 - They wandered away from the Living God and back to mute idols
 - And this transition shouldn't surprise us, and not merely because Israel has been repeating this cycle for some time
 - Anytime we become comfortable with a physical manifestation of God, true idolatry is just right around the corner
 - Don't be tempted by superstition
 - Even Christians can fall into this wrong thinking, becoming victims of thinking that moves to a man-centered view of our relationship with God
 - Our walk with Christ becomes more superstition than Spirit-led
 - We carry crosses, we pause for a moment before a painting of "Jesus" on the church wall
 - We display ornate, unread Bibles on cloth-covered tables
 - We recite obscure prayers hidden deep in the Old Testament assuming they contain special power
 - We bake "Ezekiel bread" or keep Jewish certain feasts
 - We speak in certain ways, sing certain hymns, and only the King James Version, please...
 - In every case, we're reducing God to something we can control and manipulate to our own desires
 - Icons replace insight and relics replace relationship
 - God is reduced in our eyes and our experience into experiences we can see and touch
 - And when God becomes small in our experience, He becomes distant in our hearts

Judges 9A

- Gideon is behind us now and a new character will now take center stage for a while
 - How do we summarize Gideon's time as judge?
 - Daniel Block summarized him this way

"Gideon personifies the typical Israelite in the period of the judges. He is more than half Canaanite in his outlook. He does not know how to relate to God. He does not want to get involved in the Lord's work. He is not beyond using his position for personal gain and influence.

". . . recognizing the deficiencies in the man thrusts into sharper relief the contrasting patience and mercy of God . . .

"Gideon is a man God used in spite of himself. He is a rough vessel if ever there was one. But God is determined to get His work done. In the absence of genuinely qualified leadership, He will use surprising vessels."

- So let's not venerate Gideon not overlook his accomplishments in service to God
- Most every judge in this book is revealed as a flawed character because that's the nature of the times
- This is a period when God's people are living in the flesh, unwilling and unable to bow to the authority of God in Heaven
- So the pattern of Judges begins again following Gideon's death, reminding us the solution to our sin and wandering can't be found on Earth
 - Let's back up to Gideon's death and the start of the next cycle
 - What follows his death is actually a continuation of Gideon's story in that it shows his legacy
 - The next man, Abimelech is not actually a judge at all
 - He is an usurper and opportunist
 - And therefore he's a footnote in the story of Gideon

Judg. 8:33 Then it came about, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the sons of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-berith their god.

Judg. 8:34 Thus the sons of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side;

Judg. 8:35 nor did they show kindness to the household of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in accord with all the good that he had done to Israel.

Judg. 9:1 And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem to his mother's relatives, and spoke to them and to the whole clan of the household of his mother's father, saying,

Judg. 9:2 "Speak, now, in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem, 'Which is better for you, that seventy men, all the sons of Jerubbaal, rule over you, or that one man rule over you?' Also, remember that I am your bone and your flesh."

Judg. 9:3 And his mother's relatives spoke all these words on his behalf in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem; and they were inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our relative."

Judg. 9:4 They gave him seventy pieces of silver from the house of Baal-berith with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows, and they followed him.

- Gideon's death inaugurates the next cycle of sin and rebellion
 - And as we've noted before, each cycle gets a little worse than before
 - Here we see the people going astray once again
 - They play the harlot with Baal, the Canaanite god, again
 - They even declare that this pagan idol is their god
 - So once more, we know the Lord will respond to their apostasy
 - Obviously, these are not the very same people who rebelled in the last cycle
 - That generation of Israel is long gone by now
 - This is a new generation
 - And yet they repeat the mistakes of their forefathers
 - Here's a clear example of the way sin is inherited
 - The sin that began with Adam is passed down in the nature of each person

- So that the sins of the early generations are repeated in the next because apart from the grace of God, every person's heart is desperately wicked
- And we cannot please God nor even follow Him unless we are given a new spirit
- So once again the Lord will intervene to correct a new generation
- You remember that after Gideon's victory over the Midianites that the elders offered to set up a Jewish dynasty with Gideon as king
 - Gideon refused to accept that title, nevertheless, he acted as a king in the way he used his position for personal gain
 - He took many concubines and fathering 70 sons
 - And like a monarch, Gideon assumed his sons would assume power as judges following his death
 - And the people assumed the same
 - But the people did not show kindness to Gideon's household we're told
 - Notice how Samuel continues to use Gideon's new name, Jerubbaal in this account
 - That name was given after Gideon tore down the altars to Baal in the town near his home
 - The name means one who contends with Baal
 - But Gideon contention with Baal has been less than successful
 - And so Samuel uses this name in an ironic sense in this chapter, because Baal is prevailing against Israel
- One of Gideon's sons born to a concubine decides after his father's death that he likes the life of royalty
 - Even though his father rejected the title of king, Gideon lived like one and his sons enjoyed the privileges of princes
 - So Abimelech decides to make a move to consolidate power and establish himself as king

- He begins his quest in Shechem, a Canaanite city
- This is the home of Abimelech's mother, the concubine who lived in Gideon's harem in Shechem
- We can imagine that Abimelech felt his hometown crowd would be more receptive to his ambitions
- In Shechem Abimelech speaks with the clan of Gideon living in that city, which were the other offspring of Gideon's concubines
 - The children of slave women were considered lesser members of the family than the children of free women
 - So perhaps Abimelech was feeling the need to take authority for himself
 - For he feared he would be excluded by his brothers
 - In reality, Abimelech is simply projecting his own feelings of paranoia onto his brothers as excuse for his selfish desires
- So Abimelech's pitch to his family is what's better for you?
 - Is it better that you take your bets with 70 sons of Gideon?
 - In other words, do you want to wait and see which one of these men rules over you?
 - Or do you want one man, Abimelech to rule over you?
 - And remember that I am one of you?
 - So in other words, the devil you know is better than the one you don't
- In v.3 we see that Abimelech's logic is compelling
 - They say, "Well, he IS our relative, after all."
 - They assume that having a king from the family will give them an advantage in the long run
 - After all, any man who would be king is going to be a threat to anyone not in his favor
 - So let's get a king who will be on our side

- Of course, what Abimelech needs from these men is support, primarily financial support
 - It's like a candidate running for office today...money makes the wheels go 'round
 - And Abimelech needs money to hire an army of mercenaries
- With seventy piece of silver, the man is able to purchase a band of worthless and reckless fellows
 - The Hebrew word for worthless means empty literally
 - So these men are empty of character and integrity
 - And they are reckless in the sense that they do not consider the consequences of their choices and actions
- In the next two verses, we see Abimelech's terrible plan play out

Judg. 9:5 Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, for he hid himself.

Judg. 9:6 All the men of Shechem and all Beth-millo assembled together, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar which was in Shechem.

- Abimelech takes these worthless men and travel to Gideon's home in Ophrah
 - They attack his brothers and kill all but one of the seventy brothers
 - Samuel says they were killed on one stone which suggests a mass execution by beheading
 - Yet somehow, one of Gideon's sons, his youngest Jotham, escapes the attack
- This wasn't war...this was a coup
 - The place Beth-millo was a military fortress inside the city of Shechem
 - So both the people and the army of Shechem pledge their support to Abimelech

- Once the news arrives back in Shechem of Abimelech's successful coup, the men of the Canaanite city anoint Abimelech king of the city
- Meanwhile, the son who escaped decides begins to consider how he will survive against a king who will not rest until all of Gideon's descendants are gone

Judg. 9:7 Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and called out. Thus he said to them, "Listen to me, O men of Shechem, that God may listen to you.

Judg. 9:8 "Once the trees went forth to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us!'

Judg. 9:9 "But the olive tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my fatness with which God and men are honored, and go to wave over the trees?'

Judg. 9:10 "Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come, reign over us!'

Judg. 9:11 "But the fig tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to wave over the trees?'

Judg. 9:12 "Then the trees said to the vine, 'You come, reign over us!'

Judg. 9:13 "But the vine said to them, 'Shall I leave my new wine, which cheers God and men, and go to wave over the trees?'

Judg. 9:14 "Finally all the trees said to the bramble, 'You come, reign over us!'

Judg. 9:15 "The bramble said to the trees, 'If in truth you are anointing me as king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, may fire come out from the bramble and consume the cedars of Lebanon.'

- This scene might be familiar to you
 - It mirrors a moment in the book of Joshua
 - In chapter 24 Israel is nearing the end of Joshua's times as captain of the people
 - Joshua gathers all the leaders of Israel at Shechem where he spells out the covenant of Law once more
 - And he commands the people to choose who they will follow, whether the gods of the Canaanites or the God Who saved them
 - And the people all declared in unison that they would put away idols and follow the Lord in obedience
 - Now here again we have a leader of Israel standing on Mt Gerezim, the mountain next to Shechem

- Jotham calls out to the people of Shechem to reconsider their actions
- He gives them a parable, the first parable recorded in the Bible
- The parable uses plants in place of people to explain the folly of the men of Shechem
 - There parable has plants that represent the produce of Israel
 - In fact, the olive, fig and grape are all symbols of Israel at various times in the Bible
 - Each plant is offered the chance to be king by the trees of the forest
 - But each turns down the offer
 - They refuse the role because they already possess a fruitful existence
 - Each is valued for obedience to their God-given purpose
 - The olive trees produce the oil that serves the people
 - The figs produce the fruit that please men
 - And the grape vines produce the wine that brings gladness to God and men
 - To seek for a different role, one that simply serves ego and pride, would require abandoning a better purpose assigned by the Lord
 - This is a timeless truth regulating our relationship with the Lord
 - We have a specific purpose in our existence, one determined by the Creator
 - We were born and we were saved for a purpose the Lord of Heaven determined before we were born
 - And God's people will be happiest and most fulfilled when we are living in the counsel of His will
 - When we are guided by His word
 - And serving in the capacity His intended
 - Then we will know joy and satisfaction that nothing else can equal

- And more importantly, we are living in the Lord's will, where blessing will be found in abundance
- But not everyone will be content to rest in God's authority and serve the purpose the Lord intended
 - Some will chase after their flesh's desire, living in pride or fear or lusts
 - They are like the bramble in the parable
 - The bramble receives an offer that enflames the pride
 - And so the bramble, which has no business giving shade to tall trees, begins to imagine himself in the role
 - In other words, this person has not been designated for this role, but he decides to pursue it for selfish reasons
 - When the Lord has appointed someone in a role of service, that appointed will become evident to more than just the person himself
 - The Lord's hand will be evident in the confirmation of a spouse
 - And the laying on of hands by elders or other leaders in the church
 - And the circumstances of a person's life will come together in such a way that the person will see confirmation of God's will
 - But there can be times when a person desires for a role, usually one of status or authority, which is beyond their station
 - Their search is not Spirit-led, which means it's driven by the flesh
 - And in that sense, it's sin
- In v.15 the bramble incentivizes the trees to accept his rule by inviting them to take refuge in the bramble's shade
 - This is a comical way offer
 - Imagine the ridiculous situation of a tall tree seeking refuge in the shade of a dry, spiny tumbleweed
 - The offer is empty, illustrating how this leader offers nothing of value
 - And this relationship brings an implicit threat to the trees who dare to consider the bramble to be a suitable king

- A bramble is an exceedingly dry piece of kindle
- In the Palestinian desert, the heat and sun can be so intense that brambles will spontaneously combust
- And that makes them especially dangerous to larger trees, since a bramble can start a forest fire
- So bringing the bramble close threatens the trees with destruction by fire
- They are taking a great risk in making this deal

- So then Jotham applies the lesson of his parable to the people of Shechem

Judg. 9:16 “Now therefore, if you have dealt in truth and integrity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have dealt with him as he deserved –

Judg. 9:17 for my father fought for you and risked his life and delivered you from the hand of Midian;

Judg. 9:18 but you have risen against my father's house today and have killed his sons, seventy men, on one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your relative –

Judg. 9:19 if then you have dealt in truth and integrity with Jerubbaal and his house this day, rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you.

Judg. 9:20 “But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and consume the men of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from Beth-millo, and consume Abimelech.”

Judg. 9:21 Then Jotham escaped and fled, and went to Beer and remained there because of Abimelech his brother.

- He says in v.16 that if indeed their selection of Abimelech is based on God's leading of the people in integrity, then rejoice in him (v.19)
 - If this anointing of a king is according to God's will and plan, then Jotham couldn't stand in God's way
 - In fact, no man will stand in God's way
 - So all men can rejoice knowing this is God's purpose for the people
- But then Jotham reminds the men of Shechem that Abimelech's rise to power doesn't follow the pattern of God working among His people

- First, Jotham questions whether these men have dealt with Gideon's household in a godly way
- Gideon risked his life for the men of Shechem
- And Gideon successfully freed the city from the oppression of the Midianites
- But the men of the city have not repaid that faithfulness with respect for Gideon's family
 - They have contributed to the murder of the 69 brothers
 - And they have select Abimelech not because he was anointed by the Lord as judge much less king
 - But because he was their relative
- So in summary, Jotham insinuates that these people are operating without sanction from the Lord and not according to obedience
 - And if this is true, then they can be sure they are taking a great risk
 - Fire will come forth from Abimelech and consume the people of Shechem
 - Jotham is predicting that when the Lord moves against Abimelech's sin, the men of Shechem will suffer collateral damage
 - Furthermore, Jotham calls for the Lord to use the men of Shechem to destroy Abimelech's reign
 - Then Jotham retreats to hiding to avoid Abimelech
 - He goes to a town called Beer, which is unknown
 - The word means well, so perhaps this was no town at all
 - Perhaps Jotham hid in a well for a time to avoid Abimelech
- As for Abimelech, he didn't rule for very long or over much territory
 - And his rule is marked by treachery and bloodshed

Judg. 9:22 Now Abimelech ruled over Israel three years.

Judg. 9:23 Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech,

Judg. 9:24 so that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood might be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers.

- Abimelech has ruled Shechem and the surrounding areas of Israel for three years when his rule began to unravel
 - The Lord sends an evil spirit to disrupt the trust between Abimelech and Shechem
 - This is one of several places in the Bible where we're told the Lord "sends" an evil spirit to do His bidding
 - An evil spirit is a reference to a fallen angel or demon
 - These spirits are not inclined to cooperate with the Lord's will
 - In fact, they are "evil" in the sense that they have rebelled against the Lord and aligned with Satan
 - Revelation tells us that a third of the angelic realm joined Satan in rebelling against the Lord
 - These fallen angels are the demons we see throughout scripture and hear about in the Gospels
 - Clearly, they are not interested in serving the Lord
 - So how are they "sent" by God to accomplish any work He prefers?
- This is perhaps the best example of Romans 8:28 in all scripture, that is the way the Lord can direct the actions of even His enemies
 - As Paul says

Rom. 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

- The world is filled with violence and hatred for God's people
 - The source for all that evil is Satan and all that he has created through the fall of man

- But even those who oppose God will be brought into conformance with the Lord's will
- Which is why the Bible assures us that nothing can separate us from the love of God
- In this case, the Lord desires to stir up animosity between Abimelech and the men of Shechem ultimately to bring down Abimelech's sinful rule
 - The Lord can't sin Himself nor become the author of sin
 - But He can direct the desires of sinful creatures so that they serve His purpose in yielding righteous and good for those who love the Lord
 - You remember in the Gospels when the Lord says He choose the 12 apostles including one man who was "a devil"
 - Then later that one was indwelled by Satan leading to Christ's crucifixion
 - That is another example of the Lord using evil to accomplish good things
- We can imagine that the evil spirit brought certain ideas to mind, placed temptations in these men's hearts and created the motivation to act out
 - That's the way the enemy works
 - He naturally desires to move us away from God's will and toward self destruction
 - So when the Lord sends a spirit, He knows the spirit will do what comes naturally
 - And in that way, God's purposes will be met
- In v.24 the scripture tells us that the Lord intends for this evil spirit to visit the same violence and treachery on Abimelech and on Shechem that they brought upon Gideon's home
 - There's a term in popular culture that tries to explain a similar connection
 - The word is "karma" and it's an eastern pagan concept

- It states that the sum of our actions taken in this life will determine our fate in a future existence
- It's a works-based philosophy like all pagan views
- And though karma is a false concept, it is somewhat reflective of how the Lord works at times
- The Lord may chose to visit the sins of a person upon himself
 - Certainly, the consequences of sin for all unbelievers comes to rest upon them in eternity
 - But on occasion, the Lord gives them a downpayment while in this life
 - And men have long taken note of this tendency, that bad things will eventually happen to bad people
- Sometimes, it's merely the natural consequence of risky and reckless behavior
 - If you sin in sexual promiscuity, you can expect to suffer any number of consequences
 - If you sin in theft or murder or other crimes, you will likely end up in prison
 - If you treat people in unkind ways, you won't have many friends in your time of need, etc.
- And then sometimes, the Lord steps in to bring negative consequences for sin in supernatural ways, as we see happening here to Abimelech and the men of Shechem
 - This isn't karma
 - This is the Lord sovereignly acting to make a point to them and all men who hear of this story
 - This is why Paul tells believers not to take vengeance into our own hands

Rom. 12:17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.

Rom. 12:18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

Rom. 12:19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord.

Rom. 12:20 "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD."

- We treat our enemies with kindness and dare them to respond in kind
 - But if they don't, we know the Lord has the capacity to work on our behalf
 - Perhaps the Lord will decide He doesn't want to bring consequences upon them now, preferring to wait for their final judgment
 - If this is the Lord's will, then who are we to rush that timetable by trying to exact revenge early?
- On the other hand, perhaps the Lord will decide to bring consequences in this life
 - Perhaps He will disrupt the life of our enemies, bringing them calamity in one way or another
 - If that be the Lord's will, do you really want to get in the way of that judgment?
 - Can you do better than the Lord?
 - Leave room for Him to do what He will and trust Him that there will be justice in the end

Judges 9B

- Can there be anything better on a Sunday morning at church than to hear a story of treachery, murder, cursing and jealousy?
 - Well, that's what we have before us today on the pages of scripture
 - And it's this way because this is what Gideon's legacy left the people of Israel and us
 - His death gave way to a civil war of sorts
 - His seventy heirs have been reduced to a single son hiding for his life in wells
 - And Abimelech, the son of a slave wife, attempting to rule Israel as a king
 - Abimelech is an ungodly man, not a judge much less a king, and he's determined to hold on to power through any means necessary
 - But like an despot, he has enemies, which we see this morning

Judg. 9:22 Now Abimelech ruled over Israel three years.

Judg. 9:23 Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech,

Judg. 9:24 so that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood might be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers.

Judg. 9:25 The men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who might pass by them along the road; and it was told to Abimelech.

Judg. 9:26 Now Gaal the son of Ebed came with his relatives, and crossed over into Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their trust in him.

Judg. 9:27 They went out into the field and gathered the grapes of their vineyards and trod them, and held a festival; and they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank and cursed Abimelech.

Judg. 9:28 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 Jerubbaal, and is Zebul not his lieutenant? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him?"

Judg. 9:29 "Would, therefore, that this people were under my authority! Then I would remove Abimelech." And he said to Abimelech, "Increase your army and come out."

Judg. 9:30 When Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger burned.

Judg. 9:31 He sent messengers to Abimelech deceitfully, saying, "Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his relatives have come to Shechem; and behold, they are stirring up the city against you.

Judg. 9:32 "Now therefore, arise by night, you and the people who are with you, and lie in wait in the field.

Judg. 9:33 "In the morning, as soon as the sun is up, you shall rise early and rush upon the city; and behold, when he and the people who are with him come out against you, you shall do to them whatever you can."

- Abimelech settles into a limited form of ruling
 - He rules a limited section of Canaan in and around Shechem
 - And after three years, it becomes evident to everyone that this man isn't going to rise to significant power
 - Instead of a vast empire, this man has only managed to become a ruler over a city and the surrounding countryside
 - Abimelech resides in Arumah as we see a little later and his vassals are required to send him payments
 - And he uses this power to rob the people of their wealth
 - Naturally, this treatment breeds resentment with the people
 - Ironically, they wanted Abimelech as king because they were afraid of bad treatment at the hands of Gideon's sons
 - And yet after only three years, they have exactly the situation they were trying to avoid
 - Because they selected an evil man contrary to the Lord's will
 - More importantly, the Lord Himself takes steps to ensure this false leader can't remain in power for long
 - As we saw last time, the Lord sends an evil spirit to stir up discontent between Abimelech and those he rules
 - That discontent boils over into civil war
 - Until the sins of Abimelech come back to rest on his own head as the terrible things he did to Gideon's sons are done to him

- It starts with the men of Shechem sitting in ambush for those who travel down the road leading into the city
 - There is a road that passes between Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal on its way into the city
 - Anyone coming into Shechem would travel through this pass making them vulnerable to an ambush from above
 - Abimelech required that the surrounding villages under his control pay him tributes and taxes
 - And these payments came by way of this road
 - So when the men of the city decide they have had enough of this man's rule, they take it upon themselves to steal his tributes
 - They ambush travelers taking their possessions in a highway robbery
 - And eventually the news reaches Abimelech that his tribute was being taken
 - And more importantly, his authority and rule were being challenged
 - Even more troubling for Abimelech, another man arrives on the scene to challenge his authority
 - A man named Gaal, a Canaanite who was opposed to Gideon's family, Yahweh and any who were associated with the Lord
 - Since Abimelech was a son of Gideon, Gaal was set against him
 - He decides to enter in Shechem and wins over some of the men of the city against Abimelech
 - To cement their new alliance, they take grapes from the fields belong to Abimelech and make a quick wine for a festival
 - This was a worship act intended to formalize their relationship and establish a new god over them
 - They cursed Abimelech, which means they entered into a conspiracy against him
 - In the course of that feast, Gaal declares who is this man Abimelech that the city should serve him

- He is the man of an enemy but instead the city ought to serve the Canaanite descendants of Hamor who founded the city
 - And in a phrase similar to the one Abimelech himself used to justify his reign, Gaal says wouldn't it be better to be ruled by me
 - And Gaal issues a challenge to Abimelech to gather his army and defend himself in battle
- Gaal said this knowing that Abimelech had his spies in the city who would report back what Gaal said
 - And sure enough, the ruler of the city, Zebul, Abimelech's lieutenant, hears these boasts and goes into a rage
 - He sends messengers to Abimelech and informs the would-be king that Gaal has challenged his authority
 - And he calls upon Abimelech to come back by night when he can attack Gaal at dawn in the city

Judg. 9:34 So Abimelech and all the people who were with him arose by night and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies.

Judg. 9:35 Now Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance of the city gate; and Abimelech and the people who were with him arose from the ambush.

Judg. 9:36 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 are seeing the shadow of the mountains as if they were men."

Judg. 9:37 Gaal spoke again and said, "Behold, people are coming down from the highest part of the land, and one company comes by the way of the diviners' oak."

Judg. 9:38 Then Zebul said to him, "Where is your boasting now with which you said, 'Who is Abimelech that we should serve him?' Is this not the people whom you despised? Go out now and fight with them!"

Judg. 9:39 So Gaal went out before the leaders of Shechem and fought with Abimelech.

Judg. 9:40 Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him; and many fell wounded up to the entrance of the gate.

Judg. 9:41 Then Abimelech remained at Arumah, but Zebul drove out Gaal and his relatives so that they could not remain in Shechem.

Judg. 9:42 Now it came about the next day, that the people went out to the field, and it was told to Abimelech.

Judg. 9:43 So he took his people and divided them into three companies, and lay in wait in the field; when he looked and saw the people coming out from the city, he arose against them and slew them.

Judg. 9:44 Then Abimelech and the company who was with him dashed forward and stood in the entrance of the city gate; the other two companies then dashed against all who were in the field and slew them.

Judg. 9:45 Abimelech fought against the city all that day, and he captured the city and killed the people who were in it; then he razed the city and sowed it with salt.

- Abimelech executes the plan of Zebul
 - He comes to the fields near Shechem and sits in wait in four companies
 - Then in the early morning light, Gaal goes to the city gate to watch for an expected attack
 - When he sees Abimelech's army rising up from the fields and hillsides surrounding the city, he realizes he is under attack
 - His plan must have been to remain in the city walls and defend the city from attack
 - But the Zebul realizing that Gaal wasn't so easily fooled tries to convince the man that this isn't an attack at all
 - He comes up with a feeble explanation that these were just shadows in the early light
 - But Gaal isn't fooled, and he sees that Abimelech's army has been divided into camps that approach from various directions
 - Realizing that his deception isn't working, Zebul comes clean in v.38 telling Gaal be a man and fight the battle you asked for
 - So in v.39 Gaal lead the leaders of the city into battle against Abimelech
 - The city leaders have aligned with Gaal, so everyone knows this is a battle to the death for either side
 - In this battle, Abimelech's forces are victorious in killing the soldiers who come out of the city for battle
 - But the city itself is still defended behind its walls
 - While Abimelech's forces have succeeded in defeating Gaal's forces, Zebul begins to fight within the city against those who rebelled against Abimelech
 - In v.42 we're told that Zebul drives Gaal and his forces out of the city

- Abimelech is told that his enemies have been driven out of the city and are vulnerable hiding in the fields outside the city
- So he takes his army back to Shechem and split his army into three companies
- Once company had the task of guarding the entrance gate of the city so that it couldn't be retaken or closed
- This ensured that Abimelech's army could enter the city without opposition
- The rest of his army defeated the people of the city who were in the field
 - And then they fought in the city
 - Until they had defeated the entire city in retribution for giving safe harbor to Abimelech's enemy
 - To make sure the city would never oppose him again, Abimelech salted the earth
 - He probably didn't apply salt to the entire area but only a portion
 - In any case, it was a symbolic act indicating that the city would never rise again to challenge him
- But the rebellion isn't over yet

Judg. 9:46 When all the leaders of the tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the inner chamber of the temple of El-berith.

Judg. 9:47 It was told Abimelech that all the leaders of the tower of Shechem were gathered together.

Judg. 9:48 So Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who were with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand and cut down a branch from the trees, and lifted it and laid it on his shoulder. Then he said to the people who were with him, "What you have seen me do, hurry and do likewise."

Judg. 9:49 All the people also cut down each one his branch and followed Abimelech, and put them on the inner chamber and set the inner chamber on fire over those inside, so that all the men of the tower of Shechem also died, about a thousand men and women.

- After the destruction of Shechem, Abimelech learns that some of the city's inhabitants had escaped and were held up in the nearby military fortress

- So Abimelech's not satisfied that anyone survived his retribution
 - He calls upon those in his army to each cut down a limb from a tree
 - And then the crowd piled the wood up at the base of the tower where the people were held up
 - And they proceeded to burn the wood and killed everyone inside by smoke and burning
 - We're told a thousand men and women died in the fire
- At this point, the tyrant is out of control and operating in pure rage and bloodlust
 - He isn't content with simply destroying one city
 - He now attacks a nearby city probably out of suspicion that they too are aligned against him

Judg. 9:50 Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he camped against Thebez and captured it.

Judg. 9:51 But there was a strong tower in the center of the city, and all the men and women with all the leaders of the city fled there and shut themselves in; and they went up on the roof of the tower.

Judg. 9:52 So Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it, and approached the entrance of the tower to burn it with fire.

Judg. 9:53 But a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head, crushing his skull.

Judg. 9:54 Then he called quickly to the young man, his armor bearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, so that it will not be said of me, 'A woman slew him.'" So the young man pierced him through, and he died.

Judg. 9:55 When the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, each departed to his home.

Judg. 9:56 Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father in killing his seventy brothers.

Judg. 9:57 Also God returned all the wickedness of the men of Shechem on their heads, and the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal came upon them.

- Thebez is probably the modern city of Tubas which is northeast of Shechem
 - We have no reason in scripture for his attack, which is why we suppose he was operating in pure rage at this point

- This city had a strong tower in the center of the city where the people retreated for safety
- Abimelech intends to siege this tower too with fire
- But before he can get far with his plan, a woman threw a large millstone down on his head
 - We can suppose that the stone knocked him unconscious at least at first
 - Whatever the initial result, the impact damaged his head to the point that he expected to die in the end
 - But rather than die from this injury, Abimelech asked a member of his own army to kill him
 - Remember we said back in the story of Deborah that it was a dishonor for a soldier to be killed by a woman
 - So Abimelech wants to avoid this outcome
- After Abimelech dies, the men in his army lose all interest in pursuing any further bloodshed
 - Samuel says in v.56 that this is how the Lord repaid this man for his wickedness to Gideon's family
 - We are to understand that all that transpired happened under God's hand
 - He sent the evil spirit
 - He orchestrated certain events and outcomes
 - So that Abimelech would know the full outcome of his own treachery
 - To include ensuring Abimelech's death would dishonor him in the eyes of the people
 - Samuel says that the men of Shechem likewise experienced judgment for the wickedness they displayed in working with Abimelech against Gideon's family
 - Notice Samuel adds that these things happened because of the prophetic curse spoken by Gideon's only surviving son

- We can only marvel at the power of God to turn people and events precisely so they accomplish all His desires
- Notice that Abimelech was able to defeat the city of Shechem, which appeared to be a victory for the bad guys
- Except that now we see the Lord simply used Abimelech to punish the men of Shechem for killing Gideon's sons
- And then once the people of Shechem had paid the price, the Lord turned His attention back to Abimelech
 - And the Lord used a woman in a tower to kill him
 - No army was necessary
- Does this story broaden your understanding of how the Lord works to accomplish His will?
 - He allows Abimelech to rise to power as a means of demonstrating the evil in the people's hearts
 - He allows Abimelech to kill Gideon's sons to illustrate how Gideon's actions to keep slave wives and to produce sons were in error
 - The Lord spares one son so that son can be used by God to pronounce a curse on the leader
 - And he allowed the king to rule harshly over the people for three years to demonstrate the foolishness of their desires
 - After three years, the Lord proceeded to judge Abimelech for his sin in killing Gideon's family
 - He brings an evil spirit and an opponent into the situation to bring down Abimelech
 - But not before He used Abimelech to judge those who partnered with him in Shechem
 - The entire episode is a sad lesson in how far the depravity and sin of the human heart can take us when it's left unchecked
 - But even more, this story is a tour de force of the Lord's sovereignty

- We simply can't overlook or explain away how the Lord orchestrated every detail in this situation to suit His eternal purposes
- He never caused anyone to sin nor tempted them to do so
- He used evil to accomplish good and He did everything with perfect justice for all involved
- This is a low point in Israel's time since Joshua
 - They are rudderless, not because the Lord has stopped ruling His people but because His people are no longer listening
 - Gideon ruled for many decades, but his heart wandered severely
 - And as a result, he left the people in a state of rebellion
 - From there it was a short step into civil war
 - This is the first time in Israel's history that Jews had fought other Jews in all-out warfare
 - And it begins a new pattern
 - From the time of Gideon onward, it's common for judge's death to result in civil war among the people
 - The decline of Jewish society is all the more evident in this cycle
- But then between these moments, we still find periods of peace in the land
 - After Abimelech is gone, the Lord reasserts His control over the nation for 45 years with two judges described at the beginning of chapter 10

Judg. 10:1 Now after Abimelech died, Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, arose to save Israel; and he lived in Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim.

Judg. 10:2 He judged Israel twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried in Shamir.

Judg. 10:3 After him, Jair the Gileadite arose and judged Israel twenty-two years.

Judg. 10:4 He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities in the land of Gilead that are called Havvoth-jair to this day.

Judg. 10:5 And Jair died and was buried in Kamon.

- These two judges preside over a relatively peaceful period in the land
 - There isn't much to be said about these men except perhaps the second judge Jair
 - His rule seems to have arrived at a similar end to Gideon
 - He has 30 cities and much wealth
 - His sons road around on donkeys in a time before Israel had horses
 - So it seems they took upon themselves a life of privilege again
 - Also, the man had thirty sons which must mean he had multiple wives as Gideon did
 - It would seem that Samuel elected not to say much more about these two men because the main point is obvious
 - We can see the Israel's tendency to return to the same sins again and again
 - And even though a judge had ruled them without incident for 23 years didn't stop the decline of the people again
- And because of the excesses of Jair, the people are set up for a new round of sin, punishment and civil war

Judg. 10:6 Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; thus they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him.

Judg. 10:7 The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the sons of Ammon.

Judg. 10:8 They afflicted and crushed the sons of Israel that year; for eighteen years they afflicted all the sons of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in Gilead in the land of the Amorites.

Judg. 10:9 The sons of Ammon crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah, Benjamin, and the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was greatly distressed.

- Once more, idolatry enters into daily practice among the people
 - They turned away from the Lord as if He was just another pagan god that could be traded for any other

- And the Lord did as He must
- He disciplined the people with oppressors from both the east and west
- For 18 years the people were afflicted by their own sins
 - That's the way we must view the Lord's response here
 - Like a vice, He squeezed the people
 - But the people themselves were the ones turning the screws by sinning against the word of the Lord
 - Until Israel was greatly distressed we're told
- I'm speeding through this story because you've heard it before and Samuel knows it
 - There's no reasons to dwell on the details beyond what's obvious
 - Fallen hearts are wandering hearts
 - Sinful people seek for sinful relationships, beginning with a desire to forsake the Lord for earthly attachments
- Israel is doing it once more here
 - And it started after leader charted the course of sin in his own excesses and abuses
 - Leaders are the cause of our sin
 - But sinful leaders among God's people are a cancer for godliness
- And if we persist in sin and repeat these cycles in our own walk, we dare the Lord to respond
 - As we learned in Hebrews, the Lord may choose to stop rescuing us some day
 - He may decide to leave us in our sin as a final act of judgment
 - So that our lives become a negative testimony to the world
 - And this generation of Israel appears to be in danger of that result

Judg. 10:10 Then the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, "We have sinned against You, for indeed, we have forsaken our God and served the Baals."

Judg. 10:11 The LORD said to the sons of Israel, "Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the sons of Ammon, and the Philistines?

Judg. 10:12 "Also when the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hands.

Judg. 10:13 "Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods; therefore I will no longer deliver you.

Judg. 10:14 "Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress."

- Let's learn a lesson from the story of Judges this morning, the lesson that second chances from God deserve a different response from us
 - When we have been rescued from our sins by God's grace, let's not squander His act of mercy
 - Take that mercy and use it to recommit to walking in obedience
 - Seek for help, in His word and in prayer and in fellowship among His people
 - Don't take His mercy for granted
 - Even though we know we have been saved for eternity, we still concern ourselves with the result of service to Him
 - And we cannot forget that our willful sin is fundamentally different than a momentary weakness or absentmindedness
 - Everyone sins from time to time
 - But not everyone sins with intention and desire to oppose the Lord
 - The Lord has sufficient grace to cover all sin by the blood of Christ
 - But to go on sinning intentionally is risking the discipline of the Lord, which none of us can withstand
 - Let's learn from this terrible pattern of judges by seeking for a better testimony
 - Rather than hearing the Lord declaring to us "I will no longer deliver you"

Judges 10

- There's an old, overused saying that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again while expecting a different result
 - I'm not sure if that's a reasonable definition of insanity, but it's certainly an apt description of Israel during the time of Judges
 - We've reached chapter 10
 - We're about 250 years into the 300-year period of Judges
 - And the cycle of sin and disobedience is still turning, now for the fifth time
 - So it's appropriate for us to take one day to consider some of the contributing factors driving the pattern
 - Gideon and the aftermath of his family civil war is behind us
 - And last week we heard that two judges followed in quick succession
 - One, Tola, seems to re-establish a sound culture of obedience in the land
 - But that didn't last
 - The second judge, Jair, appears to repeat the mistakes of Gideon barely three decades after Gideon's time
 - Jair took many wives
 - He had many children
 - And he took a position of privilege and status among the people
 - We can evaluate his time as judge based on the legacy he leaves behind
 - And in v.6 we see the aftermath of his time of judge

Judg. 10:6 Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; thus they forsook the Lord and did not serve Him.

- There's nothing new or surprising here, right?
- This is the cycle we've come to expect in the time Judges
- There is almost a sense that it's impossible for the people of Israel to avoid falling away
- Like a moth drawn to a flame, the people can't stay out of idolatry or so it would seem
- What is it about the Israelites or their situation that leads them down this path time and time again?
 - Simply put, Israel is succumbing to Canaanization, that they are coming under the influence of the worldly, pagan cultures around them
 - Israel was surrounded by Canaanites and other nations
 - When Joshua brought the people into the land, the Lord told the people to remove all the Canaanite peoples from the land
 - The people of God were not to seek friendship with the people of the land
 - And if they didn't obey this command, the Lord warned the people they would be tempted by their neighbors to worship other gods
 - The Lord repeats this advice to His people throughout the Bible, because it's true for everyone
 - We can seek a stronger relationship with the world...
 - Or we can seek a stronger relationship with the Lord
 - But we can't do both
 - As James said:

James 4:4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

- Or as Paul taught:

2Cor. 6:14 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

2Cor. 6:15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

2Cor. 6:16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said,

“I will dwell in them and walk among them;

And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

2Cor. 6:17 “Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,” says the Lord.

“And do not touch what is unclean;

And I will welcome you.

2Cor. 6:18 “And I will be a father to you,

And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,”

Says the Lord Almighty.

- The Bible presents us with a simple and powerful rule of thumb
 - The Lord says we are to remain separate from the world
 - Paul commands the believer in New Testament times to live this way
 - And he quotes the word spoken to Israel to emphasize that this has always been God’s expectation for those who follow Him
 - God dwells among us, so don’t try to live like those who do not have the Lord
 - Be separate, distinct, without partnership or fellowship with the world
 - Because when we associate too closely with the world seeking harmony with their values, we don’t “bring them up,” they pull us down
 - Our godliness doesn’t “rub off” on them
 - But their ungodliness will corrupt us over time
 - Obviously, the Church has a mission to pursue them, to reach the world for Christ
 - So we must make some kind of connection with an unbeliever
 - But our connection must seek to highlight our *differences*, what we have that they lack

- We can't win them over to our side if we identify with the things they value
- We lose our distinction when we forfeit our differences by trying to look just like them
- As Jesus said

[Matt. 5:13](#) "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

[Matt. 5:14](#) "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;

[Matt. 5:15](#) nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

[Matt. 5:16](#) "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

- We impact the world by our distinction, by our light, by our "saltiness"
 - But if we become just like the world, there goes our opportunity to influence it for Christ
 - And the enemy knows that
 - He knew it in Israel's day and he knows it today
 - If he can tempt you and me to identify with the world's values over God's word, then he neutralizes us on the spiritual battlefield
- He causes the world to think crude language, explicit music, and sexual immorality are cool, but what do you say?
 - The world celebrates depravity, brutality, ego and greed, but we practice love, kindness and charity
 - The world worships science, reason, mysticism, and paganism, but we witness to Christ and His word
 - We don't condemn nor judge the world for its ways, but neither do we seek to identify with them
 - It's the *contrast* that our faith affords that give us an opportunity to reach others with a different message

- Equally important, when we maintain distinction from the world, we protect ourselves from the compromises that inevitably follow
 - Friendship with the world is hatred toward God
 - So when we adopt the world's attitudes, speech and behaviors, we become like the world
 - And we move away from God
 - Inevitably we end up in idolatry
 - So when we prioritize pursuing the word above seeking the Lord and his word, we are taking part in the idolatry of our age
 - We found something about the world we liked
 - We began to agree it's worth pursuing
 - And our heart's affection is turned to something other than pleasing God
 - It's the proverbial slippery slope
- That's what's happening in Israel in these days of Judges, they keep sliding down the same path generation after generation
 - In the beginning, they ignored the Lord's instructions to put away the Canaanites' so they could be separated from their influences
 - Over time, generation after generation of Israelites found something about the Canaanite culture they liked
 - They noticed the alluring Canaanite women and took them as wives
 - They sought the profit of trading goods and establishing business with these peoples
 - And they were attracted to the excitement of settling in their large cities
 - Within no time, the Israelites were worshipping the gods of their neighbors
 - In v.6 Samuel says they people are worshipping the Canaanite gods of Baal & Ashtaroth

- Beyond that, they're now worshipping the gods of Syria, Phoenicia, Moab, Ammon and the Philistines
- This is a new low for the people of Israel as they've moved beyond merely the Canaanite gods
- Altogether, Israel has adopted seven false gods just as the Lord promised they would
- What would our list of false gods look like?
 - Ask yourself, what does our world worship today?
 - For the most part the modern world is not bowing down to wooden figures and stone monuments
 - What do they hold in high esteem?
 - What does the world make sacrifices to obtain and please?
- Aren't the gods of today wealth, physical beauty, career, sports, hobbies, or even children or pets?
 - Earthly, temporal things that cannot substitute for the living God
 - Things we've come to appreciate because we are living in and around people who tell us these things matter
 - That these are the things that make life worth living
 - Where have we compromised? Where are we sacrificing Heavenly treasure to obtain the world's treasure?
- In the cycle of Judges, we know the Lord won't ignore the Israelites latest fall, and certainly He doesn't

Judg. 10:7 The anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the sons of Ammon.

Judg. 10:8 They afflicted and crushed the sons of Israel that year; for eighteen years they afflicted all the sons of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in Gilead in the land of the Amorites.

Judg. 10:9 The sons of Ammon crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah, Benjamin, and the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was greatly distressed.

- On this occasion, the Lord disciplined His people with oppressors sent from both the east and west

- The Philistines came from the west & the Ammonites from the east
 - For 18 years the people were afflicted because of their own sins
 - Like a vice, the Lord squeezed the people
 - Until Israel was greatly distressed
 - And predictably, they cried out to the Lord for relief

Judg. 10:10 Then the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, “We have sinned against You, for indeed, we have forsaken our God and served the Baals.”

- The period of oppression led the people into repentance
 - They confess their sins and cry out to the Lord for relief
 - Here we find a second principle of the morning
 - God’s people are best served in their pursuit of godliness when God brings trial and persecution
 - As James says

James 1:2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,
James 1:3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

James 1:4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- Trials are spiritual condition exercises
 - Some trials come upon us because the Lord desires to grow our faith and strengthen us for greater works of service
 - But other times our trials are discipline brought by the Lord as a result of our sin and disobedience
- But in both cases the Lord is working to draw us closer to Him
 - To expose our weaknesses, our idolatry, our selfishness
 - So we will recognize them ourselves and put them away
 - To bring us back to a dependence on Him

- To a willingness to endure the world's disapproval for following the Lord
- But regret isn't repentance...

Judg. 10:11 The LORD said to the sons of Israel, "Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the sons of Ammon, and the Philistines?

Judg. 10:12 "Also when the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hands.

Judg. 10:13 "Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods; therefore I will no longer deliver you.

Judg. 10:14 "Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress."

- The people want relief, but the Lord isn't quick to grant that relief
 - Speaking through a prophet, the Lord rebukes the people for chasing idols again
 - In vs.11-12, the Lord reminds the people He has delivered them from their enemies in the past
 - He lists seven adversaries who oppressed the people in the past
 - Yet God rescued his people when they needed help
 - The list of seven nations oppressing the people creates symmetry with the list of seven gods the people were worshipping in v.6
 - The Lord is emphasizing their short memories
 - They're asking the Lord to grant them relief from their circumstances
 - But those very circumstances are the result of their choice to make friends with the gods of their enemies
 - If they want the Lord to deliver them from their enemies, then first they must forsake friendship with these people
 - The irony is the people were maintaining their relationships with these gods even as they cried out for relief from God's discipline
 - This is repentance in the style of Esau

- They are demonstrating regret over their circumstances, not a willingness to leave their sin behind
- So they continue in their apostasy
- Let's not think we can fool the Lord, for He knows our hearts better than we do
 - If we make friends with the world, we should expect to see the fruit of that apostasy
 - The Lord may put us in a vice at some point to get our attention
 - I've seen it many times...brothers and sisters that assume they've been doing everything right
 - They have the house, the cars, the job, 2.5 kids and a 401K
 - But they're just carbon copies of the world...plus a little church on Sunday unless the Cowboys are playing early that week
 - Chasing the world's definition of success instead of the Lord's
 - But then the cracks in the wall begin to show
 - The shallow marriage
 - The rebellious kids
 - The addictions, the lack of fulfillment, the emptiness inside
 - Maybe worse
 - They're sleeping in the bed they made...reaping a measure of regret from the living like the world and wondering why sharing the world's consequences
 - You can't architect your life to match the world while expecting a different result simply because you know Jesus
 - Israel continued to live in rebellion but expected the Lord to grant relief from the consequences
 - The Lord responds you have chosen to seek refuge in the gods of your neighbors
 - So let them deliver you
 - And of course, He knows they won't be delivered

- He simply gives them more time to learn that lesson
- And once more, a new generation of Israel wakes up to the reality of their situation

Judg. 10:15 The sons of Israel said to the Lord, "We have sinned, do to us whatever seems good to You; only please deliver us this day."

Judg. 10:16 So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord; and He could bear the misery of Israel no longer.

Judg. 10:17 Then the sons of Ammon were summoned and they camped in Gilead. And the sons of Israel gathered together and camped in Mizpah.

Judg. 10:18 The people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another, "Who is the man who will begin to fight against the sons of Ammon? He shall become head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

- The people move to a point of repentance
 - They say we have sinned
 - They agree with the Lord's assessment
 - They don't make excuses
 - And they say they will accept whatever judgment the Lord deems appropriate
 - Samuel's description is short and matter-of-fact, but give a moment's thought to how this must have taken place within the camp of Israel
 - You have a nation of several million people moved in unison to make this appeal
 - I suspect some were ready to make this move much earlier than others
 - But the Lord kept squeezing the vice until the entire nation was ready to move back to the Lord
 - The Lord isn't interested in partial obedience
 - He wants the whole heart of His people
- And secondly, notice the actions that followed their statements
 - In v.16 the people put away their foreign gods

- That doesn't mean they returned the gods to their cupboard
- It means they were sent away
- And they served the Lord, which means they obeyed His word and worshipped Him in action as well as words
- The people did the works in keeping with repentance
 - Words are cheap, and the road to Hell is paved with good intentions, as the saying goes
 - If we feel some conviction about how we're living, how we're prioritizing our lives, then we need to repent
 - And repentance means doing something differently
 - Changing a life can be difficult, yes, but not repenting is much worse
- And then the Lord was ready to rescue them
 - Samuel uses an anthropomorphic description of the Lord
 - He says the Lord could no longer bear the misery of His people
 - This is a human way to understand the timing of the Lord's response
 - We understand the Lord wasn't at a breaking point
 - But He selected His timing to ensure the people were sufficiently motivated to repent and not turn back again
- Then the battle began
 - The Ammonites assemble for a great victory against the Israelites
 - They gather in Gilead, the region east of Jericho in present day Jordan
 - Without supernatural intervention, the nation of Israel would have been crushed by their adversaries
 - So the people of Israel gather on the west side of the river in Gilead

- But they are without a judge or leader to save them
 - Do they ask the Lord to save them?
 - No, they continue to think like the world
 - They seek a human deliverer to fight the battle
 - And they in v.18 they say the person who leads them will be rewarded with the land of the Ammonites
- Years of living with worldly perspective continues to weigh on their view of life
 - They still see solutions among men rather than appealing to the Lord directly
 - The Lord is willing to rescue the people
 - And He will raise up a deliverer
 - But He will do it in unexpected ways to shame the world's wisdom
- Be prepared for the battles that come after you take a stand for the Lord
 - If you would turn away from chasing the world and seek to serve the Lord, be ready for the world to fight back
 - The enemy and his forces will not be pleased
 - And that attack will likely come from your neighbors, those close to you
 - Family and friends will seek to hold you to their way of life
 - And your own flesh will rebel as well
 - But ask the Lord for the strength to hold to your course, and He will give you strength to win those battles
 - And it will come in unexpected ways
 - The solutions to our emptiness, strife and stress won't be more money or possessions
 - It's not more time at spent at work or another drink
 - It will come from seeking the Lord and allowing Him to work

Judges 11A

- During the second half of the 19th century, life in the American west became an iconic representation of our nation's independent, self-sufficient image
 - Life in the West revealed Americans to be rugged, determined, and a bit lawless
 - The West was our frontier where laws were made by the sheriffs and broken by the outlaws
 - And sometimes it was hard to tell the difference between them
 - The white man was moving in and the native tribes were fighting for control of the land
 - It was the wild west
 - The final 60 years or so of the period of Judges could be compared to the American wild west
 - We've seen the judges from Gideon's family trying to rule by their wealth and status
 - And we've had outlaws like Abimelech and his band of worthless fellows fighting to take control
 - And we've had Ammonite natives fighting to displace the Israelites by raiding their camp
 - It's a time of cowboys and Indians but few lawmen
- Last week we heard the people of Israel were under assault from two directions
 - On the western border, the Philistines were attacking the people
 - And on the eastern border, the Ammonites were raiding Jewish towns
 - The Lord sent these two peoples against Israel because the people were caught in Canaanite culture
 - And were worshipping foreign gods
 - But now the time has come for the Lord to rescue His people
 - There's only one thing missing from our Western movie

- We need a hero to save the day
- As the Israelites declared at the end of chapter 10

Judg. 10:18 The people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another, “Who is the man who will begin to fight against the sons of Ammon? He shall become head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.”

- We need a man who fits the western stereotype
- A man who can unite the people
- We need a man who has the grit to fight the natives
 - And not just any hero will do, of course
 - Our Western needs a man of grit
 - A man with a mysterious past
 - A hero who is one part sheriff, one part outlaw and one part Clint Eastwood
 - We need Jephthah...

Judg. 11:1 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a valiant warrior, but he was the son of a harlot. And Gilead was the father of Jephthah.

Judg. 11:2 Gilead's wife bore him sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out and said to him, “You shall not have an inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman.”

Judg. 11:3 So Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob; and worthless fellows gathered themselves about Jephthah, and they went out with him.

- Jephthah was born to a prominent family and lived in the region of Gilead
 - In fact, his father's name was Gilead, indicating he was a descendant of the original Gilead family
 - Gilead is the region directly to the east of the Jordan river north of the Dead Sea
 - This territory bordered the Ammonites and the Moabites
 - The Ammonites are the people challenging Israel for their land, both in Gilead and even west of the Jordan

- Jephthah's name means "he opens" which could refer to several meanings
 - But as we'll see in this story, his name refers prophetically to his tendency to open his mouth too much
 - Specifically, he's a man who depends on his rhetorical wisdom
 - But his mouth will get him into trouble as well
- Jephthah is also a man with a dark past
 - In v.1 we're told he was born to a harlot
 - Jephthah's father wasn't the most faithful sort
 - And at some point he had relationship with a prostitute
 - And the result of that liaison was Jephthah
 - As a result of his dishonorable origins, the rest of the Gilead family turned against their half-breed brother
 - So his brothers drove Jephthah out of the home
 - They claim he will have no inheritance in their family since he was the son of a prostitute
 - The inheritance of this family would have been the land of Gilead, or so their name suggests
 - But Jephthah was cut off from that inheritance
- As a result, he leaves the family estate and flees to the Jewish frontier
 - Jephthah lands in Tob, which was the northern most town in Gilead
 - The town was an outpost on the edge of civilization, a dusty, one-horse town
 - Jephthah turns his back on his family and rides off into the sunset, a man with a score to settle
 - But he doesn't go alone, because a band of "worthless" fellows joins Jephthah on his ride out of town
 - The term worthless in English isn't quite right
 - The word in Hebrew means empty or idle or foolish

- You can get a sense of who these men are when you consider what kind of man up and leaves his family and home to follow a disgraced man
 - These are men who are loners, outcasts, without much of a future themselves
 - Men for whom the prospect of adventure on the frontier was preferable to life on the farm
 - These men were the good, the bad, and the ugly...
- So our story begins with the people declaring that the one who can defeat the Ammonites will receive Ranch Gilead as a prize
 - Meanwhile, the most prominent family in the land has banished the bastard son who will ultimately return to free the town
 - It's the making of a great Western
 - And it's also a story that builds on common biblical themes
 - The Lord raises up the outcast to rescue His people
 - But let's not overlook the larger storyline of Judges
 - These are tough times
 - The people are living with little or no understanding of the Law of God
 - And they are prone to idol worship
 - The Judges cycle is still spinning, and it's been picking up speed
- With each turn we've seen the fabric of Jewish society deteriorate in a new way
 - The sin of Israel is always best summarized by the phrase, "doing what was right in their own eyes"
 - But the details change over the course of the 300 years
- In the early cycles, the tribes refused to push out the Canaanites from the land
 - Later we saw Jewish men retreating from their spiritual role as leaders in society
 - Then the people were taking to the foreign gods of Canaan

- And the leaders became weaker and began to act as despots with children seeking privilege
- And then the people began to murder one another over the land
- And the worship of false gods grew to include gods from the nations around Israel
- And that downward spiral of the people will accelerate once again with the selection of Jephthah
 - In one way more than any other...the people are no longer looking to the Lord to raise up a deliverer
 - We saw at the end of chapter 10 that the Lord said He would not rescue the people merely because they cried out
 - He wanted true repentance, not merely regret
 - So they put aside their gods, and then they waited
 - But then we hear nothing more from the Lord
 - We don't see Him calling a specific man to judge Israel
 - And the people aren't seeking the Lord to find that man
 - Instead, they call a king of their own choosing

Judg. 11:4 It came about after a while that the sons of Ammon fought against Israel.

Judg. 11:5 When the sons of Ammon fought against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob;

Judg. 11:6 and they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our chief that we may fight against the sons of Ammon."

Judg. 11:7 Then Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me and drive me from my father's house? So why have you come to me now when you are in trouble?"

Judg. 11:8 The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "For this reason we have now returned to you, that you may go with us and fight with the sons of Ammon and become head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

Judg. 11:9 So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you take me back to fight against the sons of Ammon and the Lord gives them up to me, will I become your head?"

Judg. 11:10 The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The Lord is witness between us; surely we will do as you have said."

Judg. 11:11 Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and chief over them; and Jephthah spoke all his words before the Lord at Mizpah.

- The elders of the tribe of Gad in Gilead decide they need to call for help to defeat the Ammonites terrorizing the people
 - Interestingly, they decide to call Jephthah in Tob
 - What makes them think to call this man?
 - We must assume that his time spent on the frontier earned him a reputation as a fierce warrior and a man accustomed to difficult circumstances
 - So the elders decide this is the right kind of guy to lead them into battle
 - We might imagine Jephthah sitting in a chair on the porch of his house as a band of elders ride up in a cloud of dust
 - Jephthah is leaning back in his chair, with his boots up on the porch railing
 - His cowboy hat pitched down over his weather worn face
 - His band of worthless fellows gathered at either end of the street with their hands on their holsters
 - The elders approach hats in hand, asking Jephthah to return home to defend the ranch
 - Jephthah knows he holds all the cards, so he asks, aren't you the ones that drove me away, told me you hated me?
 - But now you're in a fix
 - You need a sheriff
 - It's a valid observation
 - Jephthah wants something in return for his services
 - He wants the ranch
 - Putting aside the western motif for a moment, this isn't how the Lord raises up judges, is it?
 - The people aren't looking for a rescue from the Lord
 - This is the inevitable result of putting distance between yourself and the Lord

- Remember, we said that when we feel distant from the Lord, it wasn't the Lord Who moved
- But once we create that distance, then inevitably we begin to operate without His counsel or power
- Life becomes entirely fleshly, earthly, secular and temporal
- We seek see manmade solutions for manmade goals
- They've lost the perspective that their trials were designed by the Lord to draw the people closer to Him
 - They have put aside the pagan gods
 - But they've haven't returned to the true God
 - Like the Christian who feels convicted to set aside some particular sin or clean their life up in some way
 - But then they never take the essential step of strengthening their walk with the Lord
 - It does not good to set aside the sin if we don't turn that momentum into seeking a closer relationship with and dependence upon the Lord
- That's why we don't hear of the Lord's response to the people...He has nothing to respond to
 - Instead, we only watch the people building their path of rescue
 - But they are bargaining with money that isn't there own
 - They are offering Jephthah a monarchy that God hasn't permitted the people to offer
 - So as with the selection of Saul later, the people's demands will lead to severe outcomes
 - Nevertheless, the Lord is prepared to rescue the people through Jephthah just as He was willing to rule through Saul for a time
 - Jephthah makes his request to become the leader over the people of Gilead
 - And the elders agree

- Like with Abimelech earlier, the devil you know seems better than the one you don't
- In v.10 Jephthah mentions the name of the Lord for the first time
 - He says the Lord will judge between them on this matter
 - Meaning, the Lord will be their witness to this agreement
 - Jephthah invokes the name of the Lord more than any other judge in the book of Judges
 - But in keeping with his name, he's a man with the words but not the actions
 - He speaks of God but doesn't seem to listen or walk with the Lord
 - Notice at the end of the passage in v.11 we hear that Jephthah "spoke" these words before the Lord
 - Once again, his mouth is getting all the action
 - This is his chief weakness
 - And it's something we should all be careful to avoid too
 - Giving lip service to God, invoking His name out of culture or habit
 - But it's not enough to acknowledge His existence or power
 - We need to seek Him expecting Him to answer us with specific direction
- Our study this morning wraps up with the one with the open mouth doing what he does best...talking
 - The newly crowned king of Gilead sends a long note to his chief adversary trying to negotiate his way out of a battle

Judg. 11:12 Now Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the sons of Ammon, saying, "What is between you and me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?"

Judg. 11:13 The king of the sons of Ammon said to the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Israel took away my land when they came up from Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok and the Jordan; therefore, return them peaceably now."

Judg. 11:14 But Jephthah sent messengers again to the king of the sons of Ammon,

Judg. 11:15 and they said to him, "Thus says Jephthah, 'Israel did not take away the land of Moab nor the land of the sons of Ammon.'

Judg. 11:16 'For when they came up from Egypt, and Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh,

Judg. 11:17 then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, "Please let us pass through your land," but the king of Edom would not listen. And they also sent to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh.

Judg. 11:18 'Then they went through the wilderness and around the land of Edom and the land of Moab, and came to the east side of the land of Moab, and they camped beyond the Arnon; but they did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was the border of Moab.

Judg. 11:19 'And Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon, and Israel said to him, "Please let us pass through your land to our place."

Judg. 11:20 'But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory; so Sihon gathered all his people and camped in Jahaz and fought with Israel.

Judg. 11:21 'The Lord, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them; so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country.

Judg. 11:22 'So they possessed all the territory of the Amorites, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok, and from the wilderness as far as the Jordan.

Judg. 11:23 'Since now the Lord, the God of Israel, drove out the Amorites from before His people Israel, are you then to possess it?

Judg. 11:24 'Do you not possess what Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So whatever the Lord our God has driven out before us, we will possess it.

Judg. 11:25 'Now are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive with Israel, or did he ever fight against them?

Judg. 11:26 'While Israel lived in Heshbon and its villages, and in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities that are on the banks of the Arnon, three hundred years, why did you not recover them within that time?

Judg. 11:27 'I therefore have not sinned against you, but you are doing me wrong by making war against me; may the Lord, the Judge, judge today between the sons of Israel and the sons of Ammon.'"

- Jephthah sends a letter by the camel express to the Ammonites asking why they are attacking Gilead and trying to claim his land
 - The answer Jephthah receives is that Israel took this land away from the Ammonites
 - Now this statement is false
 - And Jephthah knows it's wrong

- So he sets out to explain the error to the king by recounting the history of Israel's time in the land
- First, he first reminds the king that when the people of Israel came up north from Midian, they sought permission to cross through the lands of Edom and Moab
 - But the people were denied entry
 - Their denial was more than merely a geopolitical move
 - Edom and Moab were the spiritual enemies of Israel
 - The Lord had declared that there would always be enmity between Israel and these people
 - So there was no possibility of the nations acting charitably toward Israel
 - No more than we might expect the devil to bury the hatchet and worship the Lord
 - Since Israel couldn't enter those lands, they walked around Edom and Moab and then turned westward toward the Jordan river valley to avoid the land of Ammon
 - When the nation came to the western part of Gilead, they encountered the king of the Amorites, Sihon at Heshbon
 - They defeated that king and took the land
 - Therefore, they hadn't taken anything from the Ammonites
 - Jephthah's argument is that since the Lord cleared the land for Israel, how can the Ammonites lay claim to it now?
 - Furthermore, the nation of Israel has occupied this territory for 300 years
 - If this land belongs to the Ammonites, why has Ammon not fought to regain the land during that 300 years?
 - The answer is obvious...the Ammonites have not legitimate claim to the land
 - They have only recently decided to take what was not theirs

- Jephthah asks the king to be reasonable and consider the facts, but what do we think of Jephthah's tactic?
 - How do you suppose an enemy king is going to respond to a lecture from his adversary?
 - This isn't a strategy likely to win the day
 - More important, it's naive and reflects Jephthah's spiritual immaturity
 - He has no appreciation of what's really going on here in God's purpose
 - We remember it was the Lord Who brought this enemy against the people as discipline
 - So this is a spiritual battle, not merely a political battle
 - And when the Lord led His people into a land filled with enemies, He didn't ask Israel to negotiate with these people
 - He told Israel to vanquish them
 - Jephthah has forgotten the teaching of the Law that told Israel that the child of promise will always be persecuted by the child of the bondwoman
 - The people of God will be opposed by the lost people of the world without exception
 - And that persecution cannot be ended by seeking common ground with the enemy
 - There is no common ground
 - As Paul says, light and darkness have nothing in common
 - So this attempt to negotiate away from a battle is foolish and unhelpful
 - But it shows us that this man is working in the flesh even as he speaks of the Lord
 - The nation has become a secular association of independent states or tribes
 - And though the Lord is still raising up judges, the people acknowledge the Lord's authority in words only

- Unsurprisingly, the king cares nothing for Jephthah's logic

Judg. 11:28 But the king of the sons of Ammon disregarded the message which Jephthah sent him.

- The word in Hebrew for disregarded is a simple word that means worthless, unproductive, unwise
 - And all three descriptions are appropriate in this case
 - Jephthah's attempt to find common ground with God's enemies was worthless, unproductive and unwise
- It was worthless because it won't work
 - Don't think we can negotiate to peace with a world that is spiritually incapable of approving of God or His people
 - We can't be a proper ambassador for Christ and expect to be well-received by a world that hates God and His Son
 - You can negotiate around that difference
 - So any attempt to do so is worthless
- Secondly, it's unproductive
 - We aren't producing fruit when we seek compromise
 - Instead we should seek to impress the truth of Christ on His enemies
 - By doing so, we may win their hearts and move them to our side where we can find agreement
 - Wasting time in trying to make friends with the world is not our mission
- Finally, it's unwise
 - When we seek agreement with those who do not and cannot share our values, we take a huge risk
 - We risk making compromises to our own stand in Christ in order to create "common" ground

- The common ground must come from our concessions because it's spiritually impossible for the unbeliever to lay claim to any part of our beliefs
- Like the apostles said to the unbelieving magician Simon in Acts 8, the unbeliever has no part or portion in matters of faith
- So Jephthah has invited his enemy to toast peace around the campfire
 - But the enemy sent no reply
 - There are only smoke signals on the horizon
 - Jephthah knew that war was inevitable
 - And that's the way the Lord wants this encounter to proceed
 - He's determined to relieve the people of Israel from their oppression of the Ammorites and later the Philistines
 - Jephthah is called by God to eliminate one enemy
 - Samson will eliminate the other
 - It's high noon at the OK Corral...

Judges 11B

- When we last saw our latest judge, Jephthah, he was trying to negotiate with the king of Ammon over who had right to the land east of the Jordan River
 - Jephthah you remember is the son of a harlot, a man rejected by the rest of his family
 - Until they needed his help to defeat the Ammonites
 - Ammon is the nation bordering Israel on the east, about 13 miles east of the Jordan River
 - They had begun to crush the Israelites in Gilead and threatened to invade further west
 - So Jephthah tried to avoid war with Israel's neighbor by lecturing the king on who was the rightful owner of the land
 - He made good arguments, and his rhetoric was top notch
 - But his plan was doomed to fail
 - Because he was working against the Lord's desires
 - The Lord had brought the Ammonites up against Israel as a punishment for their sins under the Old Covenant
 - Now that the cycle of punishment was about to give way to deliverance, the Lord raised up Jephthah to defeat the enemy
 - He didn't want a negotiator
 - He didn't ask Jephthah to make friends with Ammon
 - He wants a captain to lead an army as past Judges have done
 - So as we read last time, the king cared nothing for Jephthah's logic

[Judg. 11:28](#) But the king of the sons of Ammon disregarded the message which Jephthah sent him.

- War seems inevitable at this point
- Which is the way the Lord wanted it

- There's certainly a time to for God's people to seek peace with our neighbors in the word
 - But when the Lord has declared to His people that peace isn't His goal, then we can't substitute our desires for His
 - Because there are times when conflict and even war suit God's good purposes better than peace and acquiescence
 - In the end, we are called to obey God's will, not second guess His instructions
- So now that Jephthah's plan has failed, it's time for the Lord's plan to go into action

Judg. 11:29 Now the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, so that he passed through Gilead and Manasseh; then he passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he went on to the sons of Ammon.

Judg. 11:30 Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, "If You will indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand,

Judg. 11:31 then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering."

- The Lord brings His Spirit upon Jephthah
 - The Spirit's power and direction is responsible for the sequence of events that follows
 - This tells us that the Lord is working to create the outcome
 - Specifically, the Spirit is said to come upon Jephthah
 - This suggests the Spirit was not already working with the judge
 - This reference and others like it in the Old Testament demonstrate that the work of the Spirit in this time didn't involve a permanent indwelling
 - The Spirit came upon an individual for a time and for a purpose
 - Later, He would depart as God determined
 - That departure wasn't an indication that the Spirit disapproves of the person
 - Or that the person was no longer a child of God saved by faith

- The ministry of the Spirit in this day was different than we know Him to work in the Church age
 - In the days prior to the New Covenant, the Spirit was still the instrument of faith, but His ministry didn't include a permanent indwelling
 - Today, the Spirit comes to permanently indwell the children of God at the moment of faith
 - The Spirit is the seal of faith and the proof of salvation for every NT believer
 - That's why we say the Church stands apart from the rest of the saints of God
- In this moment, the effect of the Spirit's arrival upon Jephthah was to fill the judge with bold courage and clear understanding of God's desires
 - The Spirit leads Jephthah north along the border between Gad and Manasseh in the Jordan river valley
 - He's recruiting an army to battle
 - And when he's got the forces he requires, he returns to Mizpah of Gilead, which was on the border on Ammon
- At this point, Jephthah is ready to go to battle, but his negotiator nature comes back
 - We remember that his name means "he opens" as in he opens his mouth too often and too easily
 - And here's one of those times he makes that mistake
 - The Lord has given him all that he needs for success in the battle
 - All that's required at this point is to move forward in the battle
 - But Jephthah isn't content to rest in the Lord's Spirit nor in the confidence of the Lord's strength
 - Jephthah wants additional assurance so he decides to make a vow
- Before we consider this vow, let's understand how the Lord sees vows in general

Num. 30:1 Then Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the sons of Israel, saying, "This is the word which the Lord has commanded.

Num. 30:2 "If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

- Under the Law, Israel was obligated to keep any vow they made to the Lord
 - To fail to keep a vow meant that the Lord would require a penalty from the one who vows
 - In fact, the penalty for failure to keep a vow was to suffer a similar payment as the one requested
- Considering the way the Lord viewed vows, a Jew was encouraged to think carefully before making any vow
 - In fact, the Lord warned the people not to make vows at all considering the risks involved

Deut. 23:21 "When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the Lord your God will surely require it of you.

Deut. 23:22 "However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you.

Deut. 23:23 "You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God, what you have promised.

- The Lord explains that vows are binding and the Lord will see them through one way or another
 - Therefore, it would be better to refrain from making vows
 - In fact, you can never sin by avoiding vows
- That's why in the New Testament, Jesus says don't make vows at all, but simply to act in trustworthy and reliable way in all dealings

Matt. 5:33 "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.'

Matt. 5:34 "But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,

Matt. 5:35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

[Matt. 5:36](#) "Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

[Matt. 5:37](#) "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil.

- Jesus explains that making promises by swearing vows to God is evil
 - It's evil because in the end our sinful hearts will lead us to promise things we can't or shouldn't do
 - Or we will be tempted to go back on our word when things don't turn out the way we want and compromise our word to God
 - Either way, evil will be the outcome, so don't make a vow
- Unfortunately, Jephthah doesn't seem to know either God's word or the heart of God
 - He has missed the warnings about making rash vows, and in this case he makes probably the most ill-advised vow in all scripture
 - He declares that he is prepared to kill something or someone without considering who that might be
 - Maybe he assumes the first out of the tent will be an animal or a slave
 - Nevertheless, his mouth is getting him into serious trouble
 - In this case, Jephthah vows that if the Lord will give him victory over Ammon, he will sacrifice to the Lord whatever comes out of his tent to meet him upon his return
 - This vow is quite odd, since animals weren't typically found inside the tents though they might wander in on occasion
 - It's more likely that a person might be first out of the tent
 - So, Jephthah is essentially promising to sacrifice either an animal or human being to the Lord
- What caused him to say such a thing? Probably a combination of an impulsive nature and a complete misunderstanding of God
 - His vow suggests he views Yahweh in the same way pagan's viewed their gods

- Pagan gods were capricious, unpredictable, uncaring and demanding
- Pagan gods demanded human sacrifice from time to time
- And they had to be appeased before the worshipper could expect payback
- The Living God is also demanding of righteousness and obedience
 - But He is not uncaring or cruel
 - Nor does He dispense His mercy on a transactional basis
 - His mercy is found through faith alone in the word of God
 - And He does not delight in human sacrifice
- At the root of Jephthah's flawed thinking was the expectation that he can negotiate with God in the same way he tried to negotiate with the king of Ammon
 - Scripture makes clear that God doesn't negotiate
 - Even when He appears to entertain offers like that of Abraham interceding for Lot or Moses interceding for Israel, He still does as He planned in the end
 - He invites us into such conversations so that he can mold our thinking and show us His will
 - But He isn't looking for advice nor is He open to suggestions
 - Be careful about turning prayer into a negotiation, making deals and making vows to God
 - Negotiating with God is just another way of trying to work our own plan instead of yielding to His
 - Jephthah had already been given the Spirit of God Who had revealed God's purposes and equipped Him to succeed in battle
 - But Jephthah didn't rest in that...he still needed to feel he was in control of his circumstances and could force a certain outcome
 - While we aren't under the Law of Moses, God still expects us to operate in faith and trust by His Spirit
- Having made his vow, the die is cast for Jephthah, and with that he goes to war

Judg. 11:32 So Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them; and the Lord gave them into his hand.

Judg. 11:33 He struck them with a very great slaughter from Aroer to the entrance of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim. So the sons of Ammon were subdued before the sons of Israel.

- Notice the Lord makes no comment regarding the vow
 - There was no need for a response, for the Lord wasn't bargaining with Jephthah
 - The Lord had his plan, and His Spirit will move it forward with or without the vow
 - That's the problem with vows...they don't obligate the Lord
 - They only obligate us
 - The Lord may choose to answer in the affirmative or the negative to our request
 - But we are obligated either way...not a good deal for us
 - In this case, the Lord always intended to grant a victory, and so when Jephthah crosses over into Ammonite territory, the Lord is with Israel
 - The army of Jephthah chase the Ammonites from place to place
 - In the process, they destroy twenty cities in a great slaughter
 - As a result, the people of Ammon cease to oppress the people of Israel
- God has delivered His people as He promised in His word, but because of Jephthah's mouth, our focus moves from the Lord to Jephthah's vow

Judg. 11:34 When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. Now she was his one and only child; besides her he had no son or daughter.

Judg. 11:35 When he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you are among those who trouble me; for I have given my word to the Lord, and I cannot take it back."

- As we feared, the first out of the tent upon his return was a person, his daughter and his only child

- Based on Jephthah's vow, he was now obligated to sacrifice his daughter to the Lord, or so he thought
 - He takes one look at her and goes into mourning knowing what must follow
 - He declares that he has given his word to God and cannot take it back
 - This is true in the sense that you can't make a vow with your fingers crossed
 - The vow stands
- Obviously, we see the foolishness of Jephthah's vow clearly now
 - He promised something that depended on a certain future outcome
 - Yet he lacked the ability to control the future
 - So he was making commitments without knowing the future
 - How much better is it to simply rely on the Lord's word, since we know He can see into the future
- Jephthah's ignorance of God and of the word of God has placed him in this position
 - And ironically, his ignorance is also responsible for leading him to go through with his vow
 - Because Jephthah doesn't know or didn't remember that the law of God made provision for situations like this
 - In Leviticus, the Lord told Israel that they could escape from keeping their vow if they paid a ransom instead

Lev. 27:1 Again, the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

Lev. 27:2 "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When a man makes a difficult vow, he shall be valued according to your valuation of persons belonging to the Lord.'

Lev. 27:3 'If your valuation is of the male from twenty years even to sixty years old, then your valuation shall be fifty shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary.'

Lev. 27:4 'Or if it is a female, then your valuation shall be thirty shekels.'

- All Jephthah needed to do was pay this ransom and he could have avoided sacrificing his daughter

- As we said before, the Lord has no interest in seeing a human being sacrificed
- And in fact, He doesn't receive such an offering
- He expects that the vow be met with a ransom payment
- But remember, the mistake here was Jephthah's, not the Lord
 - Jephthah made the vow, not the Lord
 - And he doesn't have to carry through with it if he pays the ransom
 - But since he doesn't know the word of the Lord, he thinks his only choice is to either kill his daughter or be killed himself
 - And although she is innocent, he's not willing to die in place of his daughter
- Once the daughter learns what her father vowed, she responds with faith in the Lord

Judg. 11:36 So she said to him, "My father, you have given your word to the Lord; do to me as you have said, since the Lord has avenged you of your enemies, the sons of Ammon."

Judg. 11:37 She said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me; let me alone two months, that I may go to the mountains and weep because of my virginity, I and my companions."

Judg. 11:38 Then he said, "Go." So he sent her away for two months; and she left with her companions, and wept on the mountains because of her virginity.

Judg. 11:39 At the end of two months she returned to her father, who did to her according to the vow which he had made; and she had no relations with a man. Thus it became a custom in Israel,

Judg. 11:40 that the daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.

- She willingly agrees to die in accordance with the vow
 - She is more concerned with honoring the Lord than with her own life
 - But before the sentence will be carried out, she asks that she may have a 2 month delay to mourn her virginity

- She means she is mourning the fact that she will never marry or have children
 - Jephthah's daughter is perhaps the most Christ-like character we will find in the entire book of Judges
 - She is a person dedicated to trusting the Lord and serving no matter the personal consequences
 - She does so at great personal sacrifice
 - And she remains pure in her devotion
 - We're told she remains a virgin, which means she doesn't seek for earthly pleasures at the risk of her virtue
 - And after her two months of mourning, she dutifully returns to submit to the will of the Father
 - As a result, the people of Israel commemorated her personal faithfulness with an annual observance of her sacrifice
- Now once more, there is no indication from scripture that the Lord desires that this happen or that he is pleased when it does
 - The entire story is told to reveal the evil and ignorant heart of this judge
 - Her death wasn't required by the Lord
 - But the daughter's obedience to her father was out of love for the Lord and was commendable
 - In the end her death was a testimony to Jephthah's sin and ignorance and to his daughter's piety

"Although the present story ends with the death of the young girl, her father is the tragic figure, presenting a pathetic picture of stupidity, brutality, ambition, and self-centeredness. Ironically, the one who appeared to have become master of his own fate has become a victim of his own rash word..." -Block

- But if we're making conclusions about the Lord, then don't place any of this at His feet
 - The Lord is notably silent through the entire story
 - It indicates to us that He's not playing a part in these circumstances

- He's just as saddened by it as we are, and the story was preserved so we might see the deterioration of Israel's leaders
- Finally, we're also observing the beginning of a steep decline in the condition of women in the culture
 - Earlier in Judges we noted that men had stepped back from their appointed role as leaders in the family and nation
 - Women stepped forward to fill the vacuum, which was to their credit
 - But the fact that women had to rule and lead was an indictment against the men
 - And the effect of a weak men is a weak society overall
 - And the past 250 years of history confirms the dangers of a culture of weak men
 - Ironically, now we're seeing the final stages of that decline
 - When the men become spiritually weak and unfamiliar with the Lord, eventually the women will suffer too
 - Instead of leading men out of darkness, women become victims of that darkness
 - Here we find a father vowing to kill whoever walks out of his tent, knowing that tents were generally occupied by women
 - Going forward from this point in the book, we see a rapid decline in the fortunes of women in the story of Judges
 - A woman will be raped, killed and dismembered
 - 400 young women from one city will be abducted
 - And another group will be kidnapped from Shiloh
- If weak men can be one measure of a deteriorating culture, than the neglect, abuse and exploitation of women is another
 - And one is usually the product of the other
 - Both are an indication that the Lord is preparing to step in and judge the culture that abuses His mercy in these ways

- We know that the Lord will act again in Israel, because that's the pattern of this book
- And we can also be sure that the Lord is preparing to move in our world too
 - But in both cases, the Lord's response isn't immediate
 - He has a plan and a timing all His own
 - But the Lord isn't slow about His promises
 - While we await the Lord's return, we serve Him by learning the lessons of scripture, instead of forgetting God's word like Jephthah
 - And we obey without negotiating
 - We resist taking matters into our own hands
 - Men lead in their homes and in the church body, while women serve by their side, submitted to the will of God
 - We lean on the Spirit and the counsel of the word
 - And we live sacrificially knowing that the Lord is prepared to make good things come from our obedience

Judges 12

- Our study of Japhthah isn't quite finished
 - In chapter 11, we saw him defeat the Amorites only to be undone by his rash vow against the Lord
 - Japhthah learned a hard lesson
 - Making a vow doesn't force God to do anything differently than He was planning to do anyway
 - But it does bind us, and therefore it's a foolish negotiation
 - In Jephthah's case, he tried to bargain with God to win the battle
 - He neglected to notice that the Lord was already preparing to defeat Israel's enemy
 - All Jephthah had to do was go forward into the battle
 - Instead, he offered to sacrifice whoever walked out of his tent upon his return from battle
 - He assumed the person would be a servant, someone expendable
 - But as we saw, it turned out to be his daughter, a costly price to pay for opening his mouth
 - And reminder that this time in Israel is one of ignorance and fleshly living
 - Jephthah may have been a man of God but he was ignorant of God's word and unfamiliar with God's heart
 - He should have known that Leviticus 27 made a provision for difficult vows
 - He could have saved his daughter from death had he known the word and listened to the Spirit
- This is the central lesson of Jephthah's time as judge in Israel
 - The people of God have fallen so far away from where they began under Moses and Joshua, that even the judges are ignorant of God's word

- The people are blind and they are being led by the blind
- And under such circumstances, we know the sin of the people can only increase as well
- And this is what we find as we move into the final act of Jephthah's time as judge
 - The battle with the Amorites has ended
 - But the fight in Israel continues as Ephraim returns to contest with the judge

Judg. 12:1 Then the men of Ephraim were summoned, and they crossed to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, "Why did you cross over to fight against the sons of Ammon without calling us to go with you? We will burn your house down on you."

- We remember earlier that Gideon had a similar encounter with a disgruntled Ephraimites
 - Back in Gideon's time, the tribe was made upset that Gideon went to war against the Midianites
 - At that time, we said that the tribe of Ephraim was contending with Manasseh for the position of most prominent tribe
 - So the fact that Gideon took Manasseh into battle but didn't take Ephraim nearly caused a civil war between the tribes
 - Fortunately, Gideon was able to defuse the situation by reminding the leaders of Ephraim that they had the greatest honor in the battle
 - They killed the kings of Midian
 - Now once again we see the tribe of Ephraim with their knickers in a bunch over the way Jephthah went to battle without their tribe
 - It was a strange jealousy that motivated this tribe
 - It seems they took offense anytime another tribe found success
 - Here they are threatening violence against the house of Jephthah
 - Essentially, they are threatening to bring down his judgeship

- Like Gideon, Jephthah tries to negotiate his way out of the problem, but unlike Gideon, good things don't happen when he opens his mouth

Judg. 12:2 Jephthah said to them, “I and my people were at great strife with the sons of Ammon; when I called you, you did not deliver me from their hand.

Judg. 12:3 “When I saw that you would not deliver me, I took my life in my hands and crossed over against the sons of Ammon, and the Lord gave them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?”

- Jephthah's response is simple...he says we were in trouble, I called you, you ignored my request, so we went without you
 - We must assume Jephthah's answer was truthful
 - We studied last week that he traveled through the Jordan river valley recruiting an army
 - That valley borders Manasseh, Gad, Benjamin and Ephraim
 - So we can safely assume he was seeking help from all these tribes
 - But Ephraim didn't respond
 - This seems to be the pattern for this tribe at this point in Israel's history
 - They were haughty
 - They fancied themselves the powerful, privileged tribe within the nation
 - They were aloof, refusing to give aid unless they saw some political advantage in doing so
 - But them if someone else appeared to gain an upper hand, they would respond with threats to bully the others into submission
 - The sin of Ephraim's pride is yet another result of Israel's collective ignorance of God and His word
 - And it will become the source of the next step down in Israel's descent into self-destruction
 - There is a growing independence among Israel's tribes
 - The tribes are losing their sense of identity as a single nation of people

- Making possible these kind of conflicts, when one thinks itself superior to another
- And it's only a small step from here to thinking a tribe can exist without the other
- This pattern is not unique to Israel
 - In fact, the same pattern of sin and the dangers it creates are common in the people of God today in the Church
 - Paul teaches at length in his letters about the oneness of the body of Christ
 - We are not individuals serving the Lord
 - By design, we are one body brought together by one spirit
 - Just as the members of your physical body cannot operate apart from the whole, the same is true for the members of the body of Christ
 - Yet our pride and arrogance can lead us to repeat the sin of Ephraim
 - Not only do we begin to think ourselves superior to our brothers and sisters in the body
 - But even worse, we may begin to think we can live our spiritual lives without them
 - We cut free, determined to do our own thing
 - Or we attack others to make ourselves look and feel superior
 - These are common human emotions, but there is no place for them in the body of Christ
 - Guard against this sort of thinking or placing ourselves above others or dismissing the contributions of others
 - It's a recipe for civil war in the body
 - And it's completely false sense of self-importance
 - Who are any of us apart from Christ in us?
 - We are nothing apart from Christ, so how can we make claims to self-worth, especially if we do so at the expense of our brothers or sisters?

- Unfortunately, this was Ephraim's attitude among the tribes
 - And because the entire nation is operating without sound biblical counsel or godly leadership, the cycle of sin in Judges is about to reach a new low
 - A civil war will now begin
 - And it comes about because of Ephraim's haughtiness
 - And also because of Jephthah's incompetence as judge
 - After telling the Ephraimites they were at fault for missing the battle, Jephthah must has assumed they would follow through on their threats
 - So rather than wait to be attacked, Jephthah decides to take the battle to them

Judg. 12:4 Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought Ephraim; and the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, "You are fugitives of Ephraim, O Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim and in the midst of Manasseh."

Judg. 12:5 The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan opposite Ephraim. And it happened when any of the fugitives of Ephraim said, "Let me cross over," the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he said, "No,"

Judg. 12:6 then they would say to him, "Say now, 'Shibboleth.'" But he said, "Sibboleth," for he could not pronounce it correctly. Then they seized him and slew him at the fords of the Jordan. Thus there fell at that time 42,000 of Ephraim.

- This hasty judge gathers another force of men from Gilead and attacked the tribe of Ephraim
 - Here we have one son of Jacob attacking another son of Jacob...a new low
 - Jephthah raised the army by appealing to the Gileadites' anger over being caught in the middle between Ephraim and Manasseh
 - These two tribes had experienced tension and dissent for centuries
 - And the poor Gileadites were caught in the crossfire
 - So Jephthah says in v.4 you are in the midst of this conflict

- Why not put it to an end to it by joining me to defeat the Ephraimites?
- Apparently, the jealousy and arrogance of Ephraim hadn't won it any friends, so Jephthah knew what to say to gain his recruits
 - The battle takes place east of the Jordan
 - And the Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan leading up into the hill country of Ephraim
 - This meant that the Ephraimites couldn't return to their homes, since the fords were the only passage ways back up from the river valley
- At this point Jephthah has the Ephraimites cornered
 - But there was an additional challenge for Jephthah
 - How do you tell one Jew from another?
 - Once the Ephraimites learned that their path home was blocked, they simply blended into the Gilead countryside
 - They looked like the Gileadites, so how does Jephthah find his enemy among the crowd?
- Jephthah's men take advantage of the fact that the Ephraimites spoke with a unique accent
 - And there were certain words that Ephraimites could not pronounce without betraying their tribal origins
 - Once such word was shibboleth
 - This is the Hebrew expression that can mean either "ear or corn" or "flowing stream"
 - The Ephraimites pronounced it sibboleth, without the "sh" sound
 - We can imagine modern examples of this test
 - Eastern oriental cultures lack an "r" sound, so it's impossible for them to pronounce words with r's properly
 - Similarly, Nazis identified Russian Jews by the way they pronounced "kookoorooza," the Russian word for corn

- The Gileadites used this technique for identifying the fleeing Ephraimites at the border
 - And when one was found, he was killed on the spot
 - This went on for some time until 42,000 Ephraimites were killed
 - A serious loss in Israel's first, full blown civil war
- Why do we have this episode recorded in scripture? What is God telling us about this time in Israel?
 - Well, first we see the increasing deterioration of the culture of Israel in this time of judges
 - Men are not willing to be subjected to the word of God
 - And as one generation gives way to another, the people are increasingly violent, selfish, vain, prideful and ignorant of God's word
 - It seems this time would have inevitably led to Israel's self-destruction had God not intervened
- Secondly, the fact that language differences have become so pronounced is in itself a telling sign
 - One of the most powerful, destructive sociological forces is the divergence of language
 - When language changes, people separate
 - And as they separate, they become suspicious of one another
 - When you can't know what another is saying, you assume they are your adversary
 - This was the essential force that God used to separate the people at the tower of Babel
 - By assigning different languages, He ensured people would move away from one another in fear and suspicion
 - While we haven't reached the point of different languages in Israel, we are starting to see the emergence of dialects
 - The tribes have begun to think and act in independent ways
 - It's "us" against "them" as a result of isolating themselves

- As that isolation grew, the language each group spoke became distinct, as will happen
- Already, pronunciations have evolved to the point that it identifies different tribes
 - This a very worrisome development
 - The people of Israel used to be one nation of people under the Covenant given to Moses
 - But they are quickly losing their national identity
 - In its place, tribal identities are gaining strength
 - If this trend is allowed to continue unchecked, the people of God will cease being a unified nation under one covenant
 - And soon, Israel would cease to exist
 - There is nothing unique about this pattern
 - Any group can either remain bound together by common purpose, identity and language or splinter
 - And if it splinters, then eventually its members become enemies or at least competitors in some sense
 - This is the pattern in the church as well
 - Denominations, sects and other divisions within the body of Christ are just as damaging as this division was in Israel's day
 - Even if we stay out of the denomination disputes, we can still fall prey to divisional thinking in subtle ways
 - Anytime we start dividing up the members of the body into right and wrong, have and have not, tastes great and less filling, etc. we're damaging the body
 - We need to guard against that tendency
 - It's always one step short of going to war in some way
 - And it gets in the way of serving the Lord
 - So what's next for Israel? If the period of Judges has resulted in this kind of deteriorating culture, what will save the nation?

- Isn't the Lord ruling His people? If so, how is it possible that He is allowing His people to walk up to the edge of oblivion?
 - Well fear not, the people of God will not self-destruct though they are headed that way
 - The Lord is still on the throne
 - He will correct the course of His people as He has done time and time again
- And we know how He will do that, don't we? In the cycle of Judges, rebellion begets God's judgment and judgment begets rescue
 - So the Lord is going to bring the nation into a period of judgment for the sins under this time of Jephthah
 - But first, Samuel recounts a series of judges that bridge the period of Jephthah until the next major Judge, Samson

Judg. 12:7 Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.

Judg. 12:8 Now Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel after him.

Judg. 12:9 He had thirty sons, and thirty daughters whom he gave in marriage outside the family, and he brought in thirty daughters from outside for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years.

Judg. 12:10 Then Ibzan died and was buried in Bethlehem.

Judg. 12:11 Now Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel after him; and he judged Israel ten years.

Judg. 12:12 Then Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried at Aijalon in the land of Zebulun.

Judg. 12:13 Now Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel after him.

Judg. 12:14 He had forty sons and thirty grandsons who rode on seventy donkeys; and he judged Israel eight years.

Judg. 12:15 Then Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died and was buried at Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites.

- Jephthah judged for only six years and then he died
 - If Gideon's failure was a willingness to adopt idolatry, then Jephthah's failure was his ignorance of God's word
 - Both men's failures had severe consequences for the people of God

- That's been the central lesson of Judges, that men rule in imperfect ways in line with the sinfulness of their hearts
- And in direct relationship to their knowledge of God's word and willingness to obey
- In only six years, Jephthah lost his only child and brought the nation into civil way
 - Then after him, a series of lesser judges ruled for very brief periods
 - The first is Ibzan, known for his 30 sons and 30 daughters, a sign of wealth in that day
 - We can safely assume he had multiple wives as well, or else his wife deserves an award of some kind
 - The re-emergence of polygamy is not a good sign
- Following him came Elon, then Abdon who was also wealthy with many sons and donkeys
 - Each of these men had large families, which was indicative of living as virtual kings taking advantage of the people
 - Each ruled a short time
 - And none had accomplishments worth noting
 - We can safely assume why the Lord left in power a short time and didn't record their work
 - It seems they were more interested in gaining wealth than seeking the Lord's pleasure
 - This tradeoff has never been different
 - It's always serve the Lord, accomplish great things for Him and the Kingdom
 - Or serve ourselves, accomplish temporal things and watch them burn up in the end
 - It's not the kind of work or even the place we work that matters
 - It's the master we're serving

- If we serve the Lord by His word, we are working for eternal purposes
- That service can be in a church or an office or a school or a neighborhood or our home
- The Lord wants men and women to serve Him in all these places and many more
- He seeks followers

- Israel received judges so that God's people would have access to God's word and to men who could judge the people according to the word
 - But when God's people ignore the word
 - And God's leaders are ignorant of it too
 - Then no one will be serving the Lord, since no one will know when and how to please Him
 - That's the Israel we find in the last half century of the time of Judges
 - Let's commit ourselves to never repeating that mistake in our own walk

Judges 13A

- Our study of Judges is moving into the story of the final Judge
 - Even as you hear me say that, you might glance at your Bible and notice that the book of Judges still has 9 chapters
 - And no, the account of the final judge doesn't require nine chapters to cover
 - In fact, Samson's story will take up four chapters, still a significant part of the book
 - But then the book ends with an account of two episodes in the tribe of Dan
 - In fact, the story of Samson begins our study of the Danites, since Samson is from the tribe of Dan
 - The story of the Danite Samson and the rest of the tribe of Dan will be a case study in the apostasy of Israel overall
 - For us, it will be a reminder that God is always at work through ordinary people giving us opportunity to serve Him
 - And how our response will determine where that opportunity takes us
 - But first, we need to meet our next judge...

Judg. 13:1 Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, so that the Lord gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years.

- At the end of chapter 12, we witnessed several minor judges come and go in rapid succession
 - They were not notable leaders because, it seemed, they were prone to the same failings as past men
 - They concerned themselves with building a family and acquiring wealth
 - They seemed to rule as monarchs, serving themselves rather than God and His people

- Meanwhile, the people of Israel are adrift again, and their hearts ran back to the culture living around them
 - In v.1 we read the telltale phrase we've come to know so well
 - Israel doing evil in the Lord's sight, because they did what was right in their own eyes
 - We remember that this phrase is a marker for idol worship
 - Israel is once again worshipping the false gods of those around them
- Each time we see Israel return to this behavior, we've stopped to note it
 - Sometimes, we wondered how the people could return so quickly after seeing the Lord grant rescue from His judgment
 - Other times we wonder why they didn't learn from their ancestors
 - This time I think we need to recognize the reality of spiritual warfare: it never stops
- The enemy never tires, he never stops working to corrupt God's people
 - The Lord by His grace may push Satan and his forces back from time to time
 - Inevitably, the enemy comes back again
 - He is tireless
 - He exists for one purpose, which is to destroy the work of God and substitute His own authority
 - He knows he's fighting time and a death sentence, so he has a sense of urgency and purpose that will never change
 - And he doesn't need to invent new trick either
 - He just dusts off the same idols
 - He introduces them in the same way, under similar circumstances, using the allure of wealth or sexual pleasure
 - And in short order, the people have fallen again

- Therefore, God's people can't rest on past successes
 - Our only defense from the enemy's schemes is to practice the disciplines of the faith consistently and fervently
 - Know your Bible, seek the Lord's intercession in prayer
 - Spend time in worship with the body of Christ
 - Serve the people of God out of your love for the Lord
 - As the Lord convicts, confess your sins to one another
 - And as the Spirit directs, walk in His counsel doing what you know to be pleasing to Him
 - If these practices aren't a part of your regular routine, then as your spiritual battle waxes and wanes, so will your steadfastness
 - When the enemy is going easy on you, you'll get comfortable
 - But then when the enemy turns up the heat, you'll get knocked flat like Israel did
 - It's like the old "rope-a-dope" routine from boxing
 - The enemy distracts us long enough with ease and success so he can land the hard punch when we don't expect it
 - And if the enemy weren't enough of an adversary, there's our flesh too
 - We are all tempted by something, and when our flesh is undisciplined, it tends to get its way
 - Only by living in the Spirit and denying our flesh will we move away from that pattern in time
- And even when we practice the disciplines of our walk with the Lord earnestly and consistently, we still won't be perfect and we may still fall from time to time
 - But we'll be equipped for the battle, a battle that never ends this side of Heaven
 - Over time, you'll win more battles than you lose
 - Because you've prepared yourself by asking the Lord to fight them for you

- First, to fight inside us to discipline our flesh
- And secondly, to prepare us to withstand the enemy's attacks
- Persevering in confidence, hope and peace
- But this was not the Israel of the time of Judges
 - Israel's chief sin in this time of judges is living in the flesh without a knowledge of or obedience to the word God
 - That left the people constantly susceptible to the schemes of the enemy
 - So that even if a judge might inspire good behavior in Israel for a time
 - His influence was limited in scope and time
 - So in short order, the people returned to their old ways
- So now again the people have fallen into even deeper sin, so the Lord has disciplined them again
 - But in light of the serious decline in the nation, the Lord must act in a more dramatic way than He has in the past few Judges
 - He is going to raise up a man with unique powers to address the growing independence of the tribes
 - And to unify the people
 - But first, the Lord places the people of Israel under the oppression of the Philistines
 - These warring people came from ancient Greek origins
 - Since they were Hellenistic, they were tall, skilled in warfare and intensely religious pagans
 - They settled on the costal plains of Israel in five cities
 - They were highly effective against the splintered Israelites because they maintain a strong political alliance among themselves
 - They had mastered smelting iron, which the Jews had not yet learned to do

- So they had distinct advantages in warfare and made significant incursions into Jewish territory
- Now the Lord has brought these people up against the nation of Israel to pressure them into repentance for their idol worship
 - Interestingly, the Philistines were also an attractive culture to the Jews
 - The Jews traded with them, bought their iron tools
 - And eventually adopted their pagan gods and culture at times
 - So both their warring ways and culture acted upon Israel to bring it into apostasy
 - As they say, it was complicated
 - Based on the pattern of Judges, we would expect that at this point the Lord would raise up a man who rallies the people into obedience and to defeat the enemy
 - But this time the pattern will be different
 - The Lord will raise up a judge to battle the Philistines
 - But Samson won't defeat them
 - He does win some victories, but in the end he dies before the Philistines are defeated
 - It waits for Samuel, another judge and contemporary of Samson, and later David to win decisive battles against the Philistines
 - Even then, the Philistines continued to be a threat against Israel until Nebuchadnezzar removed them entirely when he conquered all Canaan
 - More importantly, Samson's time as judge will leave the nation in worse shape than when he begins to rule
 - Civil war will become a bigger problem, not less
 - And the people's hearts will move farther from the Lord, not closer
 - Samson serves as our final proof that human leaders, even divinely chosen leaders, can't produce a lasting solution
 - It will require God bring a divine ruler to guard men's hearts

- This pattern will differ in another way as well...the people won't demonstrate repentance
 - In the past, the Lord acted to raise up a deliverer only after the people cried out to Him
 - The nation eventually tired of their oppressors
 - And in their misery, they came to their senses and repented of their idolatry
 - Only this time, we don't see that cry
 - Either the people are so far from the Lord now that they don't seek Him even after 40 years of oppression
 - Or else they are too comfortable with their oppressors
 - Accepting their harsh treatment as the price for access to their attractive culture
 - Either way, Israel is failing God's test
 - The number 40 means testing and for 40 years they have been tested by the Philistines' oppression and culture
 - Yet they fail to seek the Lord or call out for Him
 - Nevertheless, the Lord will remain faithful to His people
 - So He raises up a man to contend with the Philistines

John Davis remarked:

"What does he [the Lord] do when he has a people who refuse to forsake Baal and have no desire to forsake Philistia? A people grown so used to bondage they don't even have sense to call out for relief? At least here the very God who judges them (v. 1b) begins to work their deliverance anyway (vv. 2-5). That is grace – grace greater than all our sin, than all our stupidity, than all our density."

- So in grace, the Lord begins to bring an unique deliverer, one who can address the extreme sin and growing independence of these tribes
 - And the start of Samson's story follows a very familiar storyline in the Bible

Judg. 13:2 There was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had borne no children.

Judg. 13:3 Then the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son.

Judg. 13:4 "Now therefore, be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing.

Judg. 13:5 "For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines."

Judg. 13:6 Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, "A man of God came to me and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. And I did not ask him where he came from, nor did he tell me his name.

Judg. 13:7 "But he said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and now you shall not drink wine or strong drink nor eat any unclean thing, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'"

- Samson's arrival is almost exactly the same as Isaac, Jacob, Samuel, John the Baptist and even like Christ Himself
 - Samson's mother was barren
 - Just as Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, and Elizabeth
 - And like those women, a messenger gave them good news
 - In this case, it's the Angel of the Lord who appears, Who we know to be the Second Person of the Godhead
 - Anytime the Angel of the Lord takes time to announce your birth in advance, we can be sure you are a very important part of God's plan
 - In fact, there is only one other time in all scripture when the Angel of the Lord personally announced a birth in advance
 - That person was Isaac, the one born to Abraham
 - Certainly, we should take a close look at Samson's life
 - The Lord tells the woman that though she is barren, the Lord will deliver her a son
 - This child will be marked from birth for the Lord

- A similar words was given to Samuel's mother, Hanna
 - And to John's mother, Elizabeth
- But in this case, the Lord adds that this child would live under a Nazarite vow his entire life
 - A Nazarite vow was a form of consecrated living that God outlined in the Law
 - The rules for Nazarite living focused on three requirements
 - The person couldn't consume anything that came from a grapevine
 - Secondly, they couldn't cut their hair during the time of the vow
 - Finally, they couldn't come into contact with a dead body
 - What was the purpose in these rules?
 - First, the word nazarite means to keep separated
 - And if someone is going to be kept separate, then need to stand out
 - So the Nazarite vows kept a person distinct from the rest of the people
 - Not cutting one's hair, for example, made a person stand out
 - This is one way can know that Jesus didn't wear His hair long as He is often portrayed
 - Men normally kept their hair short, as Paul taught in 1Cor
 - Only someone under a Nazarite vow kept their hair long
 - Likewise, abstaining from wine or grapes in general would have been at odds with the culture as well
 - People drank wine like we drink water
 - So to avoid that drink forced a person to act very differently during meals, festivals, and religious observances
 - Finally, these rules emphasized a close walk with the Lord that wouldn't be interrupted

- Drinking wine can have the effect of placing someone under the influence of the alcohol rather than under the influence of the Spirit
- And under the law, coming into contact with a dead body barred a person from worshipping at the central sanctuary
- But a Nazarite wouldn't allow these things to interrupt fellowship with the Lord even for a short time
- Such would be the call on Samson's life even before he was born
 - His mother was called to observe these restrictions even before the baby was born
 - This was not normally a part of the Nazarite vow
 - Nevertheless, in this case the Lord required this additional step
 - I think the Lord gave these instructions to the mother to emphasize the importance of Samson's consecration
 - To say nothing of the benefits for a child that a pregnant mother abstain from alcohol
 - More importantly, the child's commitment to the vow would have to be learned, so the parents had to train him as the Lord commanded
 - The Lord is leaving a strong impression with the mother and father so they will follow through
 - John the Baptist was raised in a similar way
 - Lastly, the Lord tells the family why these things are so important
 - Their son will begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines
 - Notice He says Samson will "begin" that delivery
 - As we said, it will require Samuel and David to complete the work
 - But Samson will be the start
- The restrictions of a Nazarite vow were arbitrary, in the sense that there was nothing inherently good in abstaining from wine or growing hair long, etc.
 - Still, they set someone apart and became tests of a man's will to serve the Lord

- A person accepted these restrictions as an act of devotion, making sacrifice to ensure full obedience
- To remind himself that the Lord's will took priority over his own
 - And that's not a small thing
 - We all need reminders that obedience is a difficult journey
 - One we can easily stray from
 - And sometimes these markers we set for ourselves make the difference between staying on the straight and narrow or leaping off into oblivion
 - Christians aren't expected to take a Nazarite vow, and we are not under the Law given to Israel in any case
 - Nevertheless, it's probably a smart thing to set limits, rules and other practices for ourselves that we undertake as a means of setting ourselves apart
 - We don't need to be set apart in appearance
 - But we are called to be set apart from sin
 - So whatever we need to do to keep ourselves from temptations or simply forgetfulness, we should make those vows a part of our walk as well
 - It's worth asking yourself are there things standing in the way of your obedience to the Lord
 - Things that compete with following the Lord's will
 - The writer of Hebrews tells the church that if there is anything that holds us back from running at full speed with the Lord, then we should cast it aside

[Heb. 12:1](#) Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every **encumbrance** and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

- Furthermore, the call on Christian parents is equally clear

- Parents are expected to prepare the hearts of our children from an early age to be set apart for the Lord
 - We train them up in the way they should go spiritually and otherwise in the hope that the Lord will bless our obedience
 - Their obedience will be their own in the end, but we have a command of our own
 - We must create the patterns early in their lives that will establish and separate them from the world
 - We do so in the hope that the Lord, by His grace, will unite our obedience and their habits with faith in their hearts
- We pause here in our study of Samson, because we will consider the rest of the Lord's instructions to Samson's parents as part of our Christmas Eve study
 - It may surprise you to know that the second half of this chapter is a perfect place to spend Christmas Eve, but so the Lord planned it for us
 - Meanwhile, our annual celebration of the Lord's arrival as a Child is a great time to inventory our own life of obedience to the King
 - Let's live set apart to His glory
 - Let's guard ourselves against the deceit of sin and the traps of our flesh and the enemy
 - Let's honor the Him with gifts of sacrifice, putting His will above our own
 - And let's teach our children that the best gift they could give us or anyone is a testimony of obedience to the Lord
 - Not perfection, for demanding perfection where it can't be found only leads to guilt and discouragement
 - But commitments to never allow anything to come between them and their fellowship with the Lord

Judges 13B

- Tonight we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ
 - The moment when the Creator condescended to become flesh
 - The Son of God became a Son of Man
 - A baby in a manger
 - A child born to bring peace and joy to men by making possible the reconciliation of sinful mankind with a holy and just God
 - But as important as that moment was for the world, it was also very important for two parents, Mary and Joseph
 - That day some 2,000 years ago, they became parents for the first time
 - And new parents are always faced with the same questions and worries
 - How do we raise this child? How do we feed him? What if he gets sick?
 - What if I lose him in the temple some day?
 - Ok...not every parent has *that* worry, but still...
 - But every parent wonders about what their son or daughter will become when they grow up and enter the world as an adult
 - We all have great dreams for our children
 - Though I think we're just hoping they don't turn out like the kid who grew up to invent the talking clock

A young man moved away from his parents to become a student. Proudly showing off his new apartment to a couple of his friends late one night, he led the way to his bedroom where there was a big brass gong. "What's that big brass gong?" one of the guests asked. "It's not a gong. It's a talking clock," the man replied. "A talking clock? Seriously? Asked his astonished friend! "Yup," replied the student. "How's it work?" the 2nd guest asked, squinting at it. "Watch," the student replied. He picked up a hammer, gave it an ear-shattering pound and stepped back. The three stood looking at one another for a moment.

Suddenly, someone on the other side of the wall screamed: "You idiot, it's 2:30 in the morning!"

- But Joseph and Mary didn't have to wonder about such things
 - They had been told by an angel of what to expect in the case of their special Son
 - Mary knew so much about her child even before He was born
 - She knew He was conceived by the Holy Spirit
 - She knew He was the promised Messiah, the One to deliver Israel
 - She was even told his name would be Jesus
 - But even though this Son, Jesus, was about to be born as a man, He existed from eternity
 - As Jesus Himself said to the Pharisees, before Abraham was, I am.
 - So we can see Jesus at work even in the Old Testament, long before He came into the world as a man
 - When He appeared in the Old Testament days, the Bible refers to Jesus as the Angel of the Lord
- Currently, we're studying the book of Judges on Sunday mornings, as you know, and in our last study we saw another couple about to receive their first child
 - Like Mary and Joseph, this couple was told in advance that their son would be someone special according to God's purposes
 - Their son would bring to free Israel from oppression by the Philistines
 - He will live under a Nazarite vow, setting him apart from all men in service to the Lord
 - And as we'll learn later in our study, God will endow him with supernatural power to accomplish the mission God gives him
 - The man will be known as Samson, and in many ways he pictures the later arrival of Jesus Himself

- So how appropriate was it that Jesus appeared to these parents in the form of a man or prophet to announce the arrival of Samson
- As we studied last Sunday, Jesus appeared once to the mother-to-be
- But when she reported the news to her husband, Manoah, he had questions and concerns
 - So the couple prayed to the Lord to send the “man” back to answer some questions
 - And what follows reminds us of the true purpose of Christmas

Judg. 13:8 Then Manoah entreated the Lord and said, “O Lord, please let the man of God whom You have sent come to us again that he may teach us what to do for the boy who is to be born.”

Judg. 13:9 God listened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again to the woman as she was sitting in the field, but Manoah her husband was not with her.

Judg. 13:10 So the woman ran quickly and told her husband, “Behold, the man who came the other day has appeared to me.”

Judg. 13:11 Then Manoah arose and followed his wife, and when he came to the man he said to him, “Are you the man who spoke to the woman?” And he said, “I am.”

Judg. 13:12 Manoah said, “Now when your words come to pass, what shall be the boy’s mode of life and his vocation?”

Judg. 13:13 So the angel of the Lord said to Manoah, “Let the woman pay attention to all that I said.

Judg. 13:14 “She should not eat anything that comes from the vine nor drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing; let her observe all that I commanded.”

Judg. 13:15 Then Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, “Please let us detain you so that we may prepare a young goat for you.”

Judg. 13:16 The angel of the Lord said to Manoah, “Though you detain me, I will not eat your food, but if you prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the Lord.” For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the Lord.

Judg. 13:17 Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, “What is your name, so that when your words come to pass, we may honor you?”

Judg. 13:18 But the angel of the Lord said to him, “Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?”

Judg. 13:19 So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering and offered it on the rock to the Lord, and He performed wonders while Manoah and his wife looked on.

Judg. 13:20 For it came about when the flame went up from the altar toward heaven, that the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their faces to the ground.

Judg. 13:21 Now the angel of the Lord did not appear to Manoah or his wife again. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the Lord.

Judg. 13:22 So Manoah said to his wife, "We will surely die, for we have seen God."

Judg. 13:23 But his wife said to him, "If the Lord 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 let us hear things like this at this time."

- The husband prayed that the "prophet" come back to guide them on what to do with their son
 - They did what every godly parent should do, seeking the Lord for guidance in raising our children
 - In their case, they had all the more reason to ask, because they had already heard that their son would be very special
 - The Lord answers their prayer with another visit
 - He appears to the woman in the field, leading her to call her husband
 - And the two return to inquire of Him
 - The Lord confirms He was the One Who visited earlier
 - But the couple still don't realize this "Person" is the Lord Himself
- The father begins to ask the "prophet" for more information about what will happen to his son
 - Specifically, he wants to know more about his son's future
 - This is understandable, certainly
 - We would probably want to ask the same question
 - But that's not a healthy request for any of us
 - When you're asking the Lord for more details of the future, you are putting yourself in a position to evaluate what you hear
 - And then you decide whether you like that future or whether you might act to accomplish something else

- Knowing too much about what God has planned is counterproductive to our obedience
- So the Lord tells us only what we need to know to be obedient
- Then the test becomes will we obey?
- Notice the Lord's response to him was to repeat what the Lord had already told the wife in His first appearance
 - The Lord simply says just do what I've already told your wife
 - In other words you have enough information for now
 - And if you do as I've instructed then you and your son will end up in the right place
- Later in Samson's life we'll watch the man move beyond the Lord's instructions and fall as a result
 - He remains a Nazarite for his entire life
 - But he doesn't follow his parents' pattern in resting in God's revelation and provision
- Meanwhile, the father wants to honor the One Who brought this great news, as he should
 - So he offers the customary meal to a stranger
 - And what follows is a scene similar to the one Gideon experienced earlier in the book of Judges
 - In chapter 6 Gideon wanted to make a meal for the Angel of the Lord and in that chapter the Lord gave a similar response
 - He would not accept a meal, but He would attend a sacrifice to the Lord
 - At this point, the husband seeks to know the name of the man
 - The Lord answers him, but our English doesn't carry the sense of His response very well
 - The Lord answers the question by asking a question in response
 - To paraphrase, He asks "What is this question you ask...‘what is your name?’?"

- The Lord is asking why would you ask such a question?
- He isn't saying this because they should have already known His identity
 - Rather, He's emphasizing that humanity could not know His name
 - Because the Messiah's name had yet to be revealed to men
 - Men cannot know God apart from what God chooses to reveal about Himself
 - And even then, our finite minds cannot begin to grasp all that is God
- But once the Lord reveals Himself to us, then it falls to us to recognize what God has done and accept it as such
 - This man and woman have heard from the Angel of the Lord
 - So they should understand
- So the Lord responds with a name given to Him in Isaiah
 - Isaiah says that the Messiah will be called Wonderful

Is. 9:6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

- Obviously, the Lord is referencing Himself by way of that prophecy
- Jesus is the one Isaiah spoke about centuries before Jesus was born
- Interestingly, this comment by the Angel of the Lord is coming centuries before Isaiah was born
- So here we have the Lord speaking prophetically... about something a future prophet would speak prophetically... about the future day the Lord Himself would arrive as a man
 - Isaiah says this child will rule the world

- He will be called a wonderful counselor
- He will be a mighty God
- He is both the eternal Father and the prince of Peace
- Don't miss the way those details work together
 - Jesus is both a human child and the eternal God, One with the Father
 - Today, He is a wonderful counselor in our hearts by way of His Spirit, and one day He will return to rule the world
 - Jesus declared these things about Himself in advance so that we might know we can trust His word
- The story of chapter 13 ends in a way almost identical to Gideon's encounter
 - The Lord proves His identity through miracles including ascending to Heaven in the flames of the fire of the sacrifice
 - At once the man and woman recognize they had an encounter with the Living God
 - And His departure causes them to fall down in worship and awe
 - The husband remarks they should be dead since they saw God
 - But then the wife realizes that if God wanted to kill them by His appearing, it would have happened
 - So the fact that they live proves that the Angel of the Lord came to bring life, not death
 - And that life will come in the form a special child
- Samson's life is a picture of Jesus in many ways, but that parallels start here with the birth of Samson
 - We'll study those parallels in coming weeks, but we can already see some remarkable connections already
 - First, the name Samson means son of light as Jesus will be called the Light of the world
 - Samson enters the world to begin the defeat of the Philistines

- The word Philistine has been said to mean “one who crawls in the dirt”
- This reminds us of Satan, the serpent of old who was condemned to crawl in the dirt because he brought sin to men
- The sin of the Garden brought all mankind under a curse of death, so that if men and women are to ever rise above this curse, God must do something to remove it
 - So the Father promises to bring a Savior to conquer the enemy and take our curse for us bringing peace and rest to the world
 - The Son will be conceived supernaturally, arriving in an unexpected way
 - He will be the Light of the world set apart by the Spirit
 - He will conquer the enemy by taking our course, enduring the sting of sin which is death
 - Nevertheless, He will be resurrected and one day return to judge the world in righteousness
 - Ruling the world in power and might
- Now we see Samson, the son of light, coming to a man Manoah, whose name means peace and rest
 - Who comes from the tribe of Dan, which means judge
 - And the town of Zorah, which means painful sting
 - Samson will be set apart from the womb, as pictured by the Nazarite vow
 - And even his mother will follow the Nazarite practices
 - And in that way, she pictures not Mary, but John the Baptist as the one who introduced the Messiah to the world
- All these parallels between Samson and Jesus were carefully planned by the Lord so that you and I would recognize the Messiah when He came to us
 - Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all the Bible teaches about God’s mercy and grace to sinners like you and me

- Just as the Lord promised, He delivered a Savior to the world in a most unexpected way
- He told the world Jesus was coming
- And He kept that promise
- But He went even further, showing the world in words and pictures the story of Jesus even before Jesus came
 - Even using the Lord in a preincarnate form to tell His own story in the life of Samson
 - Don't let the Christmas myths of Santa and elves distract you from the powerful, life-changing truth of a promised kept
 - Jesus is God Himself, Who took on the form of man because that was the only way He could make a way for you and I to enter Heaven
 - Someone has to pay the penalty for our sin, but God so loved the world that He willingly gave Himself in your place
 - He lived a sinless life as a man so that He could stand in our place, taking the penalty for our sin
- The only question remaining is whether you have accepted this gift of salvation?
 - Can you see on the pages of your Bible how the Lord foretold a Wonderful Counselor, a Prince of Peace?
 - Do you recognize He came to save you from the penalty of your sin?
 - Are you finally ready to confess this truth and receive the salvation the Lord has prepared for you?
 - This Christmas, let's accept the greatest gift the world has ever known
 - Accept Christ as your Savior, believing in your heart that He is the Lord Who died for your sins

Judges 14A

- Having studied the parallels between Samson's arrival and the arrival of Jesus to Mary and Joseph, let's move forward to see what God has planned for this remarkable man
 - Last time the angel of the Lord departed from Manoah and his wife having given instructions concerning their son
 - Now at the end of chapter 13, the time has come for the birth of Samson
 - And then very quickly we move into Samson's life as an adult
 - We start at the end of chapter 13

Judg. 13:24 Then the woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson; and the child grew up and the Lord blessed him.

Judg. 13:25 And the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

- The child Samson is born
 - Last time I taught, I mentioned that Samson's name can be translated son of light
 - In Hebrew it's *shimson*, and that word has other potential meanings
 - It can be translated deliverer or savior
 - And it can also be translated strong or daring one
 - Of course, these names are reminders that Samson's life will at times be a picture of Jesus
 - In fact, one small detail at the end of chapter 13 offers us another of those connections between Samson and Jesus
 - In the story of Jesus, we're given the details of Jesus birth and just a little bit about his growing up
 - But for the most part, Jesus' early years is a mystery
 - We hear Jesus grew and was blessed

- Then the story of Jesus in the Gospels jumps immediately to His entry into ministry
- Similarly, the story of Samson jumps from the announcement of his birth to his life as an adult
 - At the end of v.24 we hear that Samson was blessed by the Lord
 - Then we reach a bridging verse connecting his birth to his adult life in chapter 14
 - And in both the Gospel and in the story of Samson, the bridge between the birth and the start of the man's service is the Spirit
 - In the Gospels, the Spirit's arrival at the baptism of John leads Jesus to begin proclaiming the Gospel and performing miracles
 - And this will be the same pattern in Samson's life
- In v.25 we hear that the Spirit of God begins to stir in Samson's life in a place called Mahaneh-dan
 - This town was located about 14 miles due west from Jerusalem in the Shephelah
 - The shephelah is a region of foothills connecting the coastal plain with the mountains of Judea
 - Samson lived in this region and did most of his service to the Lord here
 - You may remember we learned earlier that the idolatry of Israel prompted the Lord to bring two oppressors against the nation during this cycle
 - He brought the Ammonites from the east and Philistines from the west
 - Jephthah raising armies in the east to battle the Ammonites who attacked from east of the Jordan
 - And Samson was called to defeat the Philistines in the West
 - In fact, the service of these two judges overlapped for the first few years
- But the style of each man was very different, to say the least

- Jephthah was a man who used his mouth to convince others to fight with him
 - And he relied on armies to accomplish the Lord's work
 - But Samson never relies on others
 - He is a one-man personal deliverer
- Also, we remember that during this time there is no indication that the nation of Israel responds to the Lord's work through these men
 - There is no national response, no national repentance
 - Moreover, when Samson's time as judge comes to an end, the enemy is still present
 - His defeat doesn't come until David
 - Each other these details are opportunities to draw additional parallels between Samson and the Jesus as we go along
- Of course, not everything this man will do is intended to represent Jesus
 - In fact, as we leave chapter 13, we see a man with great potential, divine appointment and Spirit empowerment
 - But as we enter chapter 14, we'll find that this man doesn't live up to his potential in all cases
 - Samson is arguably the most powerfully endowed judge in the book
 - And yet he accomplishes the least of any judge
 - Nevertheless, the Lord's sovereign will ensures that Samson accomplishes at least what the Lord intends
 - Though Samson's sin brings great turmoil back upon his head, literally
 - So we begin with Samson's pursuit of a Philistine wife

Judg. 14:1 Then Samson went down to Timnah and saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines.

Judg. 14:2 So he came back and told his father and mother, "I saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife."

Judg. 14:3 Then his father and his mother said to him, “Is there no woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?” But Samson said to his father, “Get her for me, for she looks good to me.”

Judg. 14:4 However, his father and mother did not know that it was of the Lord, for He was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. Now at that time the Philistines were ruling over Israel.

- Samson is living near Zorah in the Shephelah and he visits another small village about 4 miles away called Zorah
 - This entire region is under Philistine control at this point in Israel's existence
 - Remember, these people ruled over Israel
 - But there was an uneasy cooperation between the Philistines and Israel
 - Israel traded with these people and relied on their expertise with iron
 - But in the end, their rule oppressed Israel, resulting in the loss of land, crops and peace
 - These conditions were similar to the ones that greeted Jesus upon His first coming
 - The people of Israel were under Roman oppression
 - Rome held all the cards, yet the Jews were able to operate with a degree of freedom
 - Still, they were often pressed into slavery, their lands were taken and taxed
 - And they felt the yoke of Gentile authority over them
- Into this environment, the Lord brings Samson to deliver his people, and right away we see him taking an interest in marrying into the Philistines culture
 - Samson tells his parents he saw a woman in Timnah he wanted to marry
 - He says I saw a woman, but in Hebrew the word for woman is in the emphatic position indicated she is the “one” for him

- In effect, Samson has declared this woman is to be his wife, and he's directing his parents to arrange the marriage details for him
 - This was the customary way for any marriage to take place
 - But of course the parents' concern is in the fact that this woman is a Philistine woman
 - How is Samson going to deliver his people from the oppression of the Philistines if he's marrying into their family
 - They suggest to Samson that he should look within his own family for a daughter to marry, that is among the Danites
 - Or at least among the people of Israel
 - But Samson answers abruptly telling his father to get her because she looks good to me
 - The response is shocking dismissive of his father's authority, which tells us something of Samson at this point
 - He's a brash, self-willed young man prone to acting according to his fleshly desires
 - And he certainly doesn't take kindly to advice from elders
 - At this point we might think that Samson's choice is automatically a mistake, since the Jews weren't supposed to marry people like the Philistines
 - In reality, the Law given to the nation only stipulated that Israel couldn't marry the Canaanites because of the curse God places on those people
 - But the Philistines aren't Canaanites
 - They are descended from Japheth, the other of Noah's three sons
 - Therefore, there was nothing inherently sinful about marrying a Philistine
 - Moreover, we have v.4 staring us in the face
 - In that verse we learn that the Lord was working to bring about this marriage for reasons of His own
 - But as we'll see, this doesn't mean that the Lord wanted Samson to be married to a Philistine woman

- Rather, the Lord wants to use Samson's sinful desire for this woman
- The Lord will use it to propel Samson into his proper place as a judge and destroyer of Israel's enemies
- Now at this point, his parents agree to support his request, so the family travels down to Timnah to arrange the wedding details as was customary in this day

Judg. 14:5 Then Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came as far as the vineyards of Timnah; and behold, a young lion came roaring toward him.

Judg. 14:6 The Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily, so that he tore him as one tears a young goat though he had nothing in his hand; but he did not tell his father or mother what he had done.

Judg. 14:7 So he went down and talked to the woman; and she looked good to Samson.

Judg. 14:8 When he returned later to take her, he turned aside to look at the carcass of the lion; and behold, a swarm of bees and honey were in the body of the lion.

Judg. 14:9 So he scraped the honey into his hands and went on, eating as he went. When he came to his father and mother, he gave some to them and they ate it; but he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey out of the body of the lion.

- Apparently as Samson and his parents traveled the short distance to Timnah, Samson turned aside into some vineyards near the town
 - Perhaps Samson wanted to obtain some grapes to present to the family or as a snack after the hour long walk through the hills
 - As he goes alone into the vineyard, Samson is attacked by a young lion
 - In the Hebrew, it says the lion roared to encounter Samson
 - But then it says the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon Samson
 - And as a result, Samson literally ripped the lion body apart with his bare hands
 - In the way a man might separate the limbs of a small lamb
 - Obviously, this is a supernatural outcome, as the Lord placed the lion at the disposal of Samson's strength
 - There is no indication that Samson thought himself capable of such an act before it happened

- On the contrary, it appears that Samson is prompted into this action by the Spirit of the Lord
- And once it's over, Samson must have had a hard time making sense of it
- But we can see it with some hindsight and understand the message easily enough
 - The Lord has placed in Samson a special call and supernatural ability to defeat his enemies
 - In this case, the enemy of the moment was the lion
 - On paper, that lion would have had a field day with an single, unarmed man
 - But because of the Spirit, Samson prevailed
- So the lesson for Samson is that he is prepared by God to win battles against God's enemies
 - But of course, Samson has to be willing to enter the battle
 - Samson has to do as the Lord expects by fighting the ones oppressing Israel, for that's what God has purposed
 - Yet instead of battling Israel's enemies as God intended, we find Samson journeying to marry a Philistine woman
- These moments are typical for how God gets our attention and obedience when we're wavering in the work He has given to us
 - We have our marching orders, or at least we think we know what God wants for us
 - We've heard that quiet voice speaking to our conscience
 - We have been equipped in some way and we see how the pieces fit together in our life
 - But something stops us from moving ahead in what God has directed
 - We hesitate, maybe because it demands too much change, too much sacrifice, too much faith

- So we turn aside, and we chase after something sweet, something that pleases us
 - We may think that settles the matter, case closed
 - But the Lord loves us and wants what is best for us, so He pursues us
 - And that pursuit means he brings us surprises, roaring lions out of nowhere
 - Whatever He does, it disrupts our plans, it shocks us, leaves us feeling vulnerable and weak
 - And then His Spirit fills that void
- When we come through one of these trials, we may feel differently about our life, our choices, our desires to serve God
 - The shock to our system opens a door for the Lord to woe us back to Himself
 - But the outcome isn't certain
 - Sometimes we listen, and sometimes we don't
- Here was Samson's chance to rethink his life course, to turn down his Philistine wife and make his life purpose about defeating the Philistine enemy
 - Instead, Samson keeps the moment a secret, pretending it didn't happen
 - Samson was probably mystified by the experience
 - But that's not why he's keeping secrets
 - He's tossing aside an opportunity to turn back from his fleshly desires to following the Lord
 - And that's to be expected in this time of men doing what was right in their own eyes
 - In v.7 we're told that when Samson meets Timnah again, she looks good to him
 - Literally, it says she looked good in the eyes of Samson
 - Sounds familiar doesn't it?

- This woman seems good to Samson, but she's not good in the sight of the Lord
- At this point in the story, a covenant of marriage was struck, and Samson returned home with his parents
 - At a later point, the time came for the betrothal period to end and the marriage to be consummated
 - Marriage in this day was a two-part process
 - The man and woman were betrothed by an agreement between the families
 - And then after a period when the groom prepared a home for his bride, the marriage would be completed
 - In Philistines culture, the final act of marriage was a week-long feast celebration at the bride's house
 - This celebration was paid for by the groom's family
 - So in v.8 we see Samson returning now to the bride's house some weeks later for that feast
 - As Samson makes the trek back to Timnah, he still has on his mind that moment with the lion
 - So we're told he turned aside again to see what had become of the lion carcass he tore apart earlier
 - As we consider what Samson found, notice for a moment Samuel's choice of verbs throughout this account
 - In v.1, v.5 and again in v.7 we're told Samson "went down"
 - The phrase suggests Samson taking a fall into temptation and sin
 - And twice now Samson has "turned aside" as well
 - Also suggesting a departure from obedience
 - These terms are intended to emphasize Samson's poor choices in every case
- As Samson encounters the carcass of the lion, he sees something unexpected

- In the animal's remains, bees have established a hive and produced honey
 - Normally, bees wouldn't use rotting flesh as a home
 - Flies yes, but bees no
 - Knowing this isn't the normal behavior for bees tells us that this is a moment the Lord has produced to create a test for Samson
- What's the test? Well, the test involves his Nazarite vows
 - Inside the carcass of this dead animal the bees are producing honey, something sweet and desirable
 - Samson could look upon this scene and take away a valuable lesson from the Lord
 - He could recognize that his destruction of an enemy produced opportunity for a sweet reward
 - But that reward can only come through obedience to the Lord's commands
- But unfortunately, Samson fails the test
 - He is too eager to obtain the sweet reward and to do so according to his own ways
 - He reaches in and takes some of the honey for himself
 - In doing so, he comes into contact with a dead animal, in direct disobedience to this Nazarite vow
 - Obviously, the Lord placed the honey inside the dead animal to create this test to know if Samson would be true to his word
 - Instead, Samson fell into disobedience
- Even worse, Samson decides to take some of the honey to his parents and offered it to them without telling them of its origins
 - In the process, he thoughtlessly and selfishly brought defilement to them as well
 - They didn't know it of course
 - But that makes it all the worse in that Samson was willing to bring others along with him into sin

- His mother had sanctified him by her willingness to observe the vows herself
- And now her sacrifice was repaid with Samson's deception
 - Why did Samson share the honey with his parents?
 - Was it purely thoughtless or did he have a purpose in it?
 - It seems as though he was repeating the pattern of the woman in the Garden
 - Once sin has taken hold in our hearts, we look for opportunities to share it with others
 - Because it soothes our wounded conscience when we bring others with us into our sin
 - Just as woman gave the fruit to her husband to eat

Judg. 14:10 Then his father went down to the woman; and Samson made a feast there, for the young men customarily did this.

Judg. 14:11 When they saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him.

Judg. 14:12 Then Samson said to them, "Let me now propound a riddle to you; if you will indeed tell it to me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes.

Judg. 14:13 "But if you are unable to tell me, then you shall give me thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes." And they said to him, "Propound your riddle, that we may hear it."

Judg. 14:14 So he said to them,

"Out of the eater came something to eat,
And out of the strong came something sweet."

But they could not tell the riddle in three days.

- Then once again, we're told that Samson and his father "went down" to Timnah for the feast
 - The Hebrew word for feast is a very specific and infrequently used word that means a drink banquet
 - In other words, this is a feast centered on drinking wine
 - Which indicates that Samson broke the second major feature of his Nazarite vow, to not drink fruit of the vine

- At this week-long feast, the bride's family invited 30 guests to the banquet as a sign of honor to Samson
 - Part of the festivities included social games of proposing and solving riddles of one kind or another
 - Early in the week Samson proposes one such riddle
 - He thinks back to the lion and the honey thinks he could stump the crowd
 - But a riddle this good deserves a wager
 - So Samson proposes that if the riddle can't be solved by the end of the seven-day feast, the 30 guests would owe him each a linen wrap and set of party clothes
 - Linen wraps were large piece os fine linen the were worn next to the body
 - These were rather valuable items since they weren't used except at formal occasions
 - Likewise, the change of clothes refers to festive garments that were quite expensive
 - Apparently, Samson was quote a clothes hound, and these things interested him
 - If they could solve the riddle within the seven days, then Samson owed each man the same
 - So each man was risking one set at the prospect of gaining a set of clothes
 - But Samson was risking 30 for the sake of gaining 30
 - Obviously, he was brash and confident in his own ability
 - And he was a risk taker...none of these qualities suggest a man listening to or following the Lord's Spirit
- Obviously, this is a pretty good bet for the wedding party, so they agree
 - And then Samson gives the riddle
 - Out of the eater came something to eat
 - Out of the strong came something sweet

- Obviously, we know that Samson is referring to the honey inside the body of the lion
 - But the clues are obscure enough that no one could guess what Samson was describing
 - In fact, for three days of the feast, the family came together to eat and contemplate the puzzle, but none could guess
- Samson appears to have won the bet
 - But not so fast
 - The Lord brought these circumstances together in order to move Samson in the right direction
 - You see even though Samson has done the wrong thing in pursuing this woman, the Lord is working ahead of Samson to turns things right
 - Remember, we heard in v.4 that the Lord had a plan here
- Next time, we see how the Lord turns the tables on Samson
 - For now, put Samson aside and ask yourself is the Lord using your disobedience to bring you to a crisis moment?
 - One where you will have to make a new course?
 - He is more than capable of turning us in the right direction
- But there is the easy way and the hard way
 - The easy way involves God speaking to us, the Spirit lead us, and us listening and following
 - It's easy only by comparison to the alternative
 - The alternative is much harder
 - It involves turning aside, going down and seeking our own course
 - And then the Lord turning the tables on us at the right moment, so that we will stop in our tracks and begin to serve Him
 - As Samson will see, it's a harder way by far

Judges 14B

- Samson is a judge of Israel, but he's also an impulsive, rash, stubborn and prideful man
 - The Lord raised him up to begin the defeat of the Philistines
 - But instead, he's chasing after their daughters seeking a wife
 - Last week we saw him travel to Timnah with his father to secure a bride
 - Samson went against the counsel of his parents and against desires of the Lord
 - On the way down to be betrothed, the Lord placed a lion in his path and then endowed Samson with supernatural power to defeat the lion
 - The Lord intended that the encounter would impress the truth on Samson's wandering heart
 - The Lord called Samson to engage and defeat Israel power enemy, the Philistines
 - He was given his position of authority and power by the Spirit for that purpose
 - And yet here he was going the wrong way to marry the enemy
 - Nevertheless, Samson kept the moment a secret and went forward with his plans
 - Samson was betrothed and then after a brief time of waiting, he returned to the town to claim his bride in a week-long marriage feast
 - On the way back he decided to take another look at the lion he had killed some months earlier
 - And to his surprise he discovered bees had made a hive inside the dead animal's carcass
 - This was an unnatural behavior on the bees' part, indicating the Lord was speaking to Samson once more with a test
 - Would Samson understand that something sweet awaited him if he acted in obedience to defeat God's enemies?

- Or would he try to obtain the reward by his own hand, defiling himself in the process?
- As we saw last week, Samson failed his test
 - He reached in with his bare hands and scooped up some of the honey
 - In the process, he broke one of his Nazarite vows
 - The Nazarite vow prohibited touching unclean things, the fruit of the vine and cutting his hair
 - Now one of his vows had been broken
 - Then, Samson arrives back in Timnah and the wedding feast begins
 - The feast last seven days
 - And at the end of the feast, the couple is officially married
 - As I mentioned last week, Samuel chose to use a Hebrew word for feast that is very specific and rare
 - He used a word that means a drink banquet
 - In other words, this is a feast centered on drinking wine
 - Which indicates that Samson has now broken the second of his three Nazarite vows, never to drink the fruit of the vine
 - Only one of his vows remains intact at this point
- Finally, we learned last week that during this week-long feast, the festivities included social games of proposing and solving riddles
 - Early in the week Samson proposes a such riddle from what he saw in the lion's dead body
 - His riddle is given to us in v.14

Judg. 14:14 So he said to them,
“Out of the eater came something to eat,
And out of the strong came something sweet.”
But they could not tell the riddle in three days.

- We can see what it means clearly, but that's because we already know the answer

- But if you didn't know the backstory, then it would have been a difficult mystery
- Samson knew it would be difficult, so he wagered 30 pairs of fine clothes with the guests of the banquet
 - And as we can see at the end of v.14, even after three days of gathering and discussing the riddle, no one could solve it
 - And now the game has become more than a game
 - There is honor on the line to say nothing of the bet
 - So the tension is building for someone to win the bet before the seven days are up
- Samson appears to have won his bet
 - But not so fast
 - We learned back in v.4 that the Lord was working behind the scenes in this situation
 - Though Samson has done the wrong thing in pursuing this woman, the Lord was using it to propel Samson in another direction
- So now we see how the Lord turns the tables on Samson
 - We return to the feast week, now on the fourth day
 - And the bride-to-be's family is getting nervous and desperate to win
 - And they don't play fair

Judg. 14:15 Then it came about on the fourth day that they said to Samson's wife, "Entice your husband, so that he will tell us the riddle, or we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us to impoverish us? Is this not so?"

Judg. 14:16 Samson's wife wept before him and said, "You only hate me, and you do not love me; you have propounded a riddle to the sons of my people, and have not told it to me." And he said to her, "Behold, I have not told it to my father or mother; so should I tell you?"

Judg. 14:17 However she wept before him seven days while their feast lasted. And on the seventh day he told her because she pressed him so hard. She then told the riddle to the sons of her people.

- Now on the fourth day, some of the 30 wedding guests began to get worried they might lose this bet
 - Whether for the sake of honor or treasure, they decided they had to do something to ensure Samson didn't win
 - So they corner Samson's bride
 - Notice Samuel calls her Samson's "wife" in v.15
 - But that doesn't mean that Samson and this woman were already married
 - They were only betrothed until the end of the seven-day feast
 - But in that day, the term wife was applied to betrothed women just as to fully married women
 - The Philistines guests threaten the woman that unless she shares the answer to the riddle, they would burn down the girl's father's house
 - They also say have you invited us to impoverish us?
 - In that culture, if you invited someone to a wedding, you were legally obligated to care for them properly
 - Not only was it a social disgrace to fail to care for guests in the right way, but there were financial implications as well
 - If you didn't, you would be expected to compensate them for their loss
 - A dissatisfied guest could claim a goat or sheep as compensation for not receiving proper treatment
 - So obviously if a guest were required to leave behind a valuable set of clothing was an even greater disgrace, which explains their anger
 - Nevertheless, their claims of impoverishment are an exaggeration, to say the least
 - More likely, they are incensed at the idea of a Hebrew getting the better of a room full of Philistines
 - Remember, the Jews and the Philistines were "frienemies"
 - So after hearing their threats, Samson's future wife is understandably concerned

- They say they will burn down her house, which is essentially a death threat against her and her family
 - But she doesn't know the answer to the riddle either
 - Samson hasn't confided in her to this point
 - So she has no choice but to try to get the answer out of her husband and then pass it along to the guests
- Already we see the allegiance of this woman is with her people, the Philistines, rather than her husband to be, Samson
 - Here in lies the essential problem with Samson marrying a woman from the Philistines
 - A pagan Gentile isn't going to suddenly switch allegiance to the Jewish people of Yahweh
 - She will forever feel that tug back to her people
 - And over time, she will draw Samson away from the Lord and from the mission He gave Samson
- The same stands true for God's people throughout history
 - The world doesn't gain inspiration from association with God's people
 - The world tempts us into disobedience
 - Sure, the Lord may and occasionally does use a relationship between a believer and an unbeliever to bring new faith
 - But many more times, the enemy uses a relationship to stumble a believer
 - That's why scripture forbids believers from becoming yoked to unbelievers
- When the wife-to-be approaches Samson for the answer, Samson isn't willing to give up the solution to his riddle, for obvious reasons
 - At the end of v.16 Samson says he didn't even tell his parents the answer, so why would he tell her?
 - That comment is interesting because it reveals something of Samson's attitude toward his future wife and marriage itself

- Samson seems place his allegiance to his parents above that to his wife
- The command of scripture is that a man should forsake his father and mother and cling to his wife
- But in the same way this woman is clinging to her Philistine family, so is Samson clinging to his parents
- Granted, they aren't married yet, but the wedding is only days away
 - Obviously, this isn't the best way to start a life-long relationship
 - Neither person seems to trust or respect the other very much
 - And now we start to see the hand of God working in the situation
 - He's exposing the weakness of the relationship
 - And He's preparing for even more dramatic events
- So what does any good woman do when she isn't getting her way with her husband?
 - She cries and she claims she isn't loved
 - I call this a litmus test
 - Whenever a wife (or husband) turns a specific request into a test of love, they have created a litmus test for love
 - In v.16 the woman claims that Samson only hates her and doesn't love her
 - Why? Because he hasn't told her the answer to the riddle
 - So we're to believer that this action above all else is a fair measure of Samson's love?
 - It's as if the love one person has for another is compressed into a single defining act on upon which the entire relationship rests
 - Children and teenagers fall for this tactic, claiming they will "die" or run away if they don't get their way
 - But these kind of tactics have no place in an adult relationship

- Nevertheless, what man can resist a woman crying?
 - Well, apparently Samson could, at least for a while
 - She comes to Samson on the fourth day but he holds out until the seventh day
 - In v.17 the English translation makes it sound as if she cries for an additional seven days
 - But the proper understanding is that she cried for the duration of the seven days
- So Samson endures four days of crying and hysterics of one kind or another
 - And I guess it finally wore him down, because she pressed him so hard, we see in v.17
 - Many men can identify with Samson's plight
 - And some men might take consolation in knowing that if the mighty Samson couldn't hold out, then what man could?
 - But that's not the right way to understand this moment in our study
 - The proper way to interpret these events is to ask the question:
 - If Samson couldn't withstand the corrupting influence of a weeping Philistine woman for four days, how could he stand up to the entire Philistine army?
 - Here again, the Lord is demonstrating that this marriage is a terrible outcome for Samson and the people of Israel
 - And therefore, the Lord is using Samson's weakness and this woman's corrosive influence to stop the marriage
 - Samson tells her the answer, and of course she goes immediately to her people and shares the answer
 - Notice Samuel says that these are her people, reminding us of her true allegiance
 - And immediately on that same day before the sun goes down (and thus the day ends), the 30 guests give the answer

Judg. 14:18 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 found out my riddle.”

- In v.18, they solve the riddle and name the lion and the honey as the answer, something they only could have known with the woman's help
 - As Samson hears their answer, he immediately knows that his wife-to-be has betrayed his confidence
 - He says that if they had not “plowed with his heifer” they would not have known the answer
 - To plow with his heifer is an expression that means they found a harvest using his property
 - In the expression, Samson is comparing his wife to a cow, and the comparison is intentional
 - We use that expression to refer to a woman's appearance, but in Samson's day cows weren't thought to be ugly
 - But they were thought to be stubborn, dumb and in need of taming
 - Such is the way Samson thought of this woman, in many ways he's correct
 - But he could have just as easily been talking about himself
 - It was Samson's own stubbornness and rebellious spirit that put him in this situation
 - He was dumb to propose the bet and to trust that woman, to say nothing of his interest in marrying her
- Now remember, this scene is playing out only an hour or two before they were to cement the marriage, consummating it in the marriage tent
 - But Samson is coming to know his prospective wife with a proper understanding

- She has betrayed him and dishonored him
- And she has also impoverished him
- Ironically, she was trying to prevent the “impoverishment” of her guests, but in the process she impoverishes her future household
 - So now the Lord steps in at the eleventh hour to stop the marriage and bring Samson back to his calling and mission

Judg. 14:19 Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of them and took their spoil and gave the changes of clothes to those who told the riddle. And his anger burned, and he went up to his father's house.
Judg. 14:20 But Samson's wife was given to his companion who had been his friend.

- The Spirit leads Samson to depart from the wedding feast immediately without completing the marriage ceremony
 - This is the ancient equivalent to leaving the bride standing at the altar
 - But the situation is a little more complicated than that for Samson
 - Because the original agreement to marry was considered binding
 - The only way to officially end the engagement would be to divorce the woman
 - Nevertheless, Samson leaves as impulsively as he entered the relationship, though this time the Spirit is leading him away from the woman
 - And under the Spirit's influence, Samson goes to one of the five key Philistines cities, Ashkelon
 - The city is about 23 miles southwest of Timnah on the Mediterranean sea
 - A modern city is still there today
 - Samson has traveled here to settle his wager, which he is obligated to pay
 - But Samson knows he has been tricked by the Philistines, so he feels no obligation to pay with his own money

- Instead, he's going to make the Philistine people pay the wager
- He finds and kills thirty wealthy Philistine men and takes their fine clothes so he can pay the debt
- With the thirty sets of clothes in hand, he returns to Timnah and pays his debt
- And in anger, he leaves the town without finishing the marriage and without taking his wife with him
- What do we conclude from Samson's actions?
 - Was he murdering innocent men to pay a wager?
 - While we've certainly seen judges doing bad things in the book of Judges, this seems to be a new low, or is it?
 - Remember, Samson took this action under the influence of the Spirit of the Lord we're told
 - And the key to understanding what's happening here is found in a single word in v.19
 - In v.19 Samuel writes that Samson took the clothes as "spoil"
 - The word in Hebrew is chalitsah, a word only Samuel uses here and in 2Samuel
 - It means war booty, the spoil that one army captures from a defeated foe
 - The fact that Samuel uses this word indicates that he views Samson's actions against the Philistines to be an act of war
 - And this makes sense, given that Samson was raised up by the Spirit to conduct war against Israel's enemies, the Philistines
 - The problem isn't that Samson killed these 30 men...the problem is Samson hasn't been killing more
 - He should have the armies of Israel defeating the Philistines
 - Or at the least, he should be prosecuting the war on his own
 - But one thing is for sure...he shouldn't be trying to make peace with them by marrying their daughters
 - And yet that's exactly where Samson has been up to now

- His actions against these Philistines was motivated for carnal reasons, but still the Lord is using Samson's sin to achieve a good outcome
- The Lord is using Samson's impulsiveness and selfishness to change Samson's direction and bring him back to obedience
 - Of course, killing those 30 men hardly achieved the end the the Lord desired, but it's a start
 - But it kept Samson from marrying this woman
 - And it put his focus back on defeating these oppressors of Israel
 - After Samson returns with the clothes and storms off without his wife, the family is mortified
 - Samson has ruined the family's wedding and brought dishonor on the woman
 - Nothing, absolutely nothing, was more dishonoring to a woman than to become betrothed but not see her marriage come to pass
 - We'll see later in chapter 15 that Samson still intended to marry the woman
 - Or at least he came back to that desire once he cooled down
 - But the Lord takes the next step to ensure Samson can't change his mind and go back to her
 - When the woman's family realizes Samson was gone, they quickly enlisting one of Samson's friends to marry the woman in his place
 - We don't know who this companion was, but he seems ready and willing to take the woman as a wife
 - We can assume she must have been a woman many men desired
- And this brings us to the end of our introductory episode in Samson's story, and this isn't even the strangest thing we'll see in his story
 - This man is an example of how far disobedience and carnal living can take us away from God's heart

- Samson's self-willed behavior left him with no honor, no wardrobe, no wife and no satisfaction
- He's angry, sulking and frustrated
- Remember this story when you find yourself in the midst of these feelings about life
- Angry at God and the world
- Sulking and pouting over not getting what you want or expect out of life
- Frustrated in achieving your goals or desires, marveling at your bad luck or so it seems

- Maybe the story of Samson will come to mind, and when it does I hope it will lead you to ask the question, "What is God trying to tell me?"
 - That's the question Samson should have asked himself in the midst of his circumstances
 - Instead, he had a pity party
 - What might he have achieved for the Lord and God's people had he awoken to his own selfish cause for his misery?
 - Perhaps this story might be useful to the Spirit in us one day for the same reason
- See your circumstances as the outworking of the Lord to produce repentance and a obedience
 - Don't saw "Woe is me"
 - Say "Your will be done"
 - Let's make 2016 the year we obeyed
 - A year we turned from the persistent sin and frustration it produces
 - And turn to the Spirit and accept our mission to serve Him in obedience

Judges 15

- Our brooding, impulsive hero, Samson, has run away from his own wedding after this bride betrayed him
 - After drinking wine (probably for the very first time), Samson let the drink go to his head and he made a foolish bet
 - He bet his wedding guests they couldn't guess the riddle he posed
 - But his guests didn't play fair
 - They pressured Samson's wife to get the answer, which she did
 - And the result was a humiliation for Samson
 - In his anger, he killed 30 Philistines, taking their clothes to repay his debt and then he storms away in anger leaving his bride at the altar
 - We understood from the text that the Lord was working behind the scenes to prevent this marriage
 - Or at the very least, the Lord wanted to prompt Samson to return to his appointed task of defeating the Philistines
 - And so Samson has begun to move in that direction
 - Still, Samson is betrothed, and since he stormed off without completing the wedding, he still feels an obligation to return
 - He probably still has feelings for the woman
 - And then there is the matter of following through on the covenant
 - In that culture, personal commitments, especially in covenants, were not to be broken
 - So Samson still has an obligation to go through with his covenant despite running away
 - Therefore, as we enter chapter 15, Samson travels back to claim the bride he abandoned

Judg. 15:1 But after a while, in the time of wheat harvest, Samson visited his wife with a young goat, and said, "I will go in to my wife in her room." But her father did not let him enter.

Judg. 15:2 Her father said, "I really thought that you hated her intensely; so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please let her be yours instead."

Judg. 15:3 Samson then said to them, "This time I shall be blameless in regard to the Philistines when I do them harm."

- Samuel writes that Samson returned to Timnah after a while
 - We don't know how long "a while" was exactly but we have a couple of clues
 - This return happens at the time of the wheat harvest
 - Wheat is harvested in late Spring after a Winter planting
 - So this is late May or early June
 - And if we assume that Samson entered the vineyard earlier to eat grapes against his vows
 - Then that would have been in Fall since grapes are ready to eat in early Fall
 - So perhaps this is 6-8 months later
 - Samson goes to visit his wife carrying a goat
 - Every husband or boyfriend can identify with Samson's actions
 - Samson's bringing the ancient equivalent of chocolate and flowers
 - Because nothing says "I'm sorry" like a goat
 - Samson thinks to himself that he will go to his wife in her room
 - He means literally he will consummate his marriage as he was supposed to do six months or so earlier
 - Obviously, he's assuming his wife has continued to honor her commitment to the covenant just as he is now attempting to do

- Remember, the only way this woman could have exited the marriage covenant was through a divorce
- But when Samuel arrives in Timnah and tries to gain access to the woman's room, her father stops Samson from entering
 - Samson is confused for why he couldn't go into his wife, as he should have been allowed to do
 - The father begins to explain by first apologizing
 - He says I really thought you hated my daughter intensely
 - The Hebrew sentence is interesting in that there are no words for "really" and for "intensely"
 - Instead, Hebrew simply repeats the words "thought" and "hate"
 - So literally, "I thought thought you hate hate my daughter"
 - The point being the man is trying to emphasize to Samson is how surprising and convincing Samson's departure had been
 - Samson showed great disrespect to his future wife dishonoring her in probably the greatest way possible
 - So no one expected him to make good on his covenant
 - So the family did the next best thing, or so they thought
 - The father said he gave his daughter to Samson's companion
 - In a sense, it seems like dad was trying to employ some version of the levirate marriage principle
 - But in the process, he caused his daughter to commit an act of infidelity
 - She broke her covenant by marrying another
 - And she has now brought an even dishonor against Samson
 - Even the father's offer of his other (prettier) daughter doesn't change the fact that Samson's bride was stolen and his covenant broken
- Once again, Samson is angry and moved to taking revenge
 - Interestingly, he remarks that when he takes revenge against the Philistines this time, he will be justified in his actions

- He is acknowledging that his earlier actions were the result of his own mistake in proposing the bet in the first place
- This time, Samson is truly the innocent party
- The Philistine family has broken a solemn covenant and dishonored their word
- So Samson is justified in seeking justice

- And the justice required in the breaking of a marriage covenant was two fold
 - First, Samson himself is no longer obligated to marry this woman
 - As Jesus explains in the Gospels, if a woman engages in sex during the betrothal period, she is committing infidelity
 - And the husband is permitted to end the betrothal because of he has not yet consummated the marriage
 - His wife is no longer available to him
- Secondly, Samson could expect to exact a price from the father's family
 - Covenants were life-long commitments that could only be ended by the death of the one who made it
 - As Paul says in Romans 7

Rom. 7:2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband.

Rom. 7:3 So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.

- You may remember in the story of Mary and Joseph that when Joseph found Mary pregnant before they married, he determined to divorce her quietly
- He was saving Mary from potentially being stoned to death for breaking her covenant
- Samson isn't so generous, as his words indicate he's preparing to take his revenge, justifiably this time

Judg. 15:4 Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took torches, and turned the foxes tail to tail and put one torch in the middle between two tails.

Judg. 15:5 When he had set fire to the torches, he released the foxes into the standing grain of the Philistines, thus burning up both the shocks and the standing grain, along with the vineyards and groves.

- As usual Samson's story has unexpected details
 - He decides to destroy the Philistines' wheat fields just as they are ready to be harvested
 - This represents a serious loss
 - The food supply and financial security of this village was dependent on this harvest
 - So Samson decides to destroy it
 - But since he's only one person, he devises a creative way to get help with his plan
 - The text says he catches 300 foxes, but this seems very unlikely
 - Not because Samson couldn't capture a wild animal, but because foxes are solitary animals
 - It would highly improbable that 300 foxes would have been in the same vicinity
 - But the Hebrew word for fox can be translated as jackal, which is a small wild dog
 - Like all canines, jackals run in packs, and are much easier to catch than a fox
 - Still, we must assume that Samson's ability to capture 300 jackals was still a reflection of the Lord's special anointing of Samson
 - As he caught the jackals, he lit their bushy tails on fire and set them loose in the stranding grain fields
 - If Samson had simply walked through the field lighting fires, the Philistines could have quickly rushed to stop the flames
 - But with 300 jackals running loose with burning tails, there would be no way to stop the spread of the flames

- Sure enough the fire spreads fast
 - It burns up the stacked grain that had been already been reaped
 - And the standing grain still in the fields
 - Eventually, it spread to the vineyards and fruit groves
 - This is a devastating loss
- When the village sees the devastation and learns the cause, they too take action

[Judg. 15:6](#) Then the Philistines said, "Who did this?" And they said, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he took his wife and gave her to his companion." So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire.

- The inquiry leads the villagers back to the house of Samson's wife
 - When they learn that this family broke a marriage covenant, they realize that Samson's actions were justified to a degree
 - The true blame for the episode rested with the family that violated their covenant with Samson
 - So they brought justice to the family, burning the bride and her father
- At this point, we're all a little uncomfortable with all the violence, and we should be
 - All that's happened has been a cascading of sin
 - Beginning with Samson's decision to pursue the Philistine wife
 - To his behavior at the wedding
 - To his carnal reasons to attack the Philistines
 - To his abandonment of his wife
- And then the Philistines have committed their own offenses
 - In betraying Samson's honor in cheating on the wager
 - And then breaking the marriage covenant
 - No one is innocent here

- But step back for a moment and consider what you know about the society of these days
 - Men are doing what is right in their own eyes
 - They aren't guided by God's law so much as by their own desires,
 - They follow hearts that are drifting farther and farther from the Lord
 - And even the men appointed by God to lead them are growing less godly by each generation
 - And of course the Philistines aren't godly in the least, so it's only natural to expect them to act in vengeful ways
 - And seeing it all we're drawn to one, unavoidable conclusion: the evil of the human heart is an incurable disease
 - Israel had the covenants, the prophets, the judges, the tabernacle and on and on
 - And all of it couldn't bring men to live and act in righteous ways
 - When God stepped in forcefully as He did after the Exodus or under Joshua, the people would tow the line briefly
 - But without fail, they returned to their sinning ways
 - And of course the Gentile nations were even farther from the truth and righteousness
 - They lived without the revelation of the Lord nor His direction or representatives
 - Clearly we need something more than law and human judges
 - We need the power of God to overcome our very nature
 - The Lord knew this already, but He's using the time and experiences of Judges to demonstrate that truth to us
 - That's why we preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a fallen world
 - Because we too live in a time when everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes
 - And our judges are ruling according to whims and selfish desires

- And even the people of God are often weak, untaught and unwilling to discipline their flesh to the restraint of God's law
- What will address this problem?
- Not law, not judges, not kings
- Only the Spirit living inside us Who comes as we submit to the truth of Jesus as Lord
- The Philistine's decision to take revenge against Samson's wife gives Samson one more chance to retaliate

Judg. 15:7 Samson said to them, "Since you act like this, I will surely take revenge on you, but after that I will quit."

Judg. 15:8 He struck them ruthlessly with a great slaughter; and he went down and lived in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

- It would seem that Samson had true love for his Philistine bride, since he's willing to carry the war one step further
 - He vows to avenge his wife's death with one more act against the Philistines
 - Interestingly, he's declaring that this will be the end for him
 - Of course that's easy to promise when you're assuming you're going to be the last one to act
 - In any case, Samson goes back into the territory of the Philistines and conducts a great slaughter against them
 - Once again, we're not overlooking the chain of sinful events that brought us to this point
 - But we must also remember that the Lord declared at the beginning of chapter 14 that these events were part of God's plan
 - He's working to bring Samson to the point where he will fulfill his mission to conduct war against the Philistines
 - And Samson's sinful choice to pursue a Philistine wife left the Lord with little choice but to disrupt those plans
 - And in the process, the Lord drove Samson into a battle that supposed to happen a whole different way

- I can't stress enough that God always gets His way in our lives and in the larger events of the world around us
 - And when we're stubborn in refusing to following Him in an obedient way, then we leave Him with no choice but to drive us from behind
 - We have the stories in Judges so we might notice the Lord's ways and determine for ourselves not to test Him in the way these people did
 - Don't force God's hand, because you won't like the result
 - Like Jonah, you're going to Nineveh one way or another: either by first class or fish class
- After Samson fights, he has to retreat somewhere to hide from the Philistines' response
 - So he ends up in Etam, which is an area of caves near Timnah
 - Samson's hiding out waiting for the Philistines to give up looking for him
 - But he's stirred up a hornet's nest, and he's Hebrew brothers aren't happy
 - But in the Lord's wisdom, He has a plan for this as well

Judg. 15:9 Then the Philistines went up and camped in Judah, and spread out in Lehi.

Judg. 15:10 The men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" And they said, "We have come up to bind Samson in order to do to him as he did to us."

Judg. 15:11 Then 3,000 men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam and said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us?" And he said to them, "As they did to me, so I have done to them."

Judg. 15:12 They said to him, "We have come down to bind you so that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines." And Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not kill me."

Judg. 15:13 So they said to him, "No, but we will bind you fast and give you into their hands; yet surely we will not kill you." Then they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.

Judg. 15:14 When he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily so that the ropes that were on his arms were as flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds dropped from his hands.

Judg. 15:15 He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, so he reached out and took it and killed a thousand men with it.

Judg. 15:16 Then Samson said,

"With the jawbone of a donkey,
Heaps upon heaps,
With the jawbone of a donkey
I have killed a thousand men."

Judg. 15:17 When he had finished speaking, he threw the jawbone from his hand; and he named that place Ramath-lehi.

- In response to Samson's brutal actions, the Philistines move up into Judah and spread out in an area called Lehi, a location unknown today
 - Obviously, this game of tit-for-tat is growing out of control quickly
 - What began as a family dispute soon engulfed a village
 - And now it threatens to bring two nations of people against one another
 - But remember the Philistines essentially ruled over Israel in these days
 - Like Rome ruling Israel in Jesus' day, the Philistines could impose their will on the Jews virtually with impunity
 - So when a Jew steps into a Philistines village and kills man men, the Philistines are going to exact revenge
- So Samson's own people come looking for him to hand him over to the Philistines
 - Samson explains why he did what he did, but they will hear nothing of it
 - They would rather turn in a brother to have peace with their enemy than risk their lives in the warfare that resistance required
 - But this is why the Lord raised up Samson in the first place
 - He was to break the stronghold of the Philistines on the Jews
 - He was to free his people
 - Samson's reluctance to obey led to the Lord bringing it about in this odd fashion

- Still the Jewish leaders are so blind and weakened they don't want freedom
 - They prefer a life of quiet bondage to a life of victorious obedience to God
 - God's people can fall for this pattern of complacency at any time...it wasn't unique to the Jewish people
 - One observer of 1Samuel 15 remarked:

It is a sad fact of Christian experience that if you are a Christian committed to growing and maturing in Jesus Christ, you will often be hindered the most by other Christians who have become accustomed and accommodated to an anemic, wishy-washy spiritual life.

- For the Jewish leaders, Samson is messing up a good thing, or so they think
- Now if this pattern sounds a little familiar, it should, because it's another picture of Christ
 - Samson pictures Christ's arrival to rescue his people from the oppression of the Gentiles
 - Unlike Samson, Christ embraced His mission wholeheartedly, of course
 - But like Samson, Christ was persecuted and betrayed by His own people against the very enemies He came to defeat
 - We're learning another lesson about the evil hearts of men and women
 - We prefer our sinful lives even with all the misery our sin brings upon us
 - We say no to God and to His redemption
 - We refuse to acknowledge Him much less bend our knee
 - Only by the supernatural work of the Spirit will someone come to know the Lord as follow Him
- Speaking of the anointing of the Spirit, Samson sees an opportunity to exercise his escape from the Philistines and the Jews
 - He asks in v.12 if they will promise not to kill him

- They agree they will only bind him
- But they will not kill him
- Samson agrees then to go with them, because he knows that he has the strength to break their bonds
 - This is probably a high point in Samson's spiritual life
 - For all his stumbling about so far, we can be encouraged by his patience with his brother sin
 - And for his confidence and faith in the Lord's faithfulness to deliver him over his enemies
 - He's putting himself in a very vulnerable position, which can only mean he's confident the Lord will be there to rescue him
- Here's another picture of Christ
 - Samson pictures a man of God endowed with all power yet willing to submit to an unfair fate for the good of his people
 - Christ had the strength to resist any attempt to bind Him much less to kill Him
 - But because of His obedience to the Lord and His desire to win salvation for His people, He willingly submitted to capture, trial, torture and ultimately death
- In Samson's case, he won't face death, not yet
 - He is brought bound before the Philistines who shout in anticipation of killing this man they despise so much
 - But Samson breaks his bonds and begins to fight the Philistines who were caught off guard
- Of course, the most amazing part of this battle is the implement Samson used to win his battle
 - He notices a dead donkey that had only just died
 - Once again, his Nazarite vows prohibited touch a dead body
 - But he had violated that vow already when he touched the lion
 - So without a hesitation, he reaches out and grabs the jawbone

- The dentures of the donkey provide an interesting focal point for us, but in reality the jawbone played no meaningful role in the battle
 - In effect, Samson killed 1,000 men with his bare hands
 - His supernatural strength was the tool that granted him victory
- After the battle, Samson names the place “Jawbone Hill” in memorial to the victory
 - And he coins another riddle
 - If you want to get the full sense of the wordplay in his riddle, you could restate it this way
 - With the jawbone of an ass, I have piled them in a mass.
- Then why the detail of the jawbone?
 - I believe it's another picture of Christ
 - Samson is winning a great victory by means of the cheek of a dead donkey or ass, an unclean animal even when alive
 - Likewise, Christ won a great victory through an unclean death
 - Scripture teaches that Jesus was “smitten” or struck on the “cheek” in His death on Calvary
 - The phrase to strike the cheek means to treat with contempt
 - Furthermore, the jawbone or cheek of the donkey was moist or fresh
 - The word in Hebrew for “new” literally means moist
 - The point is the body hadn’t undergone decay
 - Neither did Jesus’ body undergo decay in winning our victory
 - And the bone was from a donkey because the donkey is unclean
 - And Jesus became unclean in the sense that He became sin on the cross
 - He Who knew no sin became sin so we might become the righteousness of God

- Finally, the jaw seems connected to the mouth in a way that suggests that the victory will be won by the word of God, supernaturally
 - And at the end of the battle, he disposes of the jawbone
 - Just as Christ will declare it is finished when the victory is won
 - Never again will Christ need to suffer to defeat sin
 - All of these details in the story remind us that Samson is acting in ways that God intends to reminds us of His Son

Judges 16A

- In our previous study of Samson, we watched him betrayed by his Jewish brothers and turned over to Israel's enemies, the Philistines
 - The Jews were upset because their oppressors were upset
 - And the Philistines were upset because Samson had killed many Philistines in retaliation for their murder of his wife
 - This was a cycle of revenge and violence
 - And it culminated in all-out-warfare with the Philistines
 - This is what the Lord intended, since he raised up Samson in the first place to free Israel from their oppressor
 - But as we've studies already, Samson wasn't very focused on this mission
 - He got caught up in marrying the Philistines instead of opposing them
 - But through a series of circumstances, the Lord has brought Samson to this point
 - Since Samson wouldn't go to the fight, the Lord brought the fight to him
- And then we have Samson's unique gifts
 - He's anointed by the Spirit to possess unique strength
 - So that he can defeat entire armies by his own hand
 - Last time we read in chapter 15 that Samson used his strength to thwart the Jews' plan to hand him over to the Philistines
 - He broke his bonds and single-handedly defeat the entire army by his own arm using just the jawbone of an ass
 - This detail in itself says a lot about the deterioration of the Jewish culture during the time of Judges
- So as we return to the end of chapter 15, we've now seen Samson defeat the Philistine army twice by himself

- Think back for a moment to the prior judges we've studied
- At first, judges led armies in defeat of God's enemies
- As time has gone by, it's become increasingly difficult for these judges to find the will among the people to enter battle
 - Debrah had to go before Barak
 - Gideon had to be convinced to go himself
 - And Jephthah had to work to recruit his army from among the tribes while other Jews attacked attacked him
- And now we see a judge literally fighting by himself
 - It would seem the Lord knew this would be the situation Samson would face in his time as judge
 - Which explains Samson unique powers
 - The Lord knew Samson would be acting alone in his battles
 - Worse than that, He knew Samson's Jewish brothers would oppose him in the fight
- But now Samson is acting as God expected, pushing the Philistines back to the coast and freeing the Jewish people
 - Perhaps Samson is on the right path now
 - Maybe he'll move ahead in obedience
 - Bringing with him the rest of his brothers
 - Before we can see that answer, we need to return to the scene at the end of chapter 15
 - Because as the battle finishes, there is an interesting moment

Judg. 15:18 Then he became very thirsty, and he called to the Lord 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 hands of the uncircumcised?"

Judg. 15:19 But God split the hollow place that is in Lehi so that water came out of it. When he drank, his strength returned and he revived. Therefore he named it En-hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day.

Judg. 15:20 So he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

- Following the battle, Samson is understandably thirsty
 - Samson was betrayed by His brothers yet won the battle for them by himself against a determined enemy
 - In the process he became weak and so thirsty that he contemplates the possibility of death
 - So he appeals to the Lord asking for relief and deliverance from the enemies of Israel
 - In response, the Lord split a hollow place creating a fountain of running (or as the Jew would say, living) water
 - That spring revived Samson's strength and brought back his strength
 - He named the spring En-hakkore, which can be translated "the voice of the one calling"
- In all these details, we find a picture in Samson's life of Jesus' death on the cross
 - Jesus was betrayed by His brothers to hang on a cross
 - When Jesus was hanging on the cross, He was winning a victory against the enemy by His own hand
 - No one worked with Jesus in winning this victory, for it was a salvation that only Jesus could accomplish
 - As Isaiah writes concerning the Messiah's victory over the enemy

Is. 63:5 "I looked, and there was no one to help,
And I was astonished and there was no one to uphold;
So My own arm brought salvation to Me,
And My wrath upheld Me.

- Secondly, as Jesus hung on the cross, He was in desperate thirst, which the Gospels document

John 19:28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, "I am thirsty."

- Jesus' thirst on the cross came after all the work of redemption had been accomplished

- Just as Samson's thirst came after he had won his battle with the Philistines
- And Samson's mention of death in connection to his thirst is answered by a spring of flowing or living water
 - Just as the Father turned the death of Christ into a spring of living water
 - And like the name Samson gave his spring, the well of living water coming forth from the Spirit is one calling the world to follow the Lord
 - As Jesus described Himself in John 4

[John 4:13](#) Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again;

[John 4:14](#) but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

- So Samson has defeated the Philistines and overcome the efforts of his brothers to betray him
 - And with this victory, Samson is able to establish himself as a man to rule Israel
 - Samuel gives us this in a single footnote to the story

[Judg. 15:20](#) So he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

- From this point Samson judged Israel twenty years
- In fact, Samuel is referring to Samson's final twenty years of ruling
 - He has been installed as judge for some time
 - But the Lord has been waiting for Samson to fulfill his calling
 - Only now does Samuel indicate that Samson has arrived in his proper place
- Secondly, notice that his ruling coincides with the days of the Philistines
 - Remember, Samson was supposed to remove Israel's enemy

- Just as past judges had pushed out the oppressors and restored peace to the land, so was Samson supposed to do
- But in this continual weakening of the Jewish society, even a mighty man like Samson can't complete his mission
- He will spend his entire life fighting Philistines

- The next moment Samuel records in the story of Samson begins chapter 16

Judg. 16:1 Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her.

- We witnessed steps of faith and obedience from Samson at the end of chapter 15, but unfortunately his untamed, impulsive nature remains
 - Sometime during the twenty years, Samson decides to visit a prostitute
 - He goes into Gaza, an area in the heart of the Philistine territory
 - Historically, his sunny area of the Mediterranean has long been a favorite vacation spot for Jews
 - So perhaps Samson didn't go there expressly to find a harlot
 - But what happens in Gaza, stays in Gaza...
- Samson's plan is a bad idea, and for more reasons than the obvious
 - He's traveling deep into the heart of the enemy's territory
 - He's been at war with them for years, so surely he's a wanted man
 - And yet here he is taking an unnecessary chance
 - In a sense, he's testing God's patience and willingness to protect His anointed
- Furthermore, frolicking with the Philistines on their beaches is not part of the plan of destroying these people
 - It's a similar compromise to marrying a Philistine
 - What part of "destroy the Philistines" didn't Samson understand?
- Lastly, Samson is clearly weak in his flesh when it comes to women

- He lusted after the Philistine woman earlier
- Now he's willing to cavort with a Philistine prostitute
- Ironically, the man has the strength of a thousand warriors, but he can't defeat his own sinful desires
- Every one of us can identify with Samson to one degree or another when it comes to fighting our flesh and losing
 - But having said that, we don't always have to lose that battle
 - While we'll never be free of the struggle as long as we're in this body
 - Nevertheless, we don't have to throw our hands up and concede to defeat
 - We can take steps to stack the odds in our favor
 - We can pray, we can fill our hearts with the counsel of God's word, we can seek godly encouragement and accountability
 - But most of all, we can set healthy boundaries and limits knowing our weaknesses
 - Samson knows he has an eye for the ladies
 - So he had no business walking into the heart of the enemy's territory
 - He was daring his flesh to trip him up
 - And our flesh is always ready to take up that challenge
 - Consider what it means for you to walk onto the enemy's territory like Samson did
 - Where are those strongholds in your life, the places the flesh has the advantage
 - And once you identify them, cross them off your map and as they say, don't go there
 - Make decisions to place barrier between you and your Gaza before you find yourself in the midst of it
 - Because by that point it's simply too late

- This is Samson's chief weakness, his principle conceit
 - He knows he's physically strong and anointed by the Spirit
 - So he assumes he's also spiritual strong, at least strong enough to sin without consequence
 - To tempt the Lord to rescue him if he gets in over his head
 - But he's no match for his flesh, and over the years it's diminished Samson
 - Consider how much more Samson could have achieved without the weight of sinful flesh pulling him backward
 - Without his tendency to feed it
 - Consider how much you can do to defeat the enemies of the Lord when you're not busy fighting your own flesh
 - Set boundaries, seek help from within the body of Christ, recognize the lost opportunities and recommit to serving the Lord
 - Seek to develop spiritual strength in ways Samson never did
- And so as Samson seeks to please his flesh, the enemy has opportunity

Judg. 16:2 When it was told to the Gazites, saying, "Samson has come here," they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. And they kept silent all night, saying, "Let us wait until the morning light, then we will kill him."

Judg. 16:3 Now Samson lay until midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the city gate and the two posts and pulled them up along with the bars; then he put them on his shoulders and carried them up to the top of the mountain which is opposite Hebron.

- To no one's surprise, the Philistines in Gaza take note of Samson's arrival and decide they have their chance to kill their enemy
 - So they late in wait for him all night at the gate of the city
 - The gate of the city is the main entrance into and out of the city
 - The gate was much more than merely a door
 - It was a multi-chambered room usually with a second story that connected to the walkway atop the city wall

- So the Philistines assume that in the morning, Samson will walk through the gate on his way home
 - They were either expecting to leap upon him from a hiding place or perhaps from above
 - Either way, they think themselves capable of defeating Samson in this way
- But somehow Samson is alerted to the plan, perhaps the Spirit gave Samson the insight supernaturally
 - So at midnight, once the men in the gate were likely asleep, Samson takes his leave
 - He's going to leave before the men expect him so he can avoid their trap
 - There's only one problem with this plan: the city gates were locked shut at night
- No problem for Samson, since he merely grabs the gates and rips them away, complete with the door posts and the horizontal bar used to car the doors closed
 - Even imagining such a thing is difficult for us
 - These doors would have been quite large and extremely heavy
 - These are Philistine doors, which means they were likely wood beam overlaid with iron
 - You can safely assume hundreds if not thousands of pounds
 - And if that weren't enough he carries them up to a mountain some distance away
 - Gaza is a long way from Hebron, about 40 miles uphill
 - While we can't say it wasn't possible to go that far, since if he could uproot them at all, he could carry them anywhere
 - But the purpose in carrying them away was to place them on a hill in full view of the city
 - Which would argue that Samson carries them to a hill in the direction of Hebron

- Samson's point to the city including the men sleeping in the gate is that he can't be felled by their schemes
 - It was a dramatic display of the Lord's anointed
 - And true as it was, it was also an ironic display
 - Because while Samson's physical victory is overshadowed by his spiritual defeat
 - It's an abuse of his position as judge
 - And he's tempting the Lord to bring defeat to subdue his pride
- But this whole story is merely prelude to what comes next
 - Samson's spiritual weakness especially with women becomes opportunity for the enemy to seek his downfall
 - Samuel told us about the harlot to help understand how Samson is eventually brought down
 - The Lord is forgiving and patient but He's not permissive
 - He will eventually bring discipline against His children
 - And so if Samson insists on staying close to Israel's enemy and to their women, then the Lord is just to use that sin to bring a measure of discipline

Judg. 16:4 After this it came about that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

Judg. 16:5 The lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Entice him, and see where his great strength lies and how we may overpower him that we may bind him to afflict him. Then we will each give you eleven hundred pieces of silver."

- The valley of Sorek lies in – you guessed it – a Philistine controlled territory north of Beth-shemesh
- It was a major east-west thoroughfare connecting the hill country of Judah to the costal plain of the Philistine cities
- Apparently, Samson was moving through this valley perhaps to visit more Philistines cities when he meets a woman called Delilah

- The name Delilah is Jewish, indicating that this woman was not a Philistine
 - Still, the town existed on the border where the two cultures mixed freely, so we don't know her origins for sure
 - And considering what she is willing to do for the Philistines, it seems more likely she was a Philistine woman
 - In that sense, she serves as the poster child for these days
 - She personifies the way Jewish and Philistine culture is combining, because of the weakness of the people
- The Philistine leaders see the perfect opportunity to discover Samson's secret
 - The very fact that they need to understand where his strength came from confirms something I mentioned a few weeks ago
 - I said that we mustn't imagine Samson some muscular body builder type of man, as he's often portrayed in pictures
 - More likely, he looked ordinary, like Clark Kent
 - But when the time came he could do amazing things
 - And they want to understand how to defeat this power, what his kryptonite was
 - The fee they offer Delilah for the information is 1,100 pieces or coins of silver
 - In that day, a person could live a comfortable lifestyle on ten pieces of silver per year
 - So she's being offers a fortune for life
 - That tells you how important this information was to the Philistines
 - So they pay a woman to get the secret out of him, and we've seen this story before
 - Earlier, Samson lost a bet over a riddle because he couldn't say no to a crying woman
 - This time he's going to give away much more
 - And it seems he's willing to do it for much less

Judg. 16:6 So Delilah said to Samson, “Please tell me where your great strength is and how you may be bound to afflict you.”

Judg. 16:7 Samson said to her, “If they bind me with seven fresh cords that have not been dried, then I will become weak and be like any other man.”

Judg. 16:8 Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh cords that had not been dried, and she bound him with them.

Judg. 16:9 Now she had men lying in wait in an inner room. And she said to him, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” But he snapped the cords as a string of tow snaps when it touches fire. So his strength was not discovered.

- So Delilah's first attempt yielded a false answer
 - Samson obviously knew better than to hand over the secret to some Philistine woman
 - Instead of divulging the real secret, he gives her a false answer
 - Tie me up with seven fresh cords and I'm yours, he tells her
 - Obviously, Samson knew that she was planning something so he was merely toying with her
 - After she reports this “secret” to the Philistines, the leaders get her the cords
 - And she binds Samson
 - How does she manage this? Maybe while he was sleeping or through some other deception
 - But of course, Samson was probably playing along
 - Then she announces the ambush and Samson proceeds to snaps the cords
 - We don't know what happened to the unfortunately Philistines at this point, but we assume they just left
 - This seems to be Samson's principle defense: no one dares challenge him knowing his power
- Of course, Delilah did not appreciate being deceived by Samson
 - There was a lot of money on the line for her, yet Samson was just making a fool of her

- So she complains of his bad treatment

Judg. 16:10 Then Delilah said to Samson, "Behold, you have deceived me and told me lies; now please tell me how you may be bound."

Judg. 16:11 He said to her, "If they bind me tightly with new ropes which have not been used, then I will become weak and be like any other man."

Judg. 16:12 So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" For the men were lying in wait in the inner room. But he snapped the ropes from his arms like a thread.

- Delilah makes Samson out to be the bad guy here, overlooking her own conspiracy against him
 - What's even more remarkable is Samson's willingness to continue his relationship with this Jezebel
 - She's obviously intent on bringing Samson down, and yet he shows no concern
 - He should have recognized the threat and moved on
- Instead, he continues to toy with her
 - She asks again and he gives her another false answer
 - Again she and the Philistines fall for it
 - And again he wins and presumably chases off his adversaries
- Now at this point any reasonable person would leave, right?
 - Scripture says flee from temptation
 - But Samson isn't fleeing
 - He's almost daring the enemy to find a way to beat him
 - It's as if he thinks he's invincible
 - What explains his behavior?
 - It's simple...his pride and lust has clouded his judgment
 - He's confident in his strength with no regard for the strength of the enemy to say nothing of the Lord
 - He's depending on his anointing like it's a superhero power

- He forgets that his power had a source outside himself
- And the same Lord who gave Samson these powers could remove His blessing at any time
- The Lord didn't raise Samson to serve himself, and so his strength was a tool the Lord intended to use to accomplish a specific purpose
 - Such is the life of every believer
 - We haven't been saved for our own sake but to seek for the glory of God among the nations of the world
 - Don't let your flesh send you off track, into enemy territory
- Next week we'll see how the Lord brings Samson low because of Samson's pride

Judges 16B

- There's an old saying about a woman scorned...you probably know how it ends
 - Twice now Samson has scorned a Philistine woman named Delilah
 - Showing his lustful weakness again, Samson took a liking to her
 - Leading the Philistines to believe they finally had their opportunity learn the secret to Samson's strength
 - They asked Delilah to learn what made Samson so strong.
 - So she simply asked Samson to reveal the secret
 - But Samson gave her false answers on two separate occasions
 - Samson's tricks left Delilah unhappy, to say the least
 - But Samson's success also left him increasingly cocky thinking he could endlessly outsmart his enemies
 - We stopped las time to wonder why Samson would even be willing to play this dangerous game
 - I concluded that he has assumed his strength would never leave him
 - He presumed that the Lord had nothing to say about how he put his gift to use
 - He has no fear of the Lord
 - So he continues to play around with evil
 - In spite of Delilah's first two attempts, Samson continues to toy with her as she seeks a way to defeat him
 - Samson continues to test God's patience to a breaking point

Judg. 16:13 Then Delilah said to Samson, "Up to now you have deceived me and told me lies; tell me how you may be bound." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my hair with the web [and fasten it with a pin, then I will become weak and be like any other man."

- So for a third time she asks him how he can be defeated

- This time Samson brings her very close to the true answer by turning her focus to his hair
 - Remember, a Nazarite was never to cut any hair on his body as part of his vow of consecration to serve God
 - By this time in Samson's life, his hair must have been quite long
- Samson mentions "seven locks" of hair, which suggests his hair was braided into seven lengths probably to keep it manageable
 - Samson tells this woman that if his hair was to be woven by a loom and left locked into the loom with a pin, he would become weak
 - This is the most ridiculous proposal yet by Samson
 - It's surprising Delilah even bought it
 - But it's getting dangerously close to the true answer
- Samson is taking bigger risks as he gambles with the Lord's patience
 - We're left with the impression that Samson's has become bored with easy victories and a lack of worthy adversary
 - So he's willing to walk up to the edge with his enemy just for the thrill
- Remember, the source of Samson's power is not the length of his hair or even his Nazarite vow
 - His power is a gift of God made possible by the Spirit of God
 - Therefore the Lord appointed to serve His purpose
 - And the Lord may withdraw that power at any time
 - But Samson hasn't given much thought to that prospect
 - He's playing with fire assuming he can never be burned
- This is the inherent danger of being used in a mighty way by God
 - The most the Lord chooses to accomplish through us, the greater the danger we may one day wake up and think it's all us
 - We see the amazing things happening around us and through us

- Maybe it's a personal ministry that reaches millions people
- Leading a person to be filled with pride to think they have something special within them that's responsible for the success
- And at that point, they stop serving the Lord and start serving themselves
- And they test the Lord's patience...how long will He tolerate such prideful self-delusion and reclaim His glory?
- But just as often we see this pattern happening in the "big fish in a small pond" scenario
 - An Sunday school teacher, a deacon, an elder, a church secretary...someone who has opportunities to serve the kingdom
 - They have been equipped and placed in a position to serve Christ and His sheep
 - And one day they wake up and conclude that God's sheep exist to serve them
 - They forget their place as their pride and ego take the place of the servant's heart God requires
- This scenario can play out a million ways, so we must all take great care as we seek to use the gifts and opportunities the Lord appoints
 - To put it simply, it's not about us
 - It's about Christ
 - But if and when we miss that fact and begin to misuse the opportunities the Lord gives, then we're testing the Lord's patience
 - And in that moment, we're like Samson toying with Delilah daring her to find a way to discover our weakness
 - And if don't repent, sooner or later the Lord may let Delilah have her way so that we are brought low

[Judg. 16:14](#) So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his hair and wove them into the web]. And she fastened it with the pin and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep and pulled out the pin of the loom and the web.

- So Delilah finds a chance while Samson is sleeping to weave his hair
 - The reference to him sleeping gives us a clue to what's truly going on here
 - If Samson is sleeping in a woman's presence, then it's likely he has been enjoying her company in an intimate sense
 - If so, then perhaps Samson has been willing to play along with her schemes so that he might gain access to her bedroom
 - He continues to propose false answers to prolong this relationship and ensure continued access to her
 - Once again, his fleshly weakness is leading him down a path of self-destruction
 - So as Samson sleeps she weaves his hair
 - Samson is clearly enjoying making a fool of her
 - And he's acting as if he's immortal
- But of course, weaving his hair isn't the secret, so when the trap is sprung on Samson he escapes
 - I'm not sure which Philistines Delilah was to recruit to ambush Samson this time
 - I'm sure word was out about Samson's trickery
 - So we might think the Philistines would be wary of trying to ambush Samson a third time
 - But evidently some still were willing to try
 - Only to be disappointed again
- Of course, weaving Samson's hair hasn't the answer
 - His power came from the Spirit's anointing, not from anything physical
 - Samson enjoyed that anointing from birth
 - And it was given in connection with a Nazarite vow
 - That vow centered on three restrictions, two of which Samson has already violated

- So we can say that in this moment Samson's vow to serve God was hanging by a single thread
- But the purpose of his vow wasn't so that Samson would have miraculous power
 - Rather, Samson's observance of his vow was to be evidence of a heart dedicated to living a life for God's purposes
 - This of the gas gauge in your car
 - When that gauge points to Empty, the car is going to stop
 - But the gauge doesn't control whether or not your car runs
- Similarly, Samson's willingness to abide by his vows didn't control his power
 - His vow was an indication of whether he was willing to serve the Lord
 - His willingness to keep his vow indicated he was willing to serve the Lord with his gifting
 - But over the years, we've seen him setting aside those restrictions to serve his flesh
 - And this setting aside was like a gas gauge moving to empty
 - It was evidence of his slipping commitment to serving the Lord
- Therefore, if Samson would not serve the Lord with the power the Lord gave him, then there was no longer a reason for the Lord to equipment him so mightily
 - All that remains at this point his his vow not to cut his hair
 - He's already tossed aside two thirds of what marked him as a servant of the Living God
 - And it's no coincidence that he's found himself in the bedroom of a Philistines woman working to defeat him
 - Sin's deceitfulness has clouded Samson's judgment and deadened his conscience
 - Each step away from God has left him weaker and more enslaved to his fleshly desires

- So now he's so bored and so cocky and so enslaved by his lustful desires that he's willing to risk breaking the final vow
- The moment we decide we can enjoy the pleasures of sin while also enjoying the privileges of serving the Lord is the moment we begin to go it alone
 - We just don't know it right away
 - And this is where we find Samson's heart

Judg. 16:15 Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have deceived me these three times and have not told me where your great strength is."

Judg. 16:16 It came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death.

Judg. 16:17 So he told her all that was in his heart and said to her, "A razor has never come on my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me and I will become weak and be like any other man."

- Delilah comes back a fourth time asking for the secret
 - She is pressing him daily with her words pleading with him for the answer
 - The Hebrew says literally that Samson's life was shortened to the point of death
 - It gets to the point that her nagging begins to annoy Samson to death (no amen from the husbands, please)
 - This reminds us of the earlier moment when a crying woman convinced him to give up the answer to the riddle
 - As strong as Samson maybe on the outside, he's obviously weak spiritually and emotionally
 - Such that merely a crying or nagging woman is enough to cause him to turn away from the Lord
 - Samson willingly forfeited his dignity and power to someone who had no right to have it and no power to compel him
 - In the end, he gives up information that will lead to his own death

- Ironically, he's so worried about being nagged to death that he's willing to risk literal death
 - How foolish can a man be?
 - He tells her that if she cuts his hair, he's done, and notice in v.17 we're told This is what lies in Samson's heart
 - In other words, Samson speaks as he truly believes
 - Samson is indicating he feels it's his hair that has given him his strength
 - He feels that so long as he doesn't break the final part of his Nazarite vow, he is invincible
 - It seems Samson recognized he had already broken his other vows leaving only one remaining
 - And he's resting in this final vow
 - Notice he doesn't say the power comes from the anointing of God
 - Samson has come to think that the source of his power was something he controlled, something about himself
 - But his Nazarite vows were simply an outward display of an inward commitment to serving the Lord
 - The vows themselves weren't the source of his gifting
 - They were the signs of his gifting
 - His statement is further evidence that he has left God behind
 - His view is barely different than a pagan's view of their gods
 - Pagans lived as if they possessed a degree of control over their gods based on what they said or did to please their gods
 - If they did the right things, and their gods would respond in predictable ways to bless them
 - Like a genie in a bottle, rub it the right way and get your wish
 - Obviously, this is not how the Living God works
 - He has plans and purposes of His own, in which He graciously allows us to participate

- We don't manipulate, control or otherwise cause God to do anything that He wasn't already inclined to do
- In fact, our relationship with the Lord is exactly the opposite of the pagan view
- The Lord calls upon His children to obey His word, and we must respond to see His pleasure
 - Samson has forgotten these things
 - He's forgotten that it's not his hair that assures him of his strength and success
 - It was the Lord's Spirit working in him
 - God gave Samson that gift to ensure Samson's success in accomplishing great things for the Lord and His people
 - Therefore, his power would only persist so long as He set his mind to serving the Lord
 - As he has set aside each of his vows, Samson has moved farther away from serving the Lord
 - And because of his departure from the Lord, the Lord will withdraw His Spirit and with Him, Samson's power
- Why did Samson take this risk in the first place?
 - I can only assume Samson couldn't imagine how the Philistines would ever be in a position to hold him down long enough to cut his hair
 - Samson would simply use his strength to prevent them from getting that opportunity
 - But he was forgetting that the Lord has the power to bring about any circumstances, especially one's we can't foresee
 - Persistent sin can lead a person to conclude that there are no consequences for our choices
 - We come to believe we can handle whatever sin brings our way
 - That's what Paul means when he speaks of the deceitfulness of sin
 - Our sin nature lies even to ourselves about what it will bring

- In the end, Samson's sinful pride lied in telling him he could control the situation no matter what he told Delilah
 - So the Lord brings about circumstances to permit Samson's hair to be cut despite his strength to prevent it
 - The Lord used Samson's pride and lust to bring him down

Judg. 16:18 When Delilah saw that he had told her all that was in his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up once more, for he has told me all that is in his heart." Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands.

Judg. 16:19 She made him sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair. Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him.

Judg. 16:20 She said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he awoke from his sleep and said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him.

Judg. 16:21 Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes; and they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains, and he was a grinder in the prison.

- Delilah for her part recognizes that there was something different in Samson's story this time
 - She sensed that this time he spoke a true statement, so she persuades the Philistines men to bring money and prepare to defeat Samson
 - So a woman who previously kissed Samson will now betray him into the hands of his enemies for pieces of silver
 - In v.19 we're told she makes him to sleep on her knees, which again suggests an intimate situation
 - So it seems that Samson got what he wanted, then Delilah set about getting what she wanted
 - She calls a man into the room to cut his hair
 - Evidently Samson is a sound sleeper, because he sleeps through having his hair shaved off
 - Or perhaps Samson has been drinking again?
- As soon as his hair was gone, Delilah began to afflict Samson we're told
 - It seems the Philistines made Delilah be the first to test Samson's strength this time

- And as Delilah begins to afflict Samson, Samson awakes to discover his enemies upon him
- At first he thinks to himself that he will just defeat them as usual
- So notice Samson isn't aware at first that his strength has gone
 - It's not as though he can feel the working of the Holy Spirit inside him
 - He only discovers the situation has changed when he goes to work in the power of God
- Notice at the end of v.20 Samson's weakness was the result of the Spirit leaving him, not his hair being cut
 - Now certainly, the Lord's decision to depart is connected to the hair
 - But this only as a confirmation of what was in Samson's heart
 - When he gave Delilah the secret in his heart, Samson was choosing Delilah over his commitment to serve the Lord
 - And so that became the moment the Lord chose to make an example of Samson by withdrawing the Spirit
- Gary Inrig said:

"Forty years, Samson had kept one part of his vow. He had broken all the other parts, but he had kept his hair unshaven, as a sign of his commitment to God. He had not made a very strong commitment or felt a deep faith, but he had trusted God at least in this. There was no magic in his hair. It was only a symbol of his separation to God. But if his hair was shaved, Samson's feeble dedication would crumble completely. "

- As Samson illustrates, men don't sense the Holy Spirit in us as a general rule
 - Instead, we see the Lord's power reflected in the fruit of His work both in us and through us
 - His hand in our efforts will be evident to us and others as we put our shoulder to the work He appoints
 - That work may be difficult, of course
 - But the results will testify to the Lord's power working in us

- On the other hand, should we ever decide we can work without the Lord, as Samson has done, we won't necessarily detect a change at first
 - Achievements accomplished with merely human effort can still look impressive
 - While a man speaking with the power of God can fill a stadium with worshippers
 - So can a man speaking lying and seductive words of worldly wisdom
 - So it can be hard to tell the difference between the two, especially if we only judge by physical appearances
- This is Samson's situation at this moment
 - He's been living in his flesh, acting by his own will and failing to carry out the will of God
 - Yet he's still achieved impressive results, at least in physical terms
- But eventually, the difference will become apparent as the fruit of our effort plays out to conclusion
 - The work we accomplish in our own power won't produce lasting spiritual growth
 - It only serves to increase pride, arrogance and selfishness
 - Ultimately, it doesn't glorify the Lord
 - This is Samson
- So when the Lord withdraws His Spirit, Samson doesn't realize at first that he's now alone and without God's power
 - Only when he sought to accomplish the work God assigned him does he discover he can't do it
 - The task was now too much for him
 - The very thing Samson was equipped to accomplish, the very thing his life was devoted to accomplishing was now the very thing he couldn't do

- Samson possessed this strength his whole life, but didn't use it to glorify the Lord
 - So the Lord's Spirit departed from him
 - Because even God's patience has a limit
 - The God of our Bible loves irony, or so it would seem, and this is the ultimate irony in the story of Samson
 - Because Samson wouldn't do what he was commanded to do for God's glory, God prevented him from doing the very same thing when Samson chose to do it for his own glory
- The Lord allowed the Philistines to exact a series of severe and symbolic punishments upon Samson
 - First, the Lord matched Samson's spiritual weakness with physical weakness
 - Samson has lost his amazing strength
 - Secondly, the Lord matched Samson's spiritual blindness with physical blindness when the Philistines gouge out Samson's eyes
 - Samson's greatest weakness was going astray whenever a Philistine woman caught his eye
 - So the Lord eliminated Samson's ability to sin in that way
 - He will never again be able to find lustful pleasure in looking upon a woman
 - Finally, Samson becomes a slave in bondage to the Philistines
 - Samson was a slave spiritually to his sin
 - Now he sits in physical chains grinding grain
 - Grinding a hand mill was the hardest and lowest form of slave labor in the ancient world
 - It was mind-numbing and considered humiliating, since it was the work of a female servant
- It would be easy to feel sympathy for Samson at this point, but don't forget all that he did to bring himself to this point
 - For years he has put aside the calling of God to pursue his own desires

- He had a unique role to judge Israel
- And he possessed unique abilities to defeat Israel's enemies
- And yet he did virtually nothing to bring about that result
- Instead, he toyed with the enemy and dared the Lord to do something about
- We can't test the Lord forever in this way and not expect severe consequences
 - These consequences were intended to teach Samson the error of his behavior
 - And at the same time to make Samson an example to the rest of us
 - That to whom much is given, much is expected
- Notice the differences in Samson's life compared to past judges
 - Past judges may have failed in one way or another
 - But in the end, they defeated their enemies and lived securely in the land of Israel, to varying degrees
 - But now the pattern has completely broken apart
 - Samson never raises an army
 - He hasn't defeated the Philistines
 - And in the end, he can't even preserve himself, or so it seems at this point
 - He's the defeated, not the victor
 - Samson is emblematic of the entire nation of Israel
 - From the birth of this nation at Mt Sinai, the Jewish people have lived under a special calling from God
 - They were given great power to defeat superior nations and promises of great blessing
 - Had they lived in light of that calling, they could never be defeated

- But when they began to seek for relationships with the world rather than with the Lord, they grew weaker
- To the point that now they are under their enemy's power
- Nevertheless, the Lord has not departed from Israel, and at the first sign of repentance, He has been faithful to restore them each time
 - And so it goes in the story of Samson as well

Judg. 16:22 However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off.

- While he's sitting in prison, his hair begins to grow back
- Samson's hair has become a useful symbol in this story
- When Samson's hair was cut, it became a symbol for his spiritual unfaithfulness to the Lord
- Likewise, Samson's hair now becomes a symbol of Samson's heart turning back to the Lord
 - It's been said that there is no such thing as an atheist in a foxhole
 - Meaning when a person comes to the end of himself, that's the point he will finally turn his heart to God in desperation
 - That's where Samson is now, sitting in a prison, blind and chained
 - He sees his situation for what it truly is and his heart turns back to God
 - So the author, Samuel, indicates this change by noting that Samson's hair begins to grow back
 - Once again, Samuel isn't suggesting that the power of Samson is in the hair itself
 - Samuel is reflecting that as Samson humbled himself before God, the Lord honored His servant by restoring him at least to a degree
- Next week, we'll see the conclusion of the story and take a little time to reflect on Samson's time as judge

Judges 16C

- The story of Samson is proof that in real life good guys and bad guys simply don't exist
 - Sure, there are heroes and villains to be found in the world
 - But the heroes are never without sin
 - And the even the villains may be put to some good purpose in God's plan
 - The truth is that God is the only One Who is good
 - And sinful men live to serve Him
 - Samson is just such a man
 - Empowered by the Spirit, gifted with great strength, called to free Israel
 - Yet he served himself, squandered his great strength to chase after prostitutes and the daughters of Israel's enemy
 - Nevertheless, he was also a man of faith
 - A man who pictured Christ in many details of his story
- Today we finish his story, which will give us an opportunity to see how the Lord makes something out of Samson's life in the end
 - But not without first making Samson an example in more ways than one
 - Obviously, Samson is an example of all those who fail to live up to their potential in serving the Living God
 - But ironically, Samson's life also a picture of Christ, which we'll see more clearly today
 - How encouraging that the Lord can take even the evil we do and use it to glorify himself
 - The end of Samson's story gives us a unique opportunity to see this principle at work
 - When we last saw him, he was suffering in a prison, blind and miserable

- Now we see how the Lord can turn a repentant heart into an opportunity to glorify Himself

Judg. 16:22 However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off.

Judg. 16:23 Now the lords of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice, for they said,

“Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hands.”

Judg. 16:24 When the people saw him, they praised their god, for they said,

“Our god has given our enemy into our hands,

Even the destroyer of our country,

Who has slain many of us.”

- As we studied last week, Samuel observation about Samson’s hair growing back sends us a powerful signal about Samson’s heart
 - Samson’s had time to think and reflect in prison
 - He’s suffering at the hands of the Philistines
 - But he knows his predicament is the result of his own foolishness
 - Furthermore, he comes to realize that the Lord allowed these circumstances to come to pass to teach him an important lesson
 - And now that he’s learning that lesson, his eyes are opening
 - A spark of light in a darkened heart
 - Meanwhile, as Samson languishes in chains, Israel’s enemies can’t stop bragging over their victory
 - They assemble to give sacrifices and thanks to their chief god, Dagon
 - They credit Dagon with giving Samson into their hands
 - So they sing praises to their god for this victory
 - Ironically, it was supposed to be Israel who gathered before their God and praised Yahweh for Samson in defeating the Philistines
 - By serving himself, Samson made Israel’s enemy stronger
 - Had he served the Lord, the enemy couldn’t have prevailed

- Now instead of Yahweh being praised by Israel, a false god is receiving the praise of the ungodly
- At a point in the celebration, the Philistines decide to parade blind, chained Samson before them
 - Remember previously Samson had moved with impunity within the land of the Philistines
 - If an ordinary Jewish man had ventured about Phlistines territory in this way, he wouldn't have lasted very long
 - He would have been killed or made a slave in short order
 - But because Samson had the Spirit's anointing, he never feared the Philistines
 - No one dared attack him because his great strength ensured he could defeat any army single-handedly
 - So for years, Samson has mocked the Philistines by moving freely within their territory
 - Not only did he not commit himself to the mission the Lord gave him, he refused to take his enemy seriously
 - And nothing could have been more foolish
 - Samson was only as invincible as the Lord allowed him to be
 - And since he didn't seek to please the Lord, Samson took great chances when he mocked the enemy he was supposed to be defeating
- Christians walk in Samson's footsteps when we take God's grace for granted by mocking the enemy's power

1Pet. 5:6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,

1Pet. 5:7 casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

1Pet. 5:8 Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

1Pet. 5:9 But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

1Pet. 5:10 After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

- Peter says the key to living triumphantly in Christ begins with humility
 - Just because you've received the Spirit and become a child of God doesn't mean you can exalt yourself before God's timing
 - This was Samson's mistake; he used his physical strength to make himself someone important and invincible
- Instead, he should have remained humble, cast his anxieties and needs upon the Lord knowing the Lord cared for Samson
 - Nevertheless, we are called to be sober in spirit, which means not to be carried away with fleshly desires or inflated pride
 - Be on alert for the enemy's schemes to trip us up
 - Because that enemy is always working to find our weakness
 - You give him something to work with and he will make the most of it
 - And should happen, we can be sure the Lord has permitted it for our own good
- This is the story of Samson's life
 - He's failed to live in a humble way and instead has treated the enemy as someone to be toyed with
 - As a result, the Lord gave the enemy an opportunity to bring Samson low
 - In a sense, if Samson would not humble himself, the Lord would humble him using his enemies
- So after suffering Samson's mocking for so long, the Philistines relish the opportunity to return the favor

Judg. 16:25 It so happened when they were in high spirits, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may amuse us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he entertained them. And they made him stand between the pillars.

Judg. 16:26 Then Samson said to the boy who was holding his hand, "Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them."

Judg. 16:27 Now the house was full of men and women, and all the lords of the Philistines were there. And about 3,000 men and women were on the roof looking on while Samson was amusing them.

- This is a big event for Israel's enemy
 - They haven't just captured the chief adversary, they've conquered a man who represented Israel's God
 - But now they see their god as having shown himself to be more powerful than Israel's God
 - This is a big event, and so we can imagine the room was filled with every dignitary, leader, ruler and prince of the Philistines
 - Anyone who was someone must have attended
 - This temple was the chief temple in the land because it was dedicated to the Philistines' highest god, Dagon
 - This god was the god of grain, the key to life, and he was worshipped throughout the region including in Syria and Babylon
 - There was even a temple dedicated to Dagon in Beth Shan in Israel in Saul's day
 - The temples of the Philistines were constructed in a Greek style, with many columns holding up a covering with an open area in the middle
 - The dignitaries would have been seated under the covering around the open center
 - While the cheap seats would have been on the roof edge looking down into the open area
 - Everyone who could find a way in would have been there to see the mighty Samson on display
- It says Samson enters the room on a leash led by a small boy
 - This scene is proof once again of God's ironic sense of humor
 - Samson was once the one who loved to be the center of parties and gatherings
 - He loved riddles and tricks
 - And now he's on display like a court jester
 - Led around the courtyard like a goat, furthering his humiliation
 - But in the end, Samson will bring the house down

- And the show starts when Samson asks the boy to lead him to the place where the pillars stood
- To stands between the pillars means to be at the front edge of the covering where the dignitaries could get a closer look
- But obviously Samson had other reasons to stand there
 - Did you notice the number of people Samuel said were in the temple?"
 - Samuel reports that 3,000 people were crammed into this space
 - Besides being a very large number, it's also a very specific number
 - The number 3 in scripture is God's calling card
 - This is the number of the triune Godhead, like His signature
 - So when we hear that exactly 3,000 people are assembled in this place, we recognize that this moment has been orchestrated by God
 - The Lord brought Samson to this place under these circumstances so Samson could complete the task he was given
 - And now that Samson's heart has returned to the Lord, then we know Samson will also recognize the Lord's work
 - And when he does, Samson realizes the Lord has given him another opportunity to fulfill his mission
- In fact, the situation is even better than anything Samson might have imagined
 - Before him is assembled every important person in the land of the Philistines
 - Had Samson gone to battle against the Philistines as the Lord expected, still Samson never could have imagined a better moment than this
 - He now has the chance to eliminate every leader among his enemies in a single moment
 - They've been assembled before him as if on a silver platter
 - And Samson recognizes his chance to fulfill his mission despite his lowly circumstances
 - There is only one problem

- Samson has no power
- He has chained, blind and without his strength
- So that leaves only one option

Judg. 16:28 Then Samson called to the Lord and said, “O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.”

Judg. 16:29 Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and braced himself against them, the one with his right hand and the other with his left.

Judg. 16:30 And Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines!” And he bent with all his might so that the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed in his life.

- After the young boy positioned Samson between two of the pillars holding up the roof, Samson cries out to the Lord
 - For the first time in Samson’s story, he appeals to the Lord for a blessing to accomplish the mission he’s been given
 - He asks the Lord to grant him strength one last time
 - And this time, he will use that strength to accomplish exactly the mission for which he received that strength in the first place
 - His actions will be an avenging of the loss of his eyes
 - But of course he will also be advancing God’s plan to free Israel from this oppressor
 - With this prayer, Samson reached out with one hand on either pillar and pressed with all his strength so that the pillars tumbled
 - As he pushed, he makes one more request of the Lord
 - He asks that he would die with the Philistines
 - He’s not merely asking for success in defeating the enemy
 - He’s also asking the Lord that he might not have to live out his life blind
 - And as we see, the Lord grants Samson both requests
 - Samson receives strength again for just the moment

- And with it, he succeeds in bringing the roof down killing all the Philistines gathered to mock Samson
 - And the Lord grants Samson to die in that moment as well
- Samson's repentance heart led him to accomplish far more in his death than he ever accomplished in his life, as Samuel notes
 - For years Samson lived and ruled as a judge of Israel with supernatural strength, and yet he never killed even 3,000 Philistines
 - Only now in this final moment of his life has Samson reached that number
 - Given his capabilities, we should expect he could have done far more had he set his mind to that task
 - Still, the Lord made the most of Samson's efforts ensuring that the 3,000 he killed were the most important in the land
 - As a result of Samson's actions, the Philistines were greatly weakened
 - And he is recorded in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11
 - Some wonder how a man with Samson's track record could be included in that list of men of faith
 - The answer is to remember the writer's purpose in that chapter
 - The writer of Hebrews is speaking of men and women who exemplified a faith in the word of God
 - And a willingness to seek reward in the Kingdom to come
- And in the last moments of Samson's life, he exemplifies this type of faith
 - Samson pressed on the pillars and expected them to fall
 - Why? He knew the Spirit had departed him and he had no strength
 - He had faith in God's prophetic word concerning his life
 - God told his mother that Samson would begin to free his people from the oppression of the Philistines
 - But to this point in his life that hadn't come to pass

- Samson had faith in the word of God, knowing that what God declares must come to pass
- And therefore, Samson had confidence the Lord would grant his request in this moment
- And the proof of Samson's faith is seen in his attempt to push the pillars down
- The only reason he pushed was because he had faith the Lord would grant his request
- And the only reason Samson had for expecting his request to be granted was the previously spoken word of God
 - Samson died a man of faith, broken, brought low but redeemed by faith
 - He asked to die with the Philistines knowing that a Heavenly reward awaited
 - He preferred to die for that reward than to live in the circumstances his sin had produced
 - It's ironic, but Samson is probably the judge we can most clearly identify with as believers following the Lord
 - No, we don't possess his special power, but we probably share his confused record of service to the Lord
 - Good days and bad days
 - And a lot more bad days than we care to remember
 - But as we get closer to the end of our lives, we grow more assured in the promises of God
 - And as we consider the Kingdom and our rewards, we concern ourselves more and more with fulfilling our mission
 - In the words of Paul

Phil. 3:13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
Phil. 3:14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

- Speaking of Jesus Christ, the end of Samson's life brings us another picture of our Messiah

- We noted last week that Samson's capture by the Philistines was made possible by 30 pieces of silver paid to Delilah
 - Of course, this compares to the silver paid to Judas to betray Jesus into the hands of the Romans
 - But the scene with Delilah brings additional parallels to Jesus
 - Like Samson, Jesus was tempted three times to give up his power
 - But each time, Jesus resisted that opportunity just as Samson resisted Delilah three times
- But in the fourth attempt by Delilah, Samson gave himself up by confessing the truth concerning the source of his power
 - Likewise, Satan's fourth attempt to defeat Jesus through Judas was successful, but only because Jesus gave himself up
 - As scripture says

John 10:18 “No one has taken it away from Me, but I **lay it down** on My own initiative. I have authority to **lay it down**, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”

- Then as Samson is led away by his enemies, he's blind and humiliated
 - Likewise, Luke says as Jesus was led away, He was blindfolded and mocked by the Roman soldiers
 - Mark reports he was bound, just as Samson was in chains
- Finally, Samson was bought out to entertain his oppressors
 - Just as Jesus was led out before the Herod and mocked
 - Later Jesus suffered shame on the cross, Paul says
- Finally, just as Samson entered prison only to leave and bring down a temple so too did Jesus make a similar journey
 - Peter says Jesus entered into a place of prison for departed spirits

[1Pet. 3:18](#) For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;
[1Pet. 3:19](#) in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison,

- And when He departed, Jesus set free those who are His

[Eph. 4:8](#) Therefore it says,

“When He ascended on high,
 He led captive a host of captives,
 And He gave gifts to men.”

[Eph. 4:9](#) (Now this expression, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?

- And in that moment, Christ brought down the stone temple and the Law with it

[Heb. 8:13](#) When He said, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

- Next, just as the destruction of the pagan temple required Samson’s death as well
 - So the destruction of the old covenant and law and tabernacle required that Jesus die

[John 2:19](#) Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

[John 2:20](#) The Jews then said, “It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?”

[John 2:21](#) But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

- Just as Samson was crushed in the temple, scripture says that Jesus was crushed for our iniquity
- Finally, Jesus body was cared for in death by friends who carried Jesus away and buried Him in a tomb
 - Similarly, we read:

[Judg. 16:31](#) Then his brothers and all his father’s household came down, took him, brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. Thus he had judged Israel twenty years.

- Obviously, seeing all these parallels as well as the ones we've seen earlier in our study remind us of the inspired nature of God's word
 - But more to the point today, it reminds us that God can still use you
 - Perhaps you're thinking that your the lessons of Samson have come too late for you
 - You wonder if you've squandered your opportunities to serve and please God?
 - He called you and equipped you, but you wonder if you've set that opportunity aside
 - And now after so long, God can't or won't use you
 - So as you study Samson and his failures you question whether there is any reason for hope in serving God again
 - But friends if that's where your heart is today, then please pay close attention to the end of Samson's story
 - He repented
 - He came to realize the Lord was still calling him
 - And he took a step of faith
 - He prayer for God to use him even yet, and then he put his shoulder to the work
 - And with that small step of faith at the end of a selfish life, Samson accomplished great things
 - And take note of the mercy and grace of our Father
 - Not only did the Lord allow Samson to do a great thing even after so many years of disobedience
 - But the Lord recorded Samson's like here and again in the Hall of Faith
 - And even more than that, the Lord made Samson's life reflect so many details of the Savior
 - Can the Lord not do that for you and me?
 - Don't let the enemy convince you that you're washed up

- Or that the Lord has given up on you
- The Lord is still with you and still calling you
- If you return to Him, great things can still yet happen
- And if you have never strayed, then be renewed in your confidence that as you serve Him, He can accomplish great things through you

Judges 17

- With the death of Samson last week, we have finished our study of the judges of Israel
 - And yet, as you can plainly see, we still have five chapters left
 - So what's left to study?
 - Simply put...a lot
 - But to follow what comes next in this study, we need to reset our timeline and get a sense of the writer's purpose
 - At the outset of our study, we learned that the events of Judges covers about 300 years of history
 - As we've moved through the first 16 chapters, we've moved chronologically through that period of time
 - Naturally, we might assume that the next five chapters continue that pattern moving forward in time
 - But that's not correct
 - Chapters 17-21 go back in time to explain other events that transpired during the time of Judges
 - That's why these chapters do not feature a judge anyway
 - The story of the judges has already been told earlier
 - But now we need to understand something else, something more important than the judges themselves
 - We need to understand Jewish society
 - So we're going to go behind the scenes to document the internal strife and deterioration of Israel's religious, civil and domestic life
 - But there's more...
 - The five chapters that end Judges are actually parts 1 and 2 of a three part story in the Old Testament

- The first part in chapters 17-18 explains the introduction of idolatry into the nation of Israel at the hands of the tribes of Ephraim and Dan
- The second part in chapters 19-21 describes the beginning of civil way among tribes of Israel by the hands of the Benjamites
- We've already seen idolatry and civil war featured in some of the stories of the judges
- But now we get the background story of how these destructive forces found their way into Jewish society
 - But where is part 3? Part 3 is the book of Ruth
 - Ruth follows Judges immediately in scripture and it was written by the same author, Samuel
 - Ruth is set in the same time period
 - And so it's a third sketch of Jewish life during the period of Judges
 - In the story of Ruth we're given the one and only solution to the problems of Israel's deteriorating culture
 - A child will be born in Bethlehem
 - And that child will lead to a king
 - And that king will one day save Israel from idolatry, civil war, disobedience, death
 - Rather than a people who do what is right in their own eyes, Israel will become a people redeemed and made righteous
 - Therefore, after we finish our study of Judges, we'll move into a study of Ruth to finish this three-part story
- So let's move to part 1, the story of how Dan introduced worship of graven images into Israel

Judg. 17:1 Now there was a man of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah.
Judg. 17:2 He said to his mother, "The eleven hundred pieces of silver which were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse in my hearing, behold, the silver is with me; I took it." And his mother said, "Blessed be my son by the Lord."

Judg. 17:3 He then returned the eleven hundred pieces of silver to his mother, and his mother said, "I wholly dedicate the silver from my hand to the Lord for my son to make a graven image and a molten image; now therefore, I will return them to you."

Judg. 17:4 So when he returned the silver to his mother, his mother took two hundred pieces of silver and gave them to the silversmith who made them into a graven image and a molten image, and they were in the house of Micah.

Judg. 17:5 And the man Micah had a shrine and he made an ephod and household idols and consecrated one of his sons, that he might become his priest.

Judg. 17:6 In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.

- This story is set in the latter half of the times of Judges, while the Philistines were oppressing the nation of Israel
 - Once again, the exact timing isn't important
 - Think about this account and the one that will follow in chapters 19-21 as stand alone accounts like the story of Ruth
 - Each makes its own point
 - But all three are connected in a larger way as well
 - First, let's examine how the account begins
 - This story and the ones that follow are set in the heartland of Israel
 - The hill country of Ephraim is in the geographical center of the nation
 - Meaning these are not fringe cases, but instead they represent what was happening in the heart of the nation
 - A son named Micah confesses to his mother that he had stolen eleven hundred pieces of silver from her
 - When the silver had turned up missing, the mother had uttered a curse upon whoever took it
 - Now the boy is revealing to his mother that he was the guilty party
 - It seems the son's confession was motivated by his desire to avoid the effects of his mother's curse

- A curse is literally the opposite of a blessing
 - It is the withholding of God's favor instead of the giving of favor
 - Only God can put power behind the words of curse or blessing
 - Just because someone speaks words of cursing or blessing doesn't mean the Lord will agree and carry them out
 - But when someone speaks under the influence of the Holy Spirit, then the words have power
 - In this case, the mother's curse will prove to be prophetic, as not only will this son be brought low by his sin but so will all Israel
- The son's name means "one who is like Yahweh," which is clearly ironic, and it's one of many details in this story that are ironic
 - The corruption and duplicity of the nation will be evident throughout this story and in every character
 - Micah is a thief willing to steal from his own mother
 - And now he confesses his sin, but merely to avoid a curse he fears
- Remarkably, when he confesses, his mother is willing to act as if nothing has happened
 - In fact, she blesses her son in the name of Yahweh
 - Earlier, she cursed him by the power of Yahweh because she lost her silver
 - Now she is willing to bless him because he returns the silver
 - We can see that their worship and obedience to Yahweh is superficial at best
 - In fact, we can detect a superstitious quality to their worship, such that the Lord is no longer viewed according to His word
 - Instead, Israel has come to relate to Him like any other idol or pagan good
 - The son's evil heart is easy to see, but we can also see the mother's corrupt heart

- When she receives back 1,100 pieces of silver, she makes a pious announcement that she will dedicate the silver to Yahweh
- Specifically, she wants two images made: a carved image and a cast image
- We aren't sure what these sacred images were, but perhaps the graven image was a carved animal or other image
- While the molten or cast image was the base upon which the carved image sat
- Either way, she is violating the Second Commandment and other ordinances in the Law against making or worshipping before such images
- And her sin goes even farther, in that she promised to devote all her silver to God but in the end only gave up 200 pieces for the images
 - This is stealing from God
 - Once we make a vow or pledge to serve God in some respect then later withhold what we promised, we steal from the Lord
 - The story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 reminds us of how the Lord views this kind of duplicity
 - Apparently, her son learned the art of stealing from his mother
- What kind of heart believes the Lord will be pleased by worship that acts in disobedience to His commands?
 - Obviously, she does not possess a heart to please God
 - In fact, it's questionable if she even knows Yahweh truly
 - Instead, she is acting with a heart of superstition
 - We can do the same if we call sin something else in the hope that the Lord will accept it
 - We simply can't approach God on our own terms
 - What God says matters, and we must conduct ourselves in according to His word
 - We can't do what pleases us, then declare it is "for the Lord," and assume that fixes everything

- God will not be mocked by that kind of foolishness
- Then we're told these idols were set up in a shrine in Micah's house, where he began to take his idol worship a step farther
 - Micah's evil and deceived heart begins to fancy himself a man of importance
 - What began as personal idol worship has moved to drawing others into his folly
 - He began to copy the implements God gave Aaron and the priests who officiate at the tabernacle
 - He made an ephod, the ornate robe that the high priest wore
 - And he made more idols and consecrated one of his sons as his "priest"
 - Micah is directly violating Deut 12 where the Lord forbid Israel from multiplying sanctuaries in Canaan
 - You can see the effects of the deceitfulness of sin in his heart
 - Micah's greed led him to steal from his own mother
 - His theft resulted in a curse, which he tried to undo by confessing to his mother
 - When his mother failed to hold him accountable for his sin, he was emboldened believing himself immune from the consequences of his sin
 - His pride led him to act with impunity creating his own gods and engaging in idol worship in his own personal religious system
 - The deeper he goes, the more he moves away from the Living God
 - Notice Micah's not less religious...in fact, if anything he's *more* religious
 - But his religion is merely an expression of his pride and ego
 - He's not worshipping Yahweh; he's worshipping himself
 - And in that sense, Micah is a poster child for Israel in the time of Judges

- In fact, Samuel inserts his customary signature line in v.6 to emphasize the universality of Micah's sin
 - This is a time when *everyone* did what was right in their own eyes
 - In Micah's eyes, it was right to have idols and dress his son up as a priest even though he wasn't a Levite
 - And to conduct religious services under his own terms
 - To declare he was worshipping the Living God even as he did everything possible to offend that God
 - This is where idolatry began in the nation of Israel
 - This isn't the first time Israel bowed it's knee to images
 - We saw that as early as Exodus when Israel worshipped the calf
 - But this is the moment that the society began to view such things as compatible with being in covenant with Yahweh
 - And that thinking will grow in the coming centuries until it infects all corners of the nation
 - Only after the Babylonian captivity was idolatry extinguished
- And now we learn how this one man's sin became the basis for a nation's sin

Judg. 17:7 Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite; and he was staying there.

Judg. 17:8 Then the man departed from the city, from Bethlehem in Judah, to stay wherever he might find a place; and as he made his journey, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah.

Judg. 17:9 Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?" And he said to him, "I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to stay wherever I may find a place."

Judg. 17:10 Micah then said to him, "Dwell with me and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year, a suit of clothes, and your maintenance." So the Levite went in.

Judg. 17:11 The Levite agreed to live with the man, and the young man became to him like one of his sons.

Judg. 17:12 So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest and lived in the house of Micah.

Judg. 17:13 Then Micah said, "Now I know that the Lord will prosper me, seeing I have a Levite as priest."

- In v.17 we're introduced to a Levite who lived in Bethlehem in Judah
 - We recognize the importance of the city of Bethlehem, but it's also the key element in this story
 - This city will be the birth place of God's chosen king for Israel, David
 - And it's the birth place of the man David pictures, Jesus the Messiah
 - Bethlehem is also a key detail in our three part story in Judges and Ruth
 - We see the city mentioned here in the account of Ephraim's and Dan's idolatry in Judges 17-18
 - And it will come up again in the story of the Benjamite civil war in Judges 18-21
 - And finally, Bethlehem is the town at the center of the story of Ruth
 - The city serves as a link tying together the three parts of our story
 - The story emphasizes that Israel's sin couldn't be corrected by human judges
 - Time and time again, those men failed to curb the sin of the nation
 - And later when Israel will seek for a king, they still do what's right in their own eyes by selecting a king that looks the part
 - Which only proves that the solution to their sin can only come from God through a Man God will send to do what's right in God's sight
 - And that man will be Israel's Messiah from the city of David, Bethlehem
- For reasons that aren't important, this man, a Levite, encounters Micah during his travels away from his home
 - It's important to note that this man wandered away from his home in Bethlehem and stumbled upon Micah along the way
 - These details alluded to his spiritual journey

- He's left the home of God's anointed
- And he's fallen into the hands of a man of idolatry and false worship
- As such this man becomes a picture of all Israel, walking away from the Lord and to become ensnared by the sin of idolatry
- He's called a Levite, but he's not called a priest
 - In other words, this man was descended from Aaron and Levi
 - But he was never formally a priest of Israel
 - Remember, all priests must be Levites
 - But not all Levites served as priests
 - So this man was not serving as a priest nor was he authorized to do so, though he came from the correct tribe
- When Micah learns that this man is a Levite and is in need of a new home, Micah sees his opportunity to "upgrade" his family priest
 - Up to this point, Micah has been using his son as the family priest
 - But even a man like Micah with his warped sense of how to worship knew that the correct tribe for priests was Levi
 - Earlier, he selected his son to serve as priest because he had no better option
 - Since he needed a priest in his mind, he made a compromise and selected an Ephraimite
 - But now that a bonafide Levite had fallen into his lap, he opted to improve his religious system
 - If this whole thing sound ridiculous, don't laugh too quickly
 - People have done this forever
 - Cain's chief sin was pretending to worship God but doing so on his own terms using practices designed to mimic God's commands
 - God commanded a certain kind of offering, but Cain decided he would rather do one his way

- If Cain (and Micah) weren't willing to worship God in the way God prescribed, we might ask why didn't they just abandon any pretense and cease worship altogether?
 - The answer is because men have a subconscious awareness that they are in debt to God and need reconciliation
 - And that vulnerability causes us to seek God
 - But unless our hearts are truly repentant, we seek Him according to our own desires
 - Paul speaks about men in the last days have a form of godliness but denying its power
- Such was Micah's heart
 - He's so excited to receive the Levite because this man brings Micah's system closer to the one God prescribed
 - But only in external ways
 - It's like the Mormon religion, which is carefully calibrated to counterfeit Jewish worship
 - Mormon have buildings they call temples
 - They call certain men priests
 - They conduct ceremonies that borrow heavily from Jewish practices
- But all these externals are merely window dressing
 - They're intended to convey a sense of legitimacy and piety to something that is otherwise bankrupt and meaningless
 - You will see this pattern in every manmade religion
 - Men substitute external for internal, image for substance, ego for repentance, self for God
- In v.10, Micah makes the Levite a job offer that he can't refuse
 - Micah will employ this Levite as a personal, family priest for a tidy sum
 - For this penniless, homeless Levite, this is an offer of a lifetime

- Like an unemployed fast food cook being offered the chance to work as the private chef of a wealthy patron
- For Micah, the Levite is a means to superstitious blessing
 - In v.13 he says that surely the Lord will bless him now that he has employed a Levite as priest
 - You get a sense of the sliding scale that dominates this man's thinking
 - If he acts in ways that are somewhat close to God's instructions, then he will please God somewhat
 - But if he operates even more closely to God's rules, then he will gain that much more blessing
- This is moral relativism at its worse, and it's complete fiction
 - This man is disobeying the Lord's commands in many ways and in great degrees
 - He's worshipping idols
 - He's operating a pagan worship shrine in his home and declaring it to be a proper house of worship in disobedience to the Law
 - And he's consecrating unqualified men to serve as so-called priests in this false system of worship
 - Micah's system possesses only a faint resemblance to God's system of worship, but somehow Micah has determined that he's playing horseshoes
 - Close is good enough
- In reality, obedience is a point, not a scale
 - When someone comes to know the Lord truly and seeks to please Him, then that person will seek to move in God's direction
 - Toward Bethlehem, as it were
 - And as we move toward God in faith and obedience, we steadily leave behind our own ways and replace them with His ways in our life

- We stop declaring our sin to be good and begin to hate it as much as the Lord does
- And in its place, we adopt God's heart and God's mind from our study of scripture
- And over time, we become more like Him so that we might please Him

Judges 18A

- We're continuing through the epilogue of the book of Judges
 - The final five chapters tell two stories about circumstances that took place in Israel during points in the 300 years of the Judges
 - These stories are important
 - They explain the heart and mind of Israel during this time
 - How Israel was turning to idolatry
 - And how the tribes were breaking apart under the weight of their sin
 - And then as I explained last week, part three of the epilogue is found outside the book of Judges in the story of Ruth that follows immediately
 - Ruth is the good news ending to the story of Judges
 - Without Ruth, the history of Judges would leave us with little hope for the nation of Israel
 - Everything we've read points to Israel self-destructing
 - And the two stories that end the book only serve to reinforce that conclusion
 - But the story of Ruth gives us hope that the Lord has a plan to redeem the people from their sin and self-destruction
 - So after we study the two stories that end Judges, we'll go directly into the story of Ruth
 - For now, we're just getting started
- Last week we were introduced to an Ephraimite named Micah
 - He was a godless man who stole a fortune from his own mother
 - Worse than that, Micah determined to set up his own religious system
 - It was patterned after worship of Yahweh, but it was counterfeit
 - He contrived the system to suit his pride and ego

- So we concluded that Micah was really seeking to worship himself not the Living God
 - And as we ended chapter 17, he had secured the services of a Levite to serve as his personal priest
 - He was operating an illegitimate house of worship in place of worshipping God according to the Lord's direction
 - And now Micah's idolatry will mix with the sin of the tribe of Dan to infect the northern tribes of Israel with apostasy

Judg. 18:1 In those days there was no king of Israel; and in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for themselves to live in, for until that day an inheritance had not been allotted to them as a possession among the tribes of Israel.

Judg. 18:2 So the sons of Dan sent from their family five men out of their whole number, valiant men from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and to search it; and they said to them, "Go, search the land." And they came to the hill country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there.

Judg. 18:3 When they were near the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young man, the Levite; and they turned aside there and said to him, "Who brought you here? And what are you doing in this place? And what do you have here?"

Judg. 18:4 He said to them, "Thus and so has Micah done to me, and he has hired me and I have become his priest."

Judg. 18:5 They said to him, "Inquire of God, please, that we may know whether our way on which we are going will be prosperous."

Judg. 18:6 The priest said to them, "Go in peace; your way in which you are going has the Lord's approval."

- Right from the start you can see trouble coming when Samuel begins with the statement that there was no king in those days
 - This is Samuel's way of reminding us that there was no central force among the people guarding their hearts and demanding obedience
 - The judges were ruling during these days
 - But the judges were only local leaders, spiritually weak and often mired in sin themselves
 - And so when a people who do what's right in their own eyes live without a strong governor, sin will rule the heart
 - And such was the case within the tribe of Dan

- In v.1 we hear the tribe of Dan are seeking a place to live in the land
 - We said last week that this story is likely set in the latter part of the time of Judges, during the time of Samson
 - This was the time when the Philistines were pressuring the western side of Israel and Samson was supposed to be freeing Israel from that oppression
 - Because Samson didn't attend to his task, the Philistines succeeded in forcing the western tribes to retreat east into the hill country of Ephraim
- One of these tribes living in Philistine territory was the tribe of Dan
 - When the Israelites first entered the land of Canaan under Joshua, the tribe of Dan was assigned the western portion of the land
 - Their land was bordered by the Mediterranean sea on the west and the tribes of Benjamin and Ephraim at the edge of the hill country in the east
 - So Dan's territory lay directly in the disputed area where Jews and Philistines often battled for control
- Since Samson didn't defeat the Philistines as commanded, the tribe of Dan suffered the most
 - Their inheritance in the land had not been cleared of the Philistines
 - So in that sense, the inheritance for the tribe of Dan has not yet been allotted
 - The word for allotted in Hebrew can also be translated knocked down or laid waste
 - The inheritance the Danites were given previously under Joshua had not been conquered yet
- So as a result, the Danites set out to look for greener pastures
 - They have determined that the only way they will find peace in the land is by taking matters into their own hands
 - They will abandon the land the Lord assigned to them

- And they will take other land for themselves
- Obviously, this plan will require taking land that belongs to some other tribe
- It's a faithless act committed in fear and pride
- The Danites are prepared to reject the Lord's provision and its place they will seek an illegitimate claim in the land
 - Just as Micah rejected true worship for something false, so now are the Danites rejecting the Lord
 - It's another form of apostasy
 - Assuming that they can provide for themselves something better than what the Lord provided
- The plan begins with the tribe sending out a scouting party of five valiant men to find a better place for the tribe
 - They move up from Zorah and Eshtaol in the western costal plain into the country of Ephraim
 - You may recognize the names of those towns
 - This is the same area where Samson grew up
 - Samuel seems to be reminding us that these circumstances were the product of Samson's own disobedience
 - And as circumstances have it, these spies find their way to the house of Micah in Ephraim
 - As they spend time in Micah's home, they hear the distinctive voice of the Levite staying with Micah
 - Apparently, Levites had a unique accent
 - Here again, this confirms what we learned earlier in this study
 - The unity of the tribes of Israel was evaporating to the point that language was beginning to differ
 - This is another sign that the nation was fracturing
 - When they hear that the voice of the priest, they ask why he's hanging out in Micah's home

- Specifically, they want to know what priestly business he has found in Micah's home
- After all, he's a long way from Shiloh, the location of the tabernacle
 - The Levite summarizes the story of how he came to Micah's home
 - He explains the good deal he found
 - And that Micah had hired him to be a personal priest
- Have you ever heard someone explain something to you, some new idea or invention, and you think to yourself, "Why didn't I think of that?"
 - The idea is so radical, so revolutionary that it's both surprising and obvious at the same time
 - That's what ran through the minds of these five Danites when they heard this Levite say he was hired as a personal priest
 - These Danites probably thought to themselves, "A personal priest? Why didn't I think of that."
 - In this case, it's a terrible idea, a sinful rebellious idolatrous idea
 - But the idea took hold in these men's hearts
 - And from this point forward, men in Israel began to accept that a person could establish their own path to God
 - They could have idols and priests and temples of their own
 - It's an example of sin spreading
 - When we take missteps in following God, we may not be the only one to suffer
 - We may be the seed that causes sin to sprout up somewhere else
 - And even if we choose to repent and retreat from our own sin, who knows where our sin may travel without us?
 - Micah's sin is about to travel a long way without him
- Notice what happens next...in v.5 they inquire of this man concerning the will of God

- Remember, this man is not a priest
 - He's just a Levite
 - The only reason he's called a priest at this point is because Micah has consecrated him as a personal priest
 - But that's like someone calling you their personal Superman
 - Someone might give you that title, but I recommend you dare not try to stop a bullet or leap off a tall building
- Nonetheless, notice how quickly these Danites embrace the Levite as if he truly represented God
 - They ask him to inquire of God concerning the future of their journey
 - Remember that the true ephod worn by the High Priest of Israel included the Urim and the Thummim stones
 - These stones allowed the High Priest to discern the will of God concerning some matter
 - The priest would inquire of the Lord in the form of a yes-no question and then throw the stones as lots
 - The Lord would cause the stones to reflect His answer the question
- Apparently, the make-believe ephod Micah's "priest" wore included pretend Urim and the Thummim stones too
 - Therefore, these men are asking the priest to seek God's will in the usual way
 - And this priest is only too happy to comply
 - He does whatever he does in his counterfeit way and then gives the Danites the answer he knows they want to hear
 - The Lord has blessed their journey, he reports
- Obviously, this scene is entirely a charade, for such is all manmade religion
 - It's like the tale of the Emperor's Clothes by Hans Christian Andersen

- As you may remember, two weavers promise to make the king a new suit of clothes that will appear invisible to those in the kingdom who are stupid or incompetent
- The weavers never actually deliver any clothes to the emperor, but only pretend to clothe him in exchange for a large fee
- Despite the emperor being naked, everyone pretended to see his new clothes for fear of revealing themselves to be the stupid one
- Even the emperor himself played along claiming his new clothes were splendid
- It required a young boy to point out the obvious, that the emperor was actually naked
- That's what's happening here between Micah, the Levite and the Danites
 - Micah knew the ephod wasn't the actual garment of the High Priest
 - And the Danites knew Micah's house wasn't the tabernacle
 - The Levite knew he wasn't truly a priest nor did he have the actual Urim and the Thummim
- So when they ask him for a blessing and he responds with an answer, everyone is playing along in a farce that suits their purposes
 - Micah feels the satisfaction of seeing his little drive through tabernacle being legitimized by the Danites' visit
 - The Danites receive affirmation for their decisions to abandon the Lord's provision
 - And the Levite take pride in being recognized as a legitimate representative of the Lord
 - Everyone is getting what they want...except the Lord
- That's what happens when we seek to please ourselves
 - We may achieve some limited benefit, but that benefit is strictly limited to our flesh
 - We won't benefit our soul

- And more importantly, we don't bless the Lord
- He is not honored much less pleased with such charades
- That's why the Bible says that the Lord does not hear the prayers of the unbeliever
 - He is not impressed with manmade piety
 - These men were speaking of God and acting as if they served Him and He was responding to them
 - But these things were happening entirely in their self-deceived minds
 - God was nowhere to be found in any of this nonsense
- That's the chief concern in this first of our three stories to end Judges
 - True worship of Yahweh is at risk
 - The people are adrift spiritually and willing to make up their own religion
 - Left unchecked, where does this lead the nation?
- That's easy to see as the rest of chapter will show

Judg. 18:7 Then the five men departed and came to Laish and saw the people who were in it living in security, after the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure; for there was no ruler humiliating them for anything in the land, and they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone.

Judg. 18:8 When they came back to their brothers at Zorah and Eshtaol, their brothers said to them, "What do you report?"

Judg. 18:9 They said, "Arise, and let us go up against them; for we have seen the land, and behold, it is very good. And will you sit still? Do not delay to go, to enter, to possess the land.

Judg. 18:10 "When you enter, you will come to a secure people with a spacious land; for God has given it into your hand, a place where there is no lack of anything that is on the earth."

- Having been "blessed" by Micah's priest, the men head about 100 miles due north eventually reaching a town called Laish
 - Laish was a quiet place, isolated and beautiful

- This Canaanite town sat at the foot of Mt Hermon in a beautiful valley
- Unlike most Canaanite cities, it wasn't defended by a large wall, probably because the inhabitants thought it unnecessary
- So the spies realize that taking this city away from the Canaanites would be easy
- They return to report what they have found and they argue for relocating to this distant place on the basis of three advantages
 - First, the land is secure and spacious
 - Secondly, it's the place the Lord is giving to the Danites
 - Finally, it's fertile land with everything they need
- But notice what really attracted the Danites to this region more than anything else
 - In v.7 they remark that this region is free from authorities that might harass them
 - They're referring both to the Philistine rulers and the judges of Israel
 - The Danites are excited by the prospect of no one telling them what to do
- You're peering into the heart of this people
 - They won't bow their knee to anyone
 - Much like Micah, the Danites would rather make their own rules than follow the word of God
 - The Lord assigned the tribe of Dan to the land He had prepared for them
 - And the Lord told the people through Joshua to remove the peoples they found in the land
 - Had they obeyed, the Lord would have given them the victories they sought and freed them from the oppression they detested
 - Instead, they disobeyed the Lord's command and decided to live among the Canaanites and Philistines

- Because they didn't drive out the Philistines, the Danites suffered under the oppression of their enemies
- Years later, the Danites complained when their disobedience came back upon their heads
- And for the record, it wasn't as though the Danites were unwilling to fight for what they wanted
 - We know this because of what follows next in the text

Judg. 18:11 Then from the family of the Danites, from Zorah and from Eshtaol, six hundred men armed with weapons of war set out.

Judg. 18:12 They went up and camped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. Therefore they called that place Mahaneh-dan to this day; behold, it is west of Kiriath-jearim.

Judg. 18:13 They passed from there to the hill country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah.

- Once the Danites discovered there was land worth possessing, they prepared a military force to defeat the people who held the land
 - Keep in mind they have calculated that this town could be taken because they believe they possess the strength to defeat this enemy
 - Earlier, they probably stopped fighting for the same reason
 - They decided they lacked the strength to defeat the enemy so they gave up
 - You see how they are making every decision according to what was right in their own eyes?
 - They aren't relying on the word of God
 - They don't trust the Lord to keep His promises
 - Instead, they see the world merely as men
 - This is the inevitable result of walking away from the Lord
 - Either we abide in Christ and in His word so that we may think and act more closely with His will
 - Or we live in our flesh, moving away from Him and seeking to engage in evil deeds
 - As Paul taught

Col. 1:21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,

Col. 1:22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach –

Col. 1:23 if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

- But this army doesn't go straight to the city of Laish
 - Instead, they retrace the route of the spies, landing in Micah's house again
 - Why have they come back to Micah?
 - Could it be they have decided that Micah's priest was responsible for leading them into the perfect city?
 - Now they return ready to claim their good luck charm
 - Next time we'll see how this first part of our epilogue concludes, with the sin of Micah and Dan conspiring to bring idolatry to an entire tribe
 - Little sins lead to big sin
 - And big sin leads us to finding new gods in ourselves or in others
 - How will God rescue His nation from this descent into oblivion?

Judges 18B

- Chinese bamboo is a fascinating plant
 - During the first four years of its life, it's a puny little thing
 - It barely grows at all
 - Standing next to full grown bamboo, it looks like a weed
 - But during those four years, it's putting down deep roots
 - And in the fifth year, the bamboo stalk will shoot skyward
 - Growing up to eighty feet in that one year
 - In some ways, we should see the three stories at the end of Judges like bamboo, as the roots of Israel's troubles
 - In previous chapters we've witnessed the people doing what was right in their own eyes
 - We saw that repeating pattern of idolatry, God's wrath and sometimes, repentance
 - Now we're learning the roots of that evil
 - And like bamboo, these stories were happening outside of view
 - But they soon lead to sin running rampant in the nation
- So these three stories are the back story of Israel's sin during the time of Judges, when they lacked a strong, godly leader
 - The first story is documented in chapters 17 and 18
 - This is the story of the sin of the Danites and Ephraimites conspiring together to introduce idolatry in the land
 - And it comes by way of a one-two punch
 - The story began with the introduction of homemade worship, a concept invented by a man named Micah, an Ephraimite
 - He was raised in an unbelieving, ungodly home

- Later, his pride lead him to hire a Levite as a personal priest officiating over a private religious service
 - This is the ultimate example of a man doing what is right in his own eyes
 - He was worshipping God in the way he preferred, forgetting that man can't define how God will be found
 - The second punch comes from the Danites, who decided they wanted a different place to live
 - They didn't trust the Lord to defeat the Philistines in their land
 - And they weren't willing to engage in the battle Joshua told the people to wage
 - Instead, the people of Dan were willing to embark on long journey in search of land
 - Eventually setting their sights on a Canaanite town in far northern Israel, in the land of Naphtali
 - They were willing to fight the Canaanites to secure that land
 - But they were unwilling to fight the Philistines in their present territory as the Lord directed
 - Had they done so, they could have enjoy the land the Lord had already given them
- Today, we see these two stream of rebellious merge into a flood that threatens to carry the nation away
 - Members of Israel are moving away from proper worship of Yahweh and from living in their appointed land, and that's an incredibly dangerous thing
 - Left unchecked, it means the destruction of the nation
 - Because Israel's identity as a nation depending on these two very things, as God intended
 - Their law and their inheritance are the defining characteristics and what distinguishes them from Gentile nations

Deut. 7:6 “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Deut. 7:7 “The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples,

Deut. 7:8 but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

- If Israel abandoned worship of Yahweh or if the tribes separate from one another, then the Jewish people come to an end
 - The covenants and God's Law are what defined them and held them together
 - But now the tribes are moving away from the Law and away from the land and each other
 - Why? Because everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes, rather than listening to the Lord
- So now we move back into chapter 18 to conclude this story, with the Danites moving north to conquer and occupy their new land

Judg. 18:11 Then from the family of the Danites, from Zorah and from Eshtaol, six hundred men armed with weapons of war set out.

Judg. 18:12 They went up and camped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. Therefore they called that place Mahaneh-dan to this day; behold, it is west of Kiriath-jearim.

Judg. 18:13 They passed from there to the hill country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah.

- As we saw last time, the Danites take a circuitous route to return to Laish
 - Rather than moving north up the costal plain and into the Jezreel valley, they elect to go east and then north into Ephraim
 - And it quickly becomes apparent why they've taken this out-of-the-way route
 - They want to stop at Micah's house
 - And their stop is not a coincidence...they want something

- In their first stop at Micah's house, they were stunned to discover Micah had established his own personal house of worship
 - Apparently, they liked the idea of their own religious system
 - The Law required Jews to travel regularly to the tabernacle to worship on certain feast days
 - But once the Danites reached Laish, they would be a long way from Shiloh, where the tabernacle stood in those days
 - Who wants to walk so far if there is an alternative?
- They've seen the future, and that future is personal tabernacles
 - It's like the first time someone proposed a personal computer
 - Before only universities or businesses could afford a computer
 - But thanks to the electronics revolution, now everyone could have one in their home
- That's how it must have felt to the Danites when they saw what Micah had set up in his house
 - So the Danites determine to steal Micah's priest to make him their own

Judg. 18:14 Then the five men who went to spy out the country of Laish said to their kinsmen, “Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod and household idols and a graven image and a molten image? Now therefore, consider what you should do.”

Judg. 18:15 They turned aside there and came to the house of the young man, the Levite, to the house of Micah, and asked him of his welfare.

Judg. 18:16 The six hundred men armed with their weapons of war, who were of the sons of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate.

Judg. 18:17 Now the five men who went to spy out the land went up and entered there, and took the graven image and the ephod and household idols and the molten image, while the priest stood by the entrance of the gate with the six hundred men armed with weapons of war.

Judg. 18:18 When these went into Micah's house and took the graven image, the ephod and household idols and the molten image, the priest said to them, “What are you doing?”

Judg. 18:19 They said to him, “Be silent, put your hand over your mouth and come with us, and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be a priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?”

Judg. 18:20 The priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod and household idols and the graven image and went among the people.

- The Danite army is 600 men, armed and ready to battle the Canaanites in Laish
 - And the five scouts bring them back to Micah's house to show them the worship system Micah has established
 - Micah's idea excited the flesh of these apostate men
 - These five scouts knew that this discovery would inspire similar feelings among the rest of the Danite army
 - In fact, they were depending on it
 - They wanted this strong force to compel the priest to leave Micah and serve the Danites in Laish
 - First, they go to the home of the Levite and strike up a conversation, reminding him that they were there earlier and he had helped them
 - Then the group goes to the home of Micah, where they proceed to begin stealing all his implements of worship
 - Once the Levite realizes that he's taking part in a theft, he objects
 - So the Danites tell him to shut up and don't challenge what's happening
 - Then they make him an offer...he can be a priest in a bigger place for more people...a promotion
 - This is an offer that a career-minded apostate Levite can't turn down
 - So he agrees to go and serve the entire tribe of Dan
- There is so much wrong with this scene, it's hard to know where to begin in breaking it all down
 - First, you have the Danites bullying and threatening a man they believe will bring them closer to God
 - Men can act so strange when it comes to imagining how to find God, can't they?
 - If they truly believed that this man could serve as an intermediary to God, how could they expect him to be a sympathetic representative under these circumstances?

- He's just witnessed these Danites stealing, which was punishable by death
- And now he's being forced to go along with the theft and to uproot and leave with them
- Yet the Danites expect this man to lead them to a blessing from the Lord
- This is the same kind of thinking that leads men to steal idols and kill innocents and do all manner of terrible things in the name of their god
 - Such men never stop to consider the hypocrisy of using sin to find holiness
 - In their warped and perverted hearts they find sin compatible with a pursuing and pleasing a deity
- Anyone can claim to be acting in name of his god, but that doesn't mean their actions are truly inspired by God
 - For example, the Crusades were atrocities committed in the name of Jesus
 - The Inquisition was torture committed in Jesus' name
 - The prejudices of the past century were often perpetrated in the name of Jesus
 - And this same twisted logic leads men and women today to seek out prosperity messages or other lies instead of the truth
- These are no different than the Danites' distortion of Jewish worship
 - Sinful man will always want God packaged in ways we prefer, beginning with Cain and continuing into today
 - Sinful men want to believe that what they want is also what God wants for them, though in reality they're simply pleasing their flesh
 - And the enemy is only too willing to support that desire
 - The enemy is able to counterfeit anything of God...except holiness
 - So you can always find the lie, because when holiness is absent, then so is God

- Secondly, there's the question of why these Danites even cared about observing religious practice in the first place?
 - If they're not willing to conform to God's Law in all respects, then why give any attention to it at all?
 - They're going to a lot of trouble to have a Levite as their priest
 - And to capture all these artifacts
 - They are determined to observe a religious practice similar to the one Moses gave them though they want it on their own terms
 - Here's a second insight into the depravity of men's hearts
 - Men need something to worship but the sinful heart never finds true worship on its own
 - We were created to worship the God Who made us in His image and breathed life into us
 - A yearning for fellowship with the Creator has always been a part of human nature
 - Our soul is wired to seek someone or something to worship
 - But Paul says that the sin of the Garden distorted our appreciation of God and over time directed our worship to other things
 - Because we don't know the Creator, we substitute other things to worship

Rom. 1:20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Rom. 1:21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Rom. 1:22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,

Rom. 1:23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

- Fallen man didn't walk away from worship
- We exchange true worship for something false

- False worship can take many different forms, but it's always based in futile speculations and a darkened heart
- Finally, consider the perspective of the Levite himself
 - This is little more than employment to him
 - He hasn't experienced an encounter with the Living God
 - He is far from God
 - He's just seeking the praises of men and a good paying job
 - So when a better offer comes along, he's only too willing to pack up his tent and move to Laish
 - The Levite is not a priest, but as the saying goes, he plays one on TV
 - He's a great example of the kind of men we see serving God everywhere these days
 - Men who see godliness as a means of gain
 - Men who view ministry as a career rather than a vocation of self-sacrificial service
 - They serve for a price but the moment a better offer comes along, they bolt for the door
 - Because they were only in it for the money
 - Obviously, everyone will move around from time to time within the body of Christ
 - God may call us to serve in a place for a time
 - And then He may call us to move on in another day
 - Nothing lasts forever this side of the Kingdom
 - But when a change happens, it should be motivated by the glory of God and the needs of His people, not by our ego or pocketbook
 - If this Levite had sincere desire to serve the lord, he never would have taken Micah's offer in the first place, much less the Danite offer now

- Moreover, he would have put both Micah and the Danites to death for their apostasy at suggesting such a plan
- Clearly, this Levite isn't a man guided by the word of God
- Instead, he's doing what's right in his own eyes
- Meanwhile, Micah eventually learns of the theft, of course, and when he does, he seeks to retrieve his property

Judg. 18:21 Then they turned and departed, and put the little ones and the livestock and the valuables in front of them.

Judg. 18:22 When they had gone some distance from the house of Micah, the men who were in the houses near Micah's house assembled and overtook the sons of Dan.

Judg. 18:23 They cried to the sons of Dan, who turned around and said to Micah, "What is the matter with you, that you have assembled together?" ...

Judg. 18:24 He said, "You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and have gone away, and what do I have besides? So how can you say to me, 'What is the matter with you?'"

Judg. 18:25 The sons of Dan said to him, "Do not let your voice be heard among us, or else fierce men will fall upon you and you will lose your life, with the lives of your household."

Judg. 18:26 So the sons of Dan went on their way; and when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his house.

- In v.21, we're told that the Danites left Micah's town with children and livestock leading the way
 - This is an interesting detail because there is no indication that the Danites brought their own families with them
 - All we've heard about up to now is that 600 warriors left to fight the Canannites
 - Now we hear about are children and livestock, and if there are children then we know there are also women
 - Because men weren't going to take children without women to care for them
 - Secondly, they've placed these people in the front leading the group
 - That is a reversal of the normal custom
 - Traditionally, the men led the way and the rest followed

- These two details together indicate that the Danites have acquired more than Micah's idols
 - We've heard mention of the "houses" around Micah several times in this passage
 - So perhaps Micah's house of worship had attracted other worshippers who became part of a cult following
 - And now the Danites seem to have stolen the servants and livestock of these families living around Micah
 - It appears Micah has become the leader of a cult of false worship
- So the Danites robbed him of the idols and the booty of his cult
 - And they have positioned this booty in the front of their ranks because they anticipated Micah might come looking for them
 - By placing the children and animals in the front, they prevent Micah from raiding them from the rear
 - Clearly, this is treachery done in the name of following the Lord
- As they expected Micah catches them and makes a scene over the stolen goods
 - Micah complains that his "gods" have been taken away
 - Friends, if your gods can be kidnapped, then you need new gods
 - They are so impotent, they can't even protect themselves
 - Again, how curious that people worship something they make with their own hands and which they must protect by their own power
 - Why bother with such a god?
 - Isn't your god supposed to have all power?
 - Isn't your god supposed to protect you?
 - Collective, the relics of Micah's homemade temple relics were gods to him
 - This is the same thing you see today in other manmade religious systems
 - The relics aren't merely symbols of a deity

- They take on deity themselves
- Catholics are taught that the wafer they eat in their communion meal is actually the body of Jesus
- Many religions bow and pray before statues
- After a short time, it becomes impossible to separate the relic from deity
- Even we need to be careful not to confuse the physical for the spiritual in our worship of Christ
 - We can over emphasize the building where we gather, or the people who serve us or even the Bible itself
 - We must remind ourselves that our build is not "God's house"
 - Nor are our ministers more holy or closer to God than we are
 - Nor is our printed Bible a holy and sacred object
 - All of these things are merely conveniences we lean upon in our relationship with the Lord since we live in a physical world
- In his protests, Micah says in v.24 that all he has has been taken by the Danites
 - With his house of worship gone and his priest defecting and his servants and livestock gone, his reason for living is gone
 - Micah's dignity, power and importance were all attached to his counterfeit worship business
 - Worship is supposed to be about the deity we seek to please
 - But for Micah was about pleasing self and worshipping ego
 - Now that these tools have been taken from him, he has nothing left he says
 - Idolatry is always an empty thing in the end
 - One day idols fail us, and whether that day comes in our earthly life or in eternity, it will come
 - And usually, they fail us many times over
 - Wealth or power or fame or wisdom or looks...they all fail eventually

- When your life brings hard questions that have no easy answers, idols will remain mute and impotent
- But God's word has answers
- And God's Spirit leads us to a peace and understanding that counterfeit worship simply can't equal
- As Micah contemplated the loss of everything, he panicked because he knew he had nothing
 - You and I worship a God that can't be confined to one place
 - He doesn't live to give meaning to our earthly lives, he offers us eternal life
 - He doesn't simply provide for our days in this world, he has set aside an inheritance in the Kingdom to come
- When the Danites hear Micah's protests, they threaten him
 - They tell him that if he keeps protesting, then he dies
 - They sound like organized criminals, making threats and forcing others to submit to their treachery
 - As a result, Micah is left without his false temple
 - But his sin will now travel on without him
 - The Danites carry Micah's idolatry into their new home

Judg. 18:27 Then they took what Micah had made and the priest who had belonged to him, and came to Laish, to a people quiet and secure, and struck them with the edge of the sword; and they burned the city with fire.

Judg. 18:28 And there was no one to deliver them, because it was far from Sidon and they had no dealings with anyone, and it was in the valley which is near Beth-rehob. And they rebuilt the city and lived in it.

Judg. 18:29 They called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father who was born in Israel; however, the name of the city formerly was Laish.

Judg. 18:30 The sons of Dan set up for themselves the graven image; and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land.

Judg. 18:31 So they set up for themselves Micah's graven image which he had made, all the time that the house of God was at Shiloh.

- The Danites reach Laish and destroy the town in a cruel and unnecessary way
 - The remote location of the town prevented the inhabitants from calling for help
 - Ironically, the Canaanites originally picked this place because it was so remote
 - In the end, that made it vulnerable too
 - After arriving, they establish a new priesthood, beginning with the Levite who went with the Danites
 - Only now does Samuel reveal the man's name, Jonathan
 - Samuel waits to reveal the man's name because he is a descendent of Moses through Gershom
 - The name Manasseh is almost universally understood to be a reference to Moses
 - But Moses' name was changed by later scribes to preserve Moses' name among Jews
- Samuel's point is to shock the reader in Israel with the truth of this man's identity
 - Just think...a direct descendant of the Law giver is himself leading the people into idolatry!
 - In fact, it may be possible that this man is only two generations removed from Moses himself
 - Which if true would date this story to much earlier in the time of Judges
 - In any case, my how far the people have fallen!
 - Idolatry plagued Israel for over six centuries
 - Countless sin and depravity took place among God's people because of the disobedience an Ephraimite and the Danites
 - As a result of their part in instigating idolatry in Israel, these two tribes are missing from the list of tribes in Revelation 7
 - In Revelation 7, the Lord will bring faith again to Israel in the last days through 144,000 Jewish men

- But none will come from the tribes of Dan and Ephraim
- This text doesn't say, but not all the Danites made this trip to Laish
 - Some remained behind in the land God allotted them
 - But the tribe disappears in time
 - Over time they become captives of Philistines through intermarriage and conflict
 - Notice the mention of the captivity in v.30, indicating God's judgment on this nation
 - By the time you get to 1Chronicles, the tribe has completely disappeared from the record of tribes in Israel
- So our first story is reveals a breakdown of the religious structures of Jewish society
 - Israel is following other gods in a systematic fashion
 - They are leaving behind the proper priesthood
 - They are moving away from the house of God
 - And they are forgetting both the God Who saved them and the place He gave them
 - Next time, we begin the second story of the three that end Judges, which brings us to the end of the book
 - That story will reveal a breakdown in the social fabric of the nation
 - Leaving us with the third and final story to be found in the book of Ruth

Judges 19A

- We've reached the final part of the book of Judges, the final episode recorded by Samuel, which exposes the evil nature of these days
 - Once again, we're involved in a review of how Israel's culture deteriorated in the years after Joshua led the people into the land
 - This review focuses on three incidents that took place during the days of Judges
 - We just finished our study of the first incident described in chapters 17-18
 - In those chapters, we learned how idolatry was introduced in the land, at the hands of an Ephraimite and the Danites
 - There are still two more incidents we will examine
 - The next three chapters tell the second story
 - While the third story is found in the next book of scripture, Ruth, which we will also study
 - But first, we will take time for our second incident found in chapters 19-21
 - This is a story of civil war in Israel
 - It's the climactic account in the book
 - But like our first incident, the timing of the story does not follow the prior chapter's events
 - In fact, the events of chapters 19-21 occurred even earlier in Israel's history than did the events of chapter 17-18
 - So why does Samuel leave them for the end of the book? In a word: shame
 - He's organized these accounts to create a sense of growing shame and depravity and self-destruction
 - He's moving the narrative from bad to worse
 - And in doing so, he's creating a growing sense of dread among anyone who hopes for better things among God's people

- What will save these people from themselves?
- So we begin in chapter 19

Judg. 19:1 Now it came about in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite staying in the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim, who took a concubine for himself from Bethlehem in Judah.

Judg. 19:2 But his concubine played the harlot against him, and she went away from him to her father's house in Bethlehem in Judah, and was there for a period of four months.

Judg. 19:3 Then her husband arose and went after her to speak tenderly to her in order to bring her back, taking with him his servant and a pair of donkeys. So she brought him into her father's house, and when the girl's father saw him, he was glad to meet him.

Judg. 19:4 His father-in-law, the girl's father, detained him; and he remained with him three days. So they ate and drank and lodged there.

- The opening refrain of chapter 19 is Samuel's way of highlighting the source of Israel trouble
 - He says there was no king in those days
 - The days he's speaking about are the days of judges
 - More specifically, this story appears to have taken place not long after Israel entered into the land under Joshua
 - Chapter 20 will introduce a man named Phinehas, who is the grandson of Joshua
 - So just as the previous incident included Moses' grandson, this incident is connected to Joshua
 - Therefore, these are the days early in the period of Judges, and the absence of a king is simply shorthand for Israel's rejection of the Lord's authority
 - These people live as though they have no king
 - But they did have a King...the Lord was their King!
 - Israel was a theocracy, lead by God Who gave them a Law and judges to govern them
 - But Samuel reminds us that there was no king for these people,
 - They didn't have an earthly, human king

- But neither did they acknowledge their sovereign heavenly King
- And the story that follows, like the one that preceded it, reveals what happens when God's people fail to acknowledge the Lord's authority in their lives
 - This is a story of moral deterioration, social chaos and political anarchy
 - It reflects the worst of human depravity emerging from the hearts of a people only recently delivered from bondage
 - And it serves as Samuel's closing argument for why Israel is beyond saving itself
 - It's beyond the reach of human judges
 - It's even beyond the rule of human kings
- As with our last incident, this one also begins with a wayward Levite in Ephraim
 - It's no coincidence that the trouble is beginning in this tribe and with a Levite at the center of the action
 - Ephraim was the most populous tribe in Israel
 - As such, that tribe serves as a barometer for the entire nation
 - As Ephraim goes, so goes Israel in many cases
 - Secondly, the Levites were the custodians of Israel's moral and religious compass
 - As the priests for the nation, they were supposed to safeguard the people from sin and encourage holiness
 - They set the bar for the people and gave them charge to serve the Lord and His Law
 - So what does it mean for the nation when the fox is guarding the hen house?
 - And so in just the first verse of the chapter, we already find a Levite living with no regard for the commandments of God
 - Like the previous story, he's living in a place not designated for Levites

- Secondly, he's practicing a socially acceptable form of adultery by taking a concubine
- A concubine was a female servant or slave who was also granted the privileges of a wife, though held a lesser status in the home
- In this period of history, concubines were tolerated within the society, but the practice was always sinful in God's sight
- The fact that Israel's priestly tribe was engaged in sin to the same degree as the rest of the culture explains why the people are so unholy
 - God's word tells us that godly leadership among God's people is all important to the goal of holiness
 - While each person is responsible for his or her own sin before the Lord, it's also true that leaders can influence us for better or worse
 - When we are led by men and women with godly character and a devotion to God's word, then we are in the best possible position to obey as well
 - Conversely, when our leaders are corrupt, lazy or haphazard with God's word, then we are swimming upstream in seeking holiness
 - We can still get there on our own, and we're still accountable if we don't
 - Nevertheless, there's no denying that leadership can influence us for better or worse
 - That's why the Bible places such high and unrelenting standards on who may lead us within the body of Christ
 - And as these two stories are showing us, the Levites of Israel are leading the nation into sin rather away from it
- The sin of this Levite begins to compound upon itself, when the concubine decides to leave her husband
 - In v.2 the text she played the harlot, which means she committed adultery on her husband
 - How ironic, considering he committed adultery on his first wife in marrying this woman
 - Now she was doing the same to him

- Because sin always begets more sin
- As a result of her actions, an argument ensued which led the woman to leave her husband and go back to her father's house
- Josephus offered this commentary on this passage:

Now he [the Levite] was very fond of his wife [concubine], and overcome with her beauty; but he was unhappy in this, that he did not meet with the like return of affection from her, for she was averse to him, which did more inflame his passion for her, so that they quarreled one with another perpetually; and at last the woman was so disgusted at these quarrels, that she left her husband, and went to her parents in the fourth month.

- In the Law, which Levites were supposed to model for Israel, an unfaithful woman must be stoned
 - But instead of stoning her, this Levite pursues her
 - We're told he intends to speak with her tenderly to win her back
 - But later in the story we'll see that he has less compassionate intentions
 - She is her possession first and foremost, and he wants his possession returned
- He comes to the father's house riding a donkey and towing another, which indicate his expectation that she would return with him
 - The bride's daughter sees the Levite coming and rejoices
 - He's probably happy to see that this Levite was willing to reconcile rather than bring justice upon his daughter
 - Which shows us once more that this people are not living with concern for the covenant they have with the Lord
- They man stays with the father-in-law for three days eating and drinking, as if this was a family reunion
 - The celebration is entirely out of place in light of the circumstances
 - The woman has committed adultery
 - She has disrespected her husband by abandoning the home

- Now everyone is overlooking the sins that brought everyone to this moment
- Instead, they are having a party
- Certainly, the Lord has a heart of mercy and forgiveness for His people, and we can still find opportunity for celebration insight of the sin in our life
 - But the Lord grants mercy to a repentant heart and forgiveness to those who love Him
 - He doesn't celebrate our imperfections and He certainly doesn't give us license to do the same
 - This threesome is in the midst of ignoring their collective sin and living as if the Lord and His law doesn't even exist
 - That's not a reason for celebration...it's a recipe for serious consequences

Judg. 19:5 Now on the fourth day they got up early in the morning, and he prepared to go; and the girl's father said to his son-in-law, "Sustain yourself with a piece of bread, and afterward you may go."

Judg. 19:6 So both of them sat down and ate and drank together; and the girl's father said to the man, "Please be willing to spend the night, and let your heart be merry."

Judg. 19:7 Then the man arose to go, but his father-in-law urged him so that he spent the night there again.

Judg. 19:8 On the fifth day he arose to go early in the morning, and the girl's father said, "Please sustain yourself, and wait until afternoon"; so both of them ate.

Judg. 19:9 When the man arose to go along with his concubine and servant, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said to him, "Behold now, the day has drawn to a close; please spend the night. Lo, the day is coming to an end; spend the night here that your heart may be merry. Then tomorrow you may arise early for your journey so that you may go home."

Judg. 19:10 But the man was not willing to spend the night, so he arose and departed and came to a place opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). And there were with him a pair of saddled donkeys; his concubine also was with him.

- The concubine's father was especially hospitable to his guest, which was the honorable thing to do in this day
 - This man's lavish hospitality would reflect honor upon him under most circumstances

- Hotels were few and far between in this day
- So travelers usually gained accommodation in the homes of strangers who were expected to receive a stranger with kindness
- This was a custom, and in that sense we expect the father-in-law to do what he's doing

- And at first, the father's hospitality proceeds as expected
 - But after a few days, his insistence for more eating and drinking becomes more a nuisance to the husband than honor
 - After three days the husband is ready to return, but the father-in-law convinces him to delay a fourth day
 - Now it's the husband who is forced to show respect by accepting the hospitality even beyond what was truly helpful to him
 - And by the fifth day of delay, he's ready to leave one way or another

- This scene is odd and leaves us wondering why it matters to the story, but we can piece it together if we notice a few key details
 - First, notice that all the celebrations take place between the men only
 - Notice in v.6 the text refers to "both of them" eating and drinking together, referring to the two men only
 - Secondly, the woman is never mentioned in this account, except at the very end of v.10 when we hear she has left with her husband
 - So it appears that the father-in-law is the one desiring to extend this visit, not the daughter
 - And the father is the primary beneficiary from the ongoing party
 - Through this encounter Samuel is showing us the underlying cause for the daughter's disobedience and sin against her husband
 - The daughter committed unfaithfulness against her husband
 - When he discovered her sin, he was angry and contended with her

- Rather than face up to her mistake, repent and accept his judgment against her, she ran away
- And where did she run? Into the waiting arms of her loving father
- How did she know she would be received gladly by her father?
 - Matthew Henry observed:

“...She went away from {her husband], and (which was not fair) was received and entertained at her father’s house. Had her husband turned her out of doors unjustly, her father ought to have pitied her affliction; but, when she treacherously departed from her husband to embrace the bosom of a stranger, her father ought not to have countenanced her sin. Perhaps she would not have violated her duty to her husband if she had not known too well where she should be kindly received. Children’s ruin is often owing very much to parents’ indulgence.”

- All this nonstop eating and drinking is evidence of this father’s inability to say no and set limits, either on himself or his daughter it seems
 - The Lord commands parents in His word to strive to raise obedient, respectful compliant children
 - We can’t produce perfect kids, of course
 - And aren’t to blame for what our adult children do after they leave our care
 - But as much as we can, while we have them in our homes, we must seek to mold their character and behaviors toward godliness
 - That requires teaching them the principles of godliness from God’s word
 - And Modeling it for them in our own lives
 - But it also means contending with their sin when they disobey, not turning a blind eye to their mistakes
 - Bringing meaningful discipline when necessary and encouraging them to repent
 - This father has evidently failed to do these things, and Samuel seems to be placing a measure of the blame at his feet by relating this encounter
 - And therefore the blame for the supreme tragedy that will follow for this girl in our story will be shared at least partly by her father

- Moreover, Samuel is passing judgment on the culture as a whole
- Because when a culture forgets how to raise godly children, then it's only a matter of time before society faces certain ruin
- It's no coincidence that in Paul's list in 2Timothy 3 of the sins that characterize the society of the last days he includes the sin of disobeying parents

2Tim. 3:1 But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come.

2Tim. 3:2 For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy,

2Tim. 3:3 unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good,

2Tim. 3:4 treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,

2Tim. 3:5 holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

- Notice that God's word places a disobedient child on a par with reviling, or hating good or treachery or being unholy
 - And Paul's point isn't to condemn the child but the parent
 - He isn't talking about full grown adults who disobey their parents
 - He's talking about a society in which young children, who have no choice but to do what a parent requires, are nevertheless allowed to misbehave
 - A young child can only misbehave routinely when parents have chosen to ignore their God-given responsibility to keep a child's behavior within appropriate boundaries
- This woman is about to become the victim indirectly of her own father's indulgence, and right now we're witnesses his indulgence at work
 - But this husband can only take so much of this father-in-law
 - So on the afternoon of the fifth day, he finally decides he must leave now or he'll never break free
- So in v.10 he finally departs, but the timing of departure is troublesome for his traveling party
 - In that day (as it still is today), it was dangerous to travel through the wilderness at night

- Bad guys and wild animals would prey on night travelers
- So it was important to stay in a safe place overnight
- Since the typical means of conveyance in that day was by foot or on a slow donkey, you had to plan your trip carefully to ensure you arrived at a town before nightfall
 - Therefore, leaving so late in the day was a risky move
 - The father-in-law was depending on the late time of day to convince the husband to stay another day
 - It's a sign of the husband's frustration that he chose to leave despite the late hour
- So now he finds himself hurrying to get to a town where they can spend the night
 - The first town they reach is Jebus, which is the ancient name of Jerusalem
 - Bethlehem is about 6 miles south of Jerusalem, so it would have taken them about two hours to get there
 - And one of the husband's servants makes the logical suggestion they should stop here for the night

Judg. 19:11 When they were near Jebus, the day was almost gone; and the servant said to his master, "Please come, and let us turn aside into this city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it."

Judg. 19:12 However, his master said to him, "We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners who are not of the sons of Israel; but we will go on as far as Gibeah."

Judg. 19:13 He said to his servant, "Come and let us approach one of these places; and we will spend the night in Gibeah or Ramah."

Judg. 19:14 So they passed along and went their way, and the sun set on them near Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin.

Judg. 19:15 They turned aside there in order to enter and lodge in Gibeah. When they entered, they sat down in the open square of the city, for no one took them into his house to spend the night.

- In that day, Jerusalem was a Jebusite (Canaanite) stronghold, which didn't make it the ideal stopping place for a Hebrew

- So the husband decides they will keep moving north to more friendly towns
 - He hopes to reach either the Jewish town of Gibeah or maybe Ramah
 - Gibeah is another three miles north or about another hour's walk
 - Ramah was another 40 minutes beyond Gibeah
- But it's already late and the sun is setting, so their situation is becoming serious
 - They need to reach Gibeah and find a place that will take them in before dark
 - But as they come upon Gibeah, the sun sets
 - So now they have no choice but to stay in this city with or without shelter
 - And as it turns out, they will stay the night in the open city square since no home would take them
- Gibeah is a town in the tribal territory of Benjamin
 - Later, it's known as the hometown of King Saul, which is interesting because Bethlehem is the home town of King David
 - The juxtapositioning of these two towns in the narrative seems to be a foreshadowing of the lives of these two kings
 - Both towns have their problems, one more severe than the other
 - In this case, Gibeah's problem is their utter lack of hospitality in accommodating these fellow Israelites
 - We have difficulty appreciating how dishonorable it was for a town to refuse accommodation to a traveling family
 - In this day, this was a severe departure from custom and deserved condemnation
 - The disciples of Jesus were prepared to call fire down from Heaven upon a Samaritan town for refusing Jesus accommodation

- What's worse, this was a Levite man, and the scriptures had commanded Israel to be especially kind in treatment of this tribe
 - Because the Levites ministered to the spiritual needs of Israel and had no inheritance of their own, the Israelites were to take good care of the Levites
 - Yet this town did nothing for them
 - Perhaps they were refused accommodation because he was a Levite
 - Perhaps they were afraid to open up their homes and expose their sinful lifestyles to a religious leader
- But this situation is about to get much, much worse
 - This town has a dark secret that was apparently not widely understood among fellow Jews
 - But this poor family is about to discover it
 - The father's indulgent nature and the husband's rash decision-making has placed them in this jeopardy
 - And what follows will bring the horrible death of the concubine and the start of civil war in Israel
- Think back to the “ingredients” that have combined to create this stew of sin among the people
 - We have religious leaders failing to follow and model the rule of God’s Law
 - They sin themselves, forgetting their place
 - And they do not hold accountable those in their charge
 - Then we have the daughter representing the children who rebel and run from authority
 - They are products of indulgent parents who give license for sin
 - They are walking in paths of self-destruction
 - And we have a culture that has ceased caring for those who provide ministerial guidance
 - They won’t show hospitality

- They seem to fear religious authority
- And ultimately, we're going to discover how they harbor extreme depravity in their midst
- As you reflect on these ingredients, notice how many of them have reasserted themselves in our culture today
 - Ask yourself how long this situation can continue before something must change
 - And let's all ask if we are contributing to the problem in one way or another
 - Let's reflect on that this week and we prepare to return to our study

Judges 19B

- Let's dive back into our second account of how Jewish society began to lose its way in the time of Judges
 - In chapter 19 we're following a Levite husband and his concubine and servant as they head back north toward their home in Ephraim
 - They have taken the risky step of traveling late in the day
 - And so they find themselves after nightfall seeking shelter in a Jewish town called Gibeah
 - They came into the city and were unable to find accommodation, which in itself is a bad omen
 - So they decide to simply camp in the middle of the town square
 - And they soon begin to learn that all is not right with this town
 - It has an evil, demonic side
 - And the evil of this place will trigger greater sin among the men of Israel

Judg. 19:16 Then behold, an old man was coming out of the field from his work at evening. Now the man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was staying in Gibeah, but the men of the place were Benjamites.

Judg. 19:17 And he lifted up his eyes and 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?"

Judg. 19:18 He said to him, "We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim, for I am from there, and I went to Bethlehem in Judah. But I am now going to my house, and no man will take me into his house."

Judg. 19:19 "Yet there is both straw and fodder for our donkeys, and also bread and wine for me, your maid servant, and the young man who is with your servants; there is no lack of anything."

Judg. 19:20 The old man said, "Peace to you. Only let me take care of all your needs; however, do not spend the night in the open square."

Judg. 19:21 So he took him into his house and gave the donkeys fodder, and they washed their feet and ate and drank.

- As this traveling family is still getting over the shock of the town's lack of hospitality, a fellow Ephraimite walks in from the fields

- He has moved to Gibeah probably for the work but he's been here long enough to know this town
 - So as he approaches this family in the town square, he senses these folks weren't from around here
 - So he approaches and begins to ask questions
- The Levite explains his circumstances
 - He says they're traveling home but no one has offered them a room
 - And then in v.19 he observes that their lack of hospitality isn't because they lack the resources to assist
 - On the contrary, the Levite observed that there was plenty of food for the animals and the people
 - So he's mystified for why this town has been so cold to them
- His observation is a commentary on the state of Israel's heart
 - In only a generation or two, the people of the land are without concern for their brothers
 - It's hard to overestimate the importance of hospitality in these days
 - We see it merely as a courtesy
 - And even then it's a courtesy we generally only extend when it's convenient for us and we like the person
 - Not so in this day
 - Offering accommodation to a traveling stranger was considered a duty as significant as rescuing an animal in distress or helping put out a neighbor's house fire
 - To refuse a traveler accommodation when room and resources were plentiful was tantamount to walking away from a child drowning in a pool
 - In many cases it meant placing that person's life at risk and it could result in severe penalties

- While our culture views hospitality differently, the Bible doubles down on the importance of believers meeting this obligation

Heb. 13:1 Let love of the brethren continue.

Heb. 13:2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

- The New Testament commands us to continue in this ancient tradition
- Notice the writer demands we continue to show love by offering hospitality to strangers
- He says continue, which implies that we are to do as those in Jesus' day did
- Secondly, notice he speaks of hospitality to strangers
 - Hospitality to family and friends is already assumed
 - Even sinners do that
 - But the love of Christ compels us to do even more
- In our culture, showing hospitality may look differently
 - It may not involve putting someone up in our home at night
 - Maybe it means providing food or clothing to neighbors in need
 - Or bringing meals to homeless, etc.
 - But nurture a generous heart that wants to bless strangers in need
 - And if you do you follow in the steps of Abraham who fed Jesus and angels when they came to visit him
- Such was not the heart of this town, and it's a shocking revelation
 - This is a town so heartless, greedy and evil that they were willing to doom this family to a great atrocity
 - The townspeople knew what lurked in this place
 - Yet they did nothing to help
 - Only this stranger from Ephram takes pity on this family

- He's a visitor to this town as well, yet it seems the evil of this place hadn't infected his heart
- And so he does what should have been done in the first place
- He offers to give this family shelter in his home

- But this is the time of Judges, and so we know that even this man's kindness is not the end of the story

Judg. 19:22 While they were celebrating, behold, the men of the city, certain worthless fellows, surrounded the house, pounding the door; and they spoke to the owner of the house, the old man, saying, "Bring out the man who came into your house that we may have relations with him."

Judg. 19:23 Then the man, the owner of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my fellows, please do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not commit this act of folly.

Judg. 19:24 "Here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. Please let me bring them out that you may ravish them and do to them whatever you wish. But do not commit such an act of folly against this man."

- As they enjoy their evening, there comes a pounding on the door of the house
 - A group of "worthless" men have surrounded the house and are seeking entry
 - The word worthless in Hebrew literally means "sons of Beliel"
 - And Beliel is another name for Satan
 - The men have surrounded the house because they intend to rape the Levite staying in his home
 - We wonder why they do not attack the homeowner himself
 - Probably because he's an old man and not of interest to them
 - So they demand the visitor
 - This story will remind you of the story of Lot living in Sodom in Genesis 19 when the two angels visit his home
 - At that time, the antagonists were depraved Canaanites
 - But this time, the wicked are fellow Jews

- So right away we're struck by how far the culture of Israel has deteriorated in just a generation or two
- Israel is now repeating the worst sins of the surrounding pagan Canaanites
- And they are perpetuating these sins on themselves
- But the story gets worse, because the response of this seemly kind old man is as depraved as the request of the crowd of men outside
 - He proposes to give them his own daughter and the concubine of the traveler
 - The custom of the day demanded that a host do everything he could to protect and care for his guests
 - His honor was on the line
 - So this man's perverse logic must have been that to allow these men to rape two women was less dishonorable to his reputation than to allow them to molest his male guest
 - Once again, his proposal was similar to Lot's solution, and therefore it draws to make the obvious comparison
 - Lot was a man troubled by the sin of his surroundings
 - But he willingly placed himself in those surroundings
 - So that the terrible consequences of that choice fell up on him and his family
 - His moral compass has lost its way, and his peace in this life went with it
 - So it must have been for this man
 - He has left his own tribe to live and work among another
 - Moreover, he has decided that his work in the nearby fields was worth suffering in such a desperately wicked place
 - And that association has brought him to the point of making these twisted moral tradeoffs
 - He's reached the point where he can find justification for abandoning two innocent girls to the depravity of these men

- Like the story of Lot, this old man plays a small part in the larger story, but he's a harbinger for what comes of living the compromised life
 - When we start down the path of excusing sin, whether in ourselves or others, we're moving in a dangerous direction
 - It's a downhill journey
 - The going gets easier as we move further ahead
 - One day we're willing to be bound with immoral friends or work associates
 - Next, our close association leads us to make excuses for their sin
 - Ultimately, we'll find sharing it with them
 - This man has found himself in this situation making this reprehensible choice because of a decision he made earlier
 - His decision to abandon the land God gave him to work among another tribe
 - His decision to live among them even after discovering their wickedness
 - His decision to set down roots by buying a house despite the risks
 - Tonight's drama is just the latest link in a chain of events
 - In v.23 we see the man's folly as he pleads with these men to do the right thing
 - Earlier, we saw him whisking the travelers out of the town square
 - So we know he understood the evil that surrounded him
 - Therefore, what good did he expect his pleas to accomplish?
 - He is so willingly blind to the sin that he thinks he can talk the men out of their desires
- After the mob refuses the old man's offer, the Levite guest panics and decides he needs to take matters into his own hands to save his skin

Judg. 19:25 But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and brought her out to them; and they raped her and abused her all night until morning, then let her go at the approach of dawn.

- The man in this verse is the Levite, who grabs his concubine and throws her outside the house to the waiting crowd of men
 - This woman must have put up the fight of her life against her husband as he dragged her kicking and screaming to the door, and then pushes her outside
 - Contrast this moment with the moment earlier in the chapter when the husband was “speaking tenderly” to win back his wife
 - Actions speak louder than words, and here we see the man’s true feelings toward this woman
 - No wonder she felt the need to leave him
 - In case you’re wondering, there are no good guys in this story
 - The old man is clearly compromised by his association with this evil place
 - And now we see the Levite is no man of God
 - He displays a callous indifference to the life of his wife
 - He cares only for himself, and this a perfect reflection of Jewish society as a whole during this time
 - Everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes, but their eyes see nothing but sin
 - They do only what sin can do
 - Notice earlier the old man told the crowd they could do whatever they thought was right with the women
 - That’s the way everyone thought and lived
 - And it very nearly destroyed the Jewish nation in only a matter of a couple of generations
- But this is the book of Judges...so things get even worse

Judg. 19:26 As the day began to dawn, the woman came and fell down at the doorway of the man's house where her master was, until full daylight.

Judg. 19:27 When her master arose in the morning and opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, then behold, his concubine was lying at the doorway of the house with her hands on the threshold.

Judg. 19:28 He said to her, "Get up and let us go," but there was no answer. Then he placed her on the donkey; and the man arose and went to his home.

Judg. 19:29 When he entered his house, he took a knife and laid hold of his concubine and cut her in twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout the territory of Israel.

Judg. 19:30 All who saw it said, "Nothing like this has ever happened or been seen from the day when the sons of Israel came up from the land of Egypt to this day. Consider it, take counsel and speak up!"

- The poor woman is assaulted the entire night by who-knows-how-many men
 - At dawn she is finally released and falls unconscious at the doorstep of the house
 - Notice she arrives at the house at dawn
 - But she remains lying on the ground until "full daylight"
 - The indifference of her husband is astounding
 - He appears to sleep comfortably on this particular morning, such that he sleeps in past dawn
 - As he finally rises from and opens the door to leave, he discovers his wife
 - It seems he wasn't even expecting to find her
 - As I said earlier, she is nothing more than property to him, and so he's acting as if he had just given away an old piece of furniture
 - He never expected to see her again
- In v.28, it's gets worse still, as he callously orders her to get up so they can go
 - But as he calls out for her, she cannot answer
 - At this point, we don't know if she was dead or still in the process of dying
 - Assuming she hasn't died, his lack of compassion reaches a zenith at this point

- He simply loads her up on a donkey like baggage and moves on
- By the time he reaches his home in Ephraim, it appears the girl has died as a result of her trauma the night before
 - And then the man proceeds to do something no one in Israel had ever seen before nor even considered doing
 - He dismembers her body by cutting it into twelve pieces
 - Now, to our modern ears, his actions may be repulsive but they aren't particularly novel
 - We hear of similar things in the news routinely
 - But that just tells you something about the days in which we live
 - It's worth mentioning that it's unclear exactly when this girl died or even what killed her
 - The Septuagint includes a statement in v.28 that she was dead at the doorstep
 - But most manuscripts leave out that detail
 - So it's entirely possible that her husband was her murderer
 - Perhaps she was so wounded by the attack that she was left semi-conscious though alive
 - Perhaps he thought she was going to die anyway
 - Or even worse, perhaps he decided she was more useful to him dead than alive since she had been taken by other men
 - Interestingly, in v.29 it says he laid hold of her
 - But the Hebrew word means to take by force, with strength
 - As if to suggest she resisted him
 - So we have to leave open the possibility that this man's brutality against his wife was even worse than we thought
- In either case, his degree of viciousness bordered on the inhumane
 - Desecrating a dead body was a sign of tremendous disrespect and dishonor in that culture

- In wartime, an army might decapitate the body of a particularly hated enemy, as when David took off Goliath's head
 - But to cut up a body in this way was beyond anyone's imagination
 - He cut her into specifically twelve pieces because he was sending a message to each of the other tribes of Israel besides Benjamin
 - The Levite told the messengers who carried her body to recount the circumstances of her death to each tribe
 - His intention was to shock the conscience of the nation, enflaming their passions and causing them to cry out for justice
 - He wants to mobilize an army for his cause of revenge
- In v. 30, we hear the response of the people as they see the body parts and hear the story of her death
 - They remark that nothing like this has ever happened in Israel
 - The entire atrocity...
 - The inhospitable town, the mob's homosexual demands, the concubine's rape and death and the husband's grisly response...
 - All of it is beyond their comprehension
 - So then they begin to call for exactly the kind of response that the Levite had hoped to illicit
 - They say consider what this means and take counsel, that is learn from this situation what must be done, and then speak up
 - Call out for men to act in revenge
 - And this begins a war against the Benjamites which we see in chapter 20
- Chapter 19 is so revealing of Israel's declining state of culture and morality
 - Everywhere you look in this chapter you see an appearance of kindness, love and morality
 - You see a husband seeking to reconcile with his wife
 - You see a father-in-law offering warm hospitality

- You see a man offering aid to strangers
- You see a nation incensed by injustice and ready to right the wrong
- But as the events play out and we take a closer look, we discover their sense of morality has become untethered from its source, God
 - Morality or the concept of right and wrong isn't the result of evolving standards or the collective wisdom of society
 - Morality comes from the Law Giver as stated in His word
 - If a society is ruled by God's word, as Israel was intended to be, then its views of morality will reflect God's views, at least to a degree
 - But when a society walks away from God and His word, as Israel has done in these days, then morality becomes a matter of convenience and personal opinion
 - People do what is right in their own eyes
- We can see the impact of that thinking clearly in this chapter, because everything the characters do seems to be an act of love but lacks the substance of love
 - The husband seeking reconciliation with his wife was actually something entirely different
 - First, his choice to marry her wasn't an act of love but for the sake of gaining a slave
 - He sees her only as a possession
 - Which allows him to cast her aside when she no longer serves his purposes
 - The father-in-law who showed so much hospitality was actually self-indulgent
 - His show of hospitality was actually motivated by selfish motives, not genuine love
 - His misbehavior led the Levite to depart under risky circumstances

- If he had truly loved this couple, then he wouldn't have allowed his runaway daughter to hide out for 4 months
 - Then we have the old man who appeared to show love in offering to take in this family knowing the evil of the town
 - Yet then he's the first to suggest throwing his daughter and his guest's wife to the mob
 - And even his willingness to hang around this town knowing their depravity shows the compromised state of his morals
 - And the mob in the town wants to have sexual relations, something reserved by God for a loving relationship
 - But they have distorted it in the most perverse way possible
 - And they
 - Finally, we see the hearts of the people of Israel, moved by the violence in their midst, they rally for justice
 - But the irony is this is the same people who couldn't be found to fight the battles the Lord brought them
 - When we studied some of the earliest Judges we noted that the people often resisted the call to enter battle against Israel's enemies
 - It reached the point where men waited for women to lead them into battle
 - And yet under these circumstances, they willingly rush to the fight
 - In other words, everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes
 - And ever since Samuel first introduced that phrase to us, he's been working to explain it in all its ramifications
 - It means people lived according to their own moral compass
 - They followed the rules that seemed best to them
 - And their flesh drove their choices
 - Obviously, God's people can't operate on this basis
 - At the very least, it removes the distinction between God's people and the people of the enemy, which is the world

- And in the long run it means the utter destruction of the people of God
- This is what happens when God's people lives as if there is no king and rejects the Lord's authority in their lives
 - J. Clinton McCann observed:

By describing as clearly and graphically as possible the horrible, terror-filled, violent consequences of human self-assertion and idolatry—that is, everybody doing what is right in their own eyes—Judges 19, the book of Judges, and the prophetic canon invite repentance and conformity of self and society to the just, righteous, and peaceful purposes of God.

Judges 20A

- As we approach the end of our study and as we find the circumstances in Israel growing increasingly dire, I assume you are starting to question whether to keep listening
 - I don't blame you...after all we turn to scripture to be encouraged, inspired and reminded of God's love and goodness
 - And then we hear stories like the one we read last week, and we wince a little and prefer to dwell on better things
 - That's only natural
 - But if that's you, let me remind you that the story isn't over yet
 - I'm not referring to Judges
 - I'm speaking of the story of God's redemptive plan, His plan to deal with this endless downward spiral of sin among His people
 - Because that's where this story is taking us
 - The human heart is desperately wicked and without hope in this world
 - And when men and women live without restraint, sin takes over
 - And few books of scripture demonstrate that truth better than the story of Judges
- But even as the story has taken us to limits of our patience, it's reminded us of why we needed a Savior
 - Of why Christ had to die for us
 - And yet God loved His people so much that He was willing to take that penalty in the most cruel fashion
 - And so as you consider the ugliness of this time, let that truth remind you of how ugly your own sin is to God
 - All sin grieves God's heart
 - And yet our Redeemer is powerful enough to cleanse us of it all

- We'll hear that story in the book of Ruth, which Samuel gives us to finish the time of Judges
- So as the saying goes, it's always darkest before the dawn
- So let's return to the darkness of Judges as we move toward to dawn of Ruth
 - We stopped last week at the end of chapter 19 after the wife of a Levite had been raped and left for dead by the mob in the Benjamite town
 - The husband responded by sending his wife's dismembered body to the twelve tribes as a disturbing message
 - By that message he hoped to trigger a response to exact revenge upon the Benjamites
 - And at the end of chapter 19, we saw the people respond as expected
 - Collectively, the nation cried out for something to be done
 - It's a significant moment in the time of Judges
 - For at least this one moment, the people of Israel have come together in a desire to contend with the sin among them
 - But predictably, the people respond to one sin by acting in even greater sin
 - They start a war against their brothers, which takes us into chapter 20

Judg. 20:1 Then all the sons of Israel from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, came out, and the congregation assembled as one man to the Lord at Mizpah.

Judg. 20:2 The chiefs of all the people, even of all the tribes of Israel, took their stand in the assembly of the people of God, 400,000 foot soldiers who drew the sword.

Judg. 20:3 (Now the sons of Benjamin heard that the sons of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.) And the sons of Israel said, "Tell us, how did this wickedness take place?"

Judg. 20:4 So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, "I came with my concubine to spend the night at Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin.

Judg. 20:5 "But the men of Gibeah rose up against me and surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me; instead, they ravished my concubine so that she died.

Judg. 20:6 "And I took hold of my concubine and cut her in pieces and sent her throughout the land of Israel's inheritance; for they have committed a lewd and disgraceful act in Israel.

- The nation's response to this atrocity is somewhat reminiscent of how our nation responded to the disaster of September 11, 2001
 - The people became of one mind that something must be done
 - In the process that follows, we'll see glimpses of righteousness
 - Men seeking for justice and even inquiring of God for direction at a moment
 - But since this is the time of Judges, their actions remain untethered from the Law of God or from the heart of God
 - Consequently, the results will not be justice
 - Samuel says that men from Dan to Beersheba and Gilead joined together to fort an army some 400,000 strong
 - As you remember from a few chapters earlier, Dan had relocated to the north of Israel
 - And Beersheba is the southern most town in Judah
 - While Gilead is the eastern border of Israel
 - Therefore, this phrase means the whole of the nation from north to south to the edges of the land in the east
 - In fact, this phrase became a common saying in Israel during the time of the monarchy to describe a united Israel
- At this assembly, the chiefs of the tribes hold a convocation in Mitzpah, which was in the territory of Benjamin just a few miles north of Gibeah
 - This meeting is a trial to determine the facts and the response
 - But notice the troops have already been gathered
 - So you get a sense of where this is going before it starts
 - In v.3 we're told that the Benjamites are aware of the meeting
 - The people of Israel gave Benjamin notice of this trial
 - They expected the leaders of Benjamin to appear and give a defense against the accusations
 - But it appears that Benjamin ignored the summons

- So the convocation begins with a testimony from the Levite who cut up his wife
 - The Levite is the star witness
 - They ask him to explain what happened
 - But in this case the Levite elects **not** to tell the whole truth
- In the broad strokes, the Levite relates the facts correctly, but he overlooks some key details intentionally to ensure the result goes his way
 - For example, in v.5 he says that the men of Benjamin wished to kill him but killed his wife instead
 - That's true, but he left out the part where he threw his bride to the crowd
 - Obviously, the Levite's omission doesn't lessen the sin of the men Gibeah
 - But we have to wonder if the crowd would have been so ready to go to war had they known the whole truth
 - Furthermore, the Levite testifies that he received his bride dead and so he cut her up to send her around Israel
 - Once again, he paints a picture that favors himself
 - Was she truly dead when he cut her up? Maybe
 - But even still, his response was equally troubling
 - Yet he piously says he did what he did in response to a lewd and disgraceful act
 - Would this national response have resulted had he merely brought his concern to the judge of his day?
 - His selective memory of the event illustrates how everyone judged sin according to a preferred perspective
 - He recognized the sin of the mob in Gibeah plainly
 - But he conveniently overlooked his own contributions to the situation
 - And he's not followed the Law in seeking justice himself

- He hasn't appealed to the representatives God assigned to judge Israel's sin
- Instead, he's acting as a vigilante seeking justice in his own way
- As a result of his decision to incite his brothers to bloodshed, this man will trigger the death of 65,000 fellow Jews'
- That is not a just response
- So as he finishes his testimony, the Levite once again calls for action

Judg. 20:7 "Behold, all you sons of Israel, give your advice and counsel here."

- The Levite says, in so many words, "don't you see what must be done in the face of this offense?"
 - He's clearly working to manipulate the minds and hearts of these people
 - He's acting out of revenge, which is a sinful desire in itself
- Israel's own law taught the people to be patient and rely on the Lord for protection in the face of your enemies

Deut. 32:35 'Vengeance is Mine, and retribution,
 In due time their foot will slip;
 For the day of their calamity is near,
 And the impending things are hastening upon them.'

Deut. 32:36 "For the Lord will vindicate His people,
 And will have compassion on His servants,
 When He sees that their strength is gone,
 And there is none remaining, bond or free.

- And Proverbs teaches Israel not to act in this way against one another

Prov. 24:28 Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause,
 And do not deceive with your lips.

Prov. 24:29 Do not say, "Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me;
 I will render to the man according to his work."

- So while this man was wronged, but his response is equally wrong, and so is the response of the leaders of the tribes

Judg. 20:8 Then all the people arose as one man, saying, “Not one of us will go to his tent, nor will any of us return to his house.

Judg. 20:9 “But now this is the thing which we will do to Gibeah; we will go up against it by lot.

Judg. 20:10 “And we will take 10 men out of 100 throughout the tribes of Israel, and 100 out of 1,000, and 1,000 out of 10,000 to supply food for the people, that when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, they may punish them for all the disgraceful acts that they have committed in Israel.”

Judg. 20:11 Thus all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united as one man.

- In v.8 the leaders say no one is going home until this matter is settled
 - Their response sounds very brave and manly, but it's not particularly godly
 - No one said let's go home and pray about this
 - They are rushing to act while in the heat of the moment
 - Because no one really cares what God thinks
 - Everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes
 - And they want to do it while passions are enflamed
 - No one makes good decisions when acting in the heat of the moment
 - The Lord commanded His people in the Law, and likewise He directs the Church in the NT, to leave room for His wrath
 - We are to respect God's purposes in everything that transpires in our life
 - Concern yourself with following Him, so that even when He permits unpleasant things to enter our lives, we trust Him with the outcome
 - Don't step in by your own hand to satisfy your own sinful desires for retribution or revenge
 - Instead, leave room for Him to work, which means don't add a sinful response on top of the sin of others
 - This people are not working for justice

- Instead, the people are assembling to feed their fleshly desire for satisfaction in the face of his loss and humiliation
- They are not concerned with God's will or their own sin...they are only concerned with revenge
- So in preparation for the battle, they begin to count out a proportional number of each tribe to support the army
 - They are taking measures to work in a united fashion for a long battle
 - Once again, they are assuming war is the necessary outcome
 - No one says let's go ask Samuel or whoever was judging Israel for advice
 - And Israel is willing to devote it's entire effort to the task
 - They apportion men to the battle and to the work of feeding the soldiers at a rate of 10%
 - This is an allusion to the Law's requirement for tithing
 - In other words, a people who were supposed to give their whole heart, mind, soul and strength to serving God have instead turned their devotion and energy to the pursuit of revenge for one act of sin
 - Take note of how often we see the phrase "as one man"
 - It appears in v.1, 8 and 11
 - The phrase stands out because it's so unusual to seeing Israel acting in unison about anything
 - It was an anomaly in the age of men doing what was right in their own eyes
- So as we move ahead to the next scene, keep in mind that a people who are never united in anything God has commanded are finally united
 - But their unison leads to near catastrophe in the nation, leading to a tribe nearly being decimated
 - Ironically, we're watching a people finally unite but still living in sin, apart from God

- It's a lesson in how the sin of men, unrestrained by submission to God's will, will do more harm than good
- In other words, unity among sinners doesn't produce righteousness
- It merely magnifies sin
- Because we cannot find righteousness nor justice in our own power
- After convocation, the leaders of the tribes enter the territory of the Benjaminites demanding to have the men of Gibeah who killed the woman

Judg. 20:12 Then the tribes of Israel sent men through the entire tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What is this wickedness that has taken place among you?

Judg. 20:13 "Now then, deliver up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and remove this wickedness from Israel." But the sons of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the sons of Israel.

Judg. 20:14 The sons of Benjamin gathered from the cities to Gibeah, to go out to battle against the sons of Israel.

Judg. 20:15 From the cities on that day the sons of Benjamin were numbered, 26,000 men who draw the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah who were numbered, 700 choice men.

Judg. 20:16 Out of all these people 700 choice men were left-handed; each one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.

- Again, this course wasn't wrong in itself
 - The Law demanded that Israel respond in this way to this kind of sin
 - And Benjamin should have turned them over to justice
 - But the justice should have been conducted by the judges according to the Law
 - This is mob justice
 - Instead, the men of Benjamin decide to reject the authority of the other tribes and prepare for war instead
 - We probably can't find a better example of men doing what is right in their own eyes

- What basis could the Benjamites have for refusing justice in this matter?
- It appears they merely wanted to protect their pride and independence
- Notice, the author emphasizes in v.13 that the Benjamites wouldn't listen to the voice of their brothers
 - They chose to see their fellow tribes as adversaries rather than brothers in a united cause of justice
 - And so they acted defensively
- The extent to which a people will stand up to defend evil is a measure of the moral decay within their community
 - And Paul says that the society of the last days – our days – is a society that hates good
 - And celebrates evil
 - And we can certainly see the same tendency of our culture to side with and protect the evil doer
 - Which tells us that the same evil infecting the Benjamites is still with us today
- So Benjamin assembled a sizable army to fight the other tribes
 - You might assume that they wouldn't have a chance, but the tribe of Benjamin was known for its warriors
 - In fact, Jacob's prophetic blessing on this tribe describes their military prowess

Gen. 49:27 “Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;
In the morning he devours the prey,
And in the evening he divides the spoil.”

- So the battle isn't as one-sided as you might expect
- In fact, the town of Gibeah supplies 700 men who were the Special Forces of their day
 - These men were especially skilled in use of the sling

- A sling in this day was not the children's toy we are familiar with today
- This was a pouch of leather with long cords tied to the ends
- A skilled thrower could place a stone as large as 1 pound in the pouch and spin it overhead at speeds that approached 90-miles/hour
- By releasing one set of cords, the thrower could place this projectile on target with remarkable accuracy
- It was a deadly weapon
- These men are skilled in this technique, but curiously they are all left-handed fighters
 - You may remember our second judge, Ehud, was also a left-handed Benjamite
 - In fact, this story might have been set in the same general period of history as Ehud
- We learned then that Ehud may have fought left-handed because he lacked the use of his right hand
 - His left-handedness was seen as a deficit
 - In Ehud's case, it reflected God's willingness to do great things with weakness
 - But in this case, it's telling a different story
- Here we have 700 skilled and powerful men, not weaklings
 - And they are all left-handed by design, hand-picked to be in this unit
 - This is a special unit that the Benjamites assembled and trained to create an advantage
 - Like a baseball team that fields a left-handed pitcher on the mound to create an advantage against certain batters
 - By operating in unison against the usual convention, this unit could gain a tactical advantage in combat
 - But symbolically, their distinction is a commentary on the spiritual heart of this tribe

- The name Benjamin means "son of my right hand"
- Remember, Benjamin was Jacob's favorite son
- And so the name reflects being close to father's authority and honor
- And yet the tribe of Benjamin couldn't be farther from God's heart in this matter
 - So we see the evil of their hearts symbolized by this band of warriors
 - The tribe of sons of the right-hand is placing its trust in left-handed men
- All is ready for battle, and now finally the people appeal to the Lord for direction

Judg. 20:17 Then the men of Israel besides Benjamin were numbered, 400,000 men who draw the sword; all these were men of war.

Judg. 20:18 Now the sons of Israel arose, went up to Bethel, and inquired of God and said, "Who shall go up first for us to battle against the sons of Benjamin?" Then the Lord said, "Judah shall go up first."

- The tabernacle of the Lord was in Bethel in these days, so the men of Israel decide to approach the Lord for direction and blessing
 - This certainly sounds like an encouraging development
 - Finally we see Israel taking steps to seek the Lord's counsel, or so it seems
 - But as we look a little deeper, we'll see that their actions are not necessarily as they seem
 - The first thing we notice is that that name for God in v.18 is not the personal name for the Lord
 - Notice in our English Bibles it says the men inquired of "God"
 - The Hebrew word for God is elohim, which is the generic word for God
 - It is not the personal name of God, Yahweh

- So the text says that the people when to inquire of God, but they aren't approaching Him on the basis of a personal knowledge of Him
 - The people of Israel are far from God, such that they don't even address Him personally
 - He is like a pagan god to them
- And now that they are approaching Him, they do so merely for advice on the order of battle
 - They want to know which tribe should lead them into battle
 - The Lord directs that Judah should go up first
- It's no coincidence that the book of Judges began with Judah leading the people into battle
 - In chapter 1 the Lord directed that Judah should enter into battle first against the Canaanites
 - Only back in chapter 1:1 the people approached Yahweh
 - In this case they approach Elohim
 - And in both cases, the Lord said the people shall be led by Judah
 - The connection between the beginning and end of the book is intended to catch our attention so we can see how the nation has slid into apostasy
 - They used to approach the Lord by name seeking to do His will
 - Now they approach Him without knowing Him and so that they can get His blessing to do their own will
 - They used to fight the enemies of Israel
 - Now they fight one another
 - But in both cases, Judah is the key
 - The mention of Judah leading Israel is looking forward to the coming monarchy
 - One day Judah will lead the people into righteousness
 - One day Jesus will come

Judges 20B

- In our last study, we stopped at the moment in chapter 20 when the tribes of Israel were organizing to go to battle against one of their own: Benjamin
 - The tribes conducted an inquiry into the matter of the Ephraimite and his concubine
 - They determined that the Benjamites were guilty of extreme sin
 - And so they determined to do something about it
 - As we studied these events last time, we noted that the tribes are still doing what is right in their own eyes
 - They aren't apply God's Law nor were they seeking justice from their appointed judges
 - Instead, they were applying justice selectively according to their own wisdom and desires
 - They overlooked their own sin and the sin of the Ephraimite to deal with the sin of the Benjamites
 - While the Benjamites were willing to protect perverse men within their tribe in order to maintain independence and pride
 - In fact, self-dependence seems to be the chief value among all the tribes
 - The Law Moses gave them was suppose to unite the people of Israel into a single nation that followed the Lord
 - Instead, we have thirteen tribes doing what each feels is right in their own eyes
 - And none are showing any regard for God
- As we ended last week, the tribes approached the tabernacle in Bethel and inquired of God the text said in v.18
 - But remember, the word for God in that verse was Elohim, not Yahweh, His personal name
 - Elohim is the generic word for god, any god

- Which means that the people approached seeking "a" God without a personal understanding of the God
- They
- That subtle detail was the clue to tell us this nation approached Yahweh as pagans approach their gods, in ritual only
 - They came seeking a superstitious blessing from a distant God
 - The only question they asked was which tribe should enter battle first
 - To which God answered "Judah"
 - His answer was a allusion to the day when Judah will produce the King Who will lead Israel out of sin
- So with that answer, the tribes ready for battle against Benjamin
 - The Lord answered their question
 - But that doesn't means He supports their actions
- On the contrary, the Lord is going to use the pride and independence of these tribes against them to teach them a lesson

Judg. 20:19 So the sons of Israel arose in the morning and camped against Gibeah.

Judg. 20:20 The men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin, and the men of Israel arrayed for battle against them at Gibeah.

Judg. 20:21 Then the sons of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and felled to the ground on that day 22,000 men of Israel.

Judg. 20:22 But the people, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves and arrayed for battle again in the place where they had arrayed themselves the first day.

Judg. 20:23 The sons of Israel went up and wept before the Lord until evening, and inquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall we again draw near for battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin?" And the Lord said, "Go up against him."

Judg. 20:24 Then the sons of Israel came against the sons of Benjamin the second day.

Judg. 20:25 Benjamin went out against them from Gibeah the second day and felled to the ground again 18,000 men of the sons of Israel; all these drew the sword.

- Twice the people of Israel went against Benjamin and twice they were defeated
 - You might think that the Lord would have allowed these tribes to defeat Benjamin, since he gave them instructions on how to enter the battle

- That's the what these tribes thought too
- But the Lord's first concern wasn't the outcome of the battle
- In all situations the Lord's first concern isn't our happiness...it's our holiness
- And there's a need for a whole lot of holiness in this story
- For example, Benjamin was acting in evil and certainly deserved to be defeated in battle
 - They needed to see that their play at independence wasn't going to be a successful strategy
 - But humbling one tribe wasn't going to solve the problem of the other 12 tribes
 - The rest were just as disobedient in their own ways
- In fact the entire nation is acting in disobedience to the Lord
 - Overall, the problem in Israel is their lack of submission to the Lord's authority and to His Law
 - So the Lord desires to correct the other tribes even as prepares to bring justice to Benjamin
 - And the process begins by putting the sons of Israel to the test
- Notice in the first engagement they lost 22,000 men and in the second battle, they lost another 18,000
 - The total is 40,000, and 40 is the number of testing
 - What the text is telling us is the Lord set Israel against itself to teach the tribes a lesson
 - He allowed one tribe to defeat 12 tribes so communicate his displeasure at their arrogance, independence and disobedience
 - He tested their hearts by allowing defeat
 - So that each time they returned to Him, they learned to submit to His authority a little more
 - Notice the first time, they asked merely who should go up first
 - They didn't even use God's personal name

- After the first defeat, the tribes were perplexed and saddened
- They expected a victory simply because God answered them
- They never asked the Lord if He wanted them to fight or even if He would grant victory
 - He gave them the answer they asked for and nothing more
 - But then He led them into defeat to make a point
- The Israelites were treating God like a genie in a bottle
 - They acted as if they controlled the relationship, what little relationship they had
 - They approached God when they needed something, and they asked the questions
 - God merely answers and grants blessing
- Let's take note of how God responds to those who approach Him in a superficial way
 - If we reduce our relationship with the Lord to merely a relationship of convenience, then we should expect to see similar consequences
 - The Lord is not our genie
 - We can't control the conversation nor demand certain outcomes as if our agenda is His agenda
 - He has made a way for us to know Him so that we might become more like Him
 - If try to turn things around thinking the relationship is about making God meet our desires, then the Lord is likely respond to us as he does these Israelites
 - We may find our plans in ruins wondering why the Lord let us down
 - God frustrates plans to get our attention so we'll stop treating Him as a genie
 - He'll brings us to a point where we humble ourselves and seek Him

- Because holiness is the goal, and holiness brings true, eternal happiness
- Notice the effect the Lord's testing had on the Israelites
 - After the first loss, the people got their wake up call
 - They knew something wasn't right because they assumed the Lord would deliver them
 - But the shock didn't correct their hearts entirely
 - Notice in v.22 the people respond by encouraging themselves
 - Literally, the text says the people "made themselves strong"
 - Despite the setback, they are determined to depend upon their own strength
 - They assume they simply need to try harder
 - But the loss has shaken their confidence, so before the second battle, the people return to the Lord again in Bethel
 - The text says this time the people wept and inquired of Yahweh
 - This time the people use the personal name of God
 - That's an improvement from the previous visit at Bethel
 - They moved from a people who believe a god exists but who don't have the need or interest in pursuing a real relationship
 - To a people who recognize that the Lord God of Israel is their God and He is present in the tabernacle
 - Nevertheless, their weeping is nothing more than a response to the deaths of their brethren, it's not a sign of repentance before the Lord
 - And until they are repenting and ready to humble themselves, the Lord isn't done testing them
 - They are still showing self-dependence, declaring they must make themselves strong again
 - And they have made no attempt to acknowledge much less address the sin that separates them from the Lord

- So the Lord tells them to go up against Benjamin again, but once more the Lord withholds victory
- In v.24 the people attack a second time, and a second time they are defeated
 - After the second attack, 40,000 have died
 - Maybe from the shock of the loss
 - Or maybe from the coded meaning of the number 40
 - Somehow the people get the point of God's testing and return to Him with the proper perspective

Judg. 20:26 Then all the sons of Israel and all the people went up and came to Bethel and wept; thus they remained there before the Lord and fasted that day until evening. And they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord.

Judg. 20:27 The sons of Israel inquired of the Lord (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days,

Judg. 20:28 and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, Aaron's son, stood before it to minister in those days), saying, "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?" And the Lord said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand."

- Once again the people return to Bethel
 - But notice how they approach the Lord this time
 - First they weep and fast before the Lord until evening
 - Weeping by itself isn't always a sign of repentance, but there's no mistaking the meaning of fasting
 - Secondly, they offer burnt offerings and peace offerings
 - These were required under the Law before a person could approach the Lord
 - Where before the people approached arrogantly without acknowledging sin, now they confirm to the Law
 - Finally, they approach the Lord through the High Priest
 - It's not clear that the High Priest was involved in the earlier encounters

- If they weren't making sacrifices, there would have been no role for the priest in interceding for the people
- But now the people recognize they need an intercessor before they can expect the Lord to consider their petitions favorably
- This marks a bright moment in an otherwise dark season for the nation
 - They have moved from arrogance to repentance
 - From independence to submission to the Lord
 - But it required the deaths of 40,000 men to accomplish this outcome in their hearts
 - Don't underestimate how much the Lord desires our obedience,
 - Consider what He was willing to do here
 - He allowed 40,000 disobedient Jews to perish in order to impress upon His people that they must address sin and seek for holiness
 - And this comes before the Lord has even begun to address the sin of the Benjamites!
 - Once again the point in our relationship is holiness, not self-satisfaction
 - Now that the people have approached Yahweh in humility, the Lord tells them what they've been waiting to hear
 - He tells them to go up again and then He adds that this time they will be successful
 - Though the Lord sent them twice before, only now He is willing to grant them victory
 - If we want to work in God's will and receive His blessings, we must first approach Him on His terms
 - In Israel's day, the Lord demanded the people approach Him according to the Law and through the Levitical priests
 - Today, the Lord has open the way to Himself for all people through His Son, Jesus Christ

- We approach the Father through His Son and only through His Son
- And like Israel, if we try to approach the Lord some other way apart from Christ, ten we will be sorely disappointed
- We'll lose in the end
- Moving forward, the Lord has granted the other tribes the opportunity for victory in battle against the Benjamites
 - Because there is still the matter of judging that tribe just as the Lord did the other tribes
 - The other tribes have lost 40,000 men because of the stubbornness of their hearts
 - Not it's Benjamin's turn to suffer God's wrath for their sin under the Law
 - And to be clear, Benjamin's chief sin was not their sexual sin in Gibeah
 - It was rebellion against the Lord by siding with those evil men over preserving unity with the other tribes of Israel
- So then then Israelites enter battle a third time, this time with the Lord's blessings for a good outcome

Judg. 20:29 So Israel set men in ambush around Gibeah.

Judg. 20:30 The sons of Israel went up against the sons of Benjamin on the third day and arrayed themselves against Gibeah as at other times.

Judg. 20:31 The sons of Benjamin went out against the people and were drawn away from the city, and they began to strike and kill some of the people as at other times, on the highways, one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah, and in the field, about thirty men of Israel.

Judg. 20:32 The sons of Benjamin said, "They are struck down before us, as at the first." But the sons of Israel said, "Let us flee that we may draw them away from the city to the highways."

Judg. 20:33 Then all the men of Israel arose from their place and arrayed themselves at Baal-tamar; and the men of Israel in ambush broke out of their place, even out of Maareh-geba.

Judg. 20:34 When ten thousand choice men from all Israel came against Gibeah, the battle became fierce; but Benjamin did not know that disaster was close to them.

Judg. 20:35 And the Lord struck Benjamin before Israel, so that the sons of Israel destroyed 25,100 men of Benjamin that day, all who draw the sword.

Judg. 20:36 So the sons of Benjamin saw that they were defeated.

- This section gives us an overview of the battle
 - The basic battle plan is to draw the Benjamite army away from the city where they can be ambushed and surrounded
 - Initially, the tribes send a small force against the Benjamites in Gibeah
 - The Benjamites respond by killing some of their attackers in an skirmish outside the city
 - They assume they are due another easy victory
 - But this was merely a diversionary tactic on the part of the other tribes to draw Benjamin out into the open
 - The tribes ultimately plan to ambush Benjamin
 - When the smaller force retreats from the battle, a large army of Benjamites chase after them
 - In the process, the Benjamites leave the city unguarded just as the tribes expected
 - With the city vulnerable, a larger army of 10,000 elite troops descend upon the city and defeat it
 - Notice in v.35 we're told that the Lord delivered a victory to the tribes as He promised
 - This success wasn't due to superior military prowess
 - It was the result of the Lord determining the outcome to suit His purposes
- But of course, we're still in the time of Judges, and so even when the people of Israel follow God, nevertheless they still find a way to do what was right in their own eyes
 - So in the next section we get a detailed description of the battle, where we find the people going beyond the needs of the battle

Judg. 20:36 ... When the men of Israel gave ground to Benjamin because they relied on the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah,

Judg. 20:37 the men in ambush hurried and rushed against Gibeah; the men in ambush also deployed and struck all the city with the edge of the sword.

Judg. 20:38 Now the appointed sign between the men of Israel and the men in ambush was that they would make a great cloud of smoke rise from the city.

Judg. 20:39 Then the men of Israel turned in the battle, and Benjamin began to strike and kill about thirty men of Israel, for they said, "Surely they are defeated before us, as in the first battle."

Judg. 20:40 But when the cloud began to rise from the city in a column of smoke, Benjamin looked behind them; and behold, the whole city was going up in smoke to heaven.

Judg. 20:41 Then the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were terrified; for they saw that disaster was close to them.

Judg. 20:42 Therefore, they turned their backs before the men of Israel toward the direction of the wilderness, but the battle overtook them while those who came out of the cities destroyed them in the midst of them.

Judg. 20:43 They surrounded Benjamin, pursued them without rest and trod them down opposite Gibeah toward the east.

Judg. 20:44 Thus 18,000 men of Benjamin fell; all these were valiant warriors.

Judg. 20:45 The rest turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, but they caught 5,000 of them on the highways and overtook them at Gidom and killed 2,000 of them.

Judg. 20:46 So all of Benjamin who fell that day were 25,000 men who draw the sword; all these were valiant warriors.

Judg. 20:47 But 600 men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and they remained at the rock of Rimmon four months.

Judg. 20:48 The men of Israel then turned back against the sons of Benjamin and struck them with the edge of the sword, both the entire city with the cattle and all that they found; they also set on fire all the cities which they found.

- This detailed account repeats the story, but this time we hear the gory details
 - Specifically, once the Benjamite city is taken, the tribes begin to sack and burn the city
 - The plan had been to use the burning of the city as a sign to the fleeing decoys to stop and begin driving the Benjamites back home
 - Sure enough, when the Benjamites saw their city burning, they turned and fled toward the wilderness hills seeking refuge

- By then, the army in the city came out and together with the smaller decoy force, they closed in on the Benjamites and killed all the soldiers
 - A total of 18,000 were killed
 - But that wasn't enough for the tribes
 - They ran after those fleeing and killed many of them
 - And after that, we read in v.48 that the people kept the fight up,
 - Eventually, they burned every single city in the entire territory of Benjamin
- They were seeking the total annihilation of the tribe it would seem
 - This kind of severe treatment was excessive and likely violated the Law against taking revenge
 - After taking the city, there was no reason to continue on in the pursuit
 - But this seemed right in the eyes of the people of Israel, so in the process, they kill all but 600 of the men in the entire tribe of Benjamin
- This introduces a new problem in Israel
 - The potential extinction of one of the tribes of Israel
 - The 600 men who are hiding in the rock of Rimmon are the last men descended from Benjamin
 - If these men die without producing heirs, the promises of God are in jeopardy
 - The entire nation is in jeopardy
 - That's how serious this sin is in the nation
 - That's why the writer places this story at the end of the book
 - It's the climactic conclusion of all the sin and all the rebellion taking place in the nation during these days
 - The very existence of Israel is at risk because the nation has become so disobedient

- Just a few generations earlier, they were entering the land triumphantly under Yeshua, the man Joshua who pictures Jesus
 - And now they are tearing each other apart
 - Barely acknowledging God or each other
 - And without a concern for God's law or for righteousness
 - Each doing what was right in his own eyes
- We have one chapter remaining, to see how Benjamin is rescued from certain destruction
- And then we'll move on to the final story in the three-part ending to this book
 - The story of Ruth

Judges 21

- We've come to the end of the book of Judges
 - Today we study the final chapter, the chapter that concludes the story of the Benjamite civil war in Israel
 - This is the second of two stories written to conclude and summarize the entire time of Judges
 - The writer of Judges wanted to capture the spirit of rebellion and ignorance that dominated during this period of Israel's history
 - So he selected these two stories about events that took place at earlier points in the 300 years of Judges to represent the entire time
 - A time of men doing what was right in their own eyes
 - My guess is the writer felt these accounts were his best examples of the trouble of this time
 - He must have expected that a retelling of these stories would lead his readers to shake their heads in disbelief and disgust at the anarchy in Israel
 - Even more, they demonstrate how depraved, wicked and self-deceived the human heart becomes apart from the Lord
- The second account began in chapter 19, and it tells of how the tribes of Israel entered into civil war over a single incident involving an Ephraimite man and his concubine
 - Twelve of the tribes decided to attack the tribe of Benjamin in retribution for the atrocity in Gibeah
 - They were so hell-bent on revenge that they were willing to put one of the tribes of God's people to an end
 - And they very nearly succeeded
 - After two set-backs, the Lord granted the tribes a victory against the Benjamites
 - But then the tribes went beyond what was proper or necessary

- They chased down as many Benjaminite men as they could find among all the cities of the tribe, killing all but 600
- Those 600 remaining refugees hid in the mountains
- The fate of the entire tribe of Benjamin now hung on the future of these men
- The foolishness of the tribes of Israel went far beyond merely acting with excessive force against their brothers
 - The tribes were placing their very existence at risk
 - It's clear they have no appreciation for the purpose of Israel in God's plan for all nations
- The Benjamites were not just another group of people living in the land
 - They were one-thirteenth of a nation God created to save humanity
 - Israel is the wife of Jehovah
 - Through Israel the Lord will bring the prophets, the covenants, the temple, and ultimately the Messiah Himself
 - Yet here they are preparing to destroy one another, beginning with the tribe of Benjamin
 - If these people had understood how important the nation was to the plan of God, they would never act in this way
 - But they only have eyes for earthly concerns
 - They are doing only what is right in their own eyes
 - Which is to say, they were doing sinful things
 - Because what seems right in the eyes of evil men is always sin
 - Interestingly, this moment was foreshadowed prophetically in Genesis in the story of Jacob and his sons
 - After Joseph's reported death, Jacob refused to let the brothers take Benjamin back to Egypt
 - He said he didn't trust his sons to protect Benjamin's life
 - Judah had to step forward – to go up first – to guarantee Benjamin's life before Jacob would allow Benjamin to go

- Now we see Jacob's fears for Benjamin were prophetic, in that his brothers are indeed seeking his destruction
- So as we enter our final chapter, the question we need to answer is what will this disobedient and evil people do in the face of this self-induced disaster?
 - And how will God ensure the continuation of His people while holding Israel accountable?
 - And as usual, the peoples' response will be sin on top of sin
 - They propose solutions that only further the anarchy
 - And I need to warn you that the narration in chapter 21 approaches the circumstances somewhat dispassionately
 - It would be easy to conclude from a quick reading that the Lord isn't particularly bothered over the events
 - But that's like failing to notice someone's dry sense of humor
 - If the joke is delivered with a straight face, you have to read between the lines to see the sarcasm
 - Similarly, the events in chapter 21 are not at all in keeping with the Lord's desires
 - He allows them to happen, self-evidently
 - But He does so merely to allow the people to serve as a negative example
 - So that we can see clearly the impact of their sin on Jewish society
 - Thankfully, the Lord has a plan to correct for all these problems
 - That solution is presented as a final story from this period of Jewish history
 - The story isn't in Judges, though
 - It's in the book of Ruth that follows the book of Judges
- So let's enter the final sad episode of this book, paying attention to the mistakes these people pile atop of previous sins

- It begins with the men of Israel acting like someone who awakens from a drinking binge to discover the regrettable things he's done while out of his senses
 - They are suddenly faced with an urgent need to save the very group of men they were working so hard to destroy earlier

Judg. 21:1 Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpah, saying, "None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin in marriage."

Judg. 21:2 So the people came to Bethel and sat there before God until evening, and lifted up their voices and wept bitterly.

Judg. 21:3 They said, "Why, O Lord, God of Israel, has this come about in Israel, so that one tribe should be missing today in Israel?"

Judg. 21:4 It came about the next day that the people arose early and built an altar there and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.

Judg. 21:5 Then the sons of Israel said, "Who is there among all the tribes of Israel who did not come up in the assembly to the Lord?" For they had taken a great oath concerning him who did not come up to the Lord at Mizpah, saying, "He shall surely be put to death."

Judg. 21:6 And the sons of Israel were sorry for their brother Benjamin and said, "One tribe is cut off from Israel today.

- The people awaken to the reality of a tribe on the brink of extinction
 - Now we wonder why this is such a big deal
 - After all, aren't 600 men enough to repopulate a tribe?
 - After all, Noah and his family repopulated the entire earth
 - Well, ordinarily that would be true, except the people of Israel dug their hole even deeper
 - In vs.1-6 we learn that the sin of Israel went much further than merely murdering every Benjamite they could get their hands on
 - Sometime during the events of chapter 20, the men of Israel made every tribe swear an oath
 - The oath was a "wife oath" or promise to never again give their daughters into marriage to a Benjamite
 - All the Benjamite women were killed in the genocide, so these 600 surviving men need to find wives from other tribes

- But as the people of Israel contemplate the plight of their Benjamite brothers, they come to realize they have tied their own hands
- They were now under obligation by their oath to deny those 600 Benjamites wives
- The tribe seems destined to go extinct
- This oath was a real barrier for Israel
 - An oath was a solemn thing, a commitment that is binding until death
 - If a man should break this oath, the rest of Israel was bound to execute such a person
 - Men believed that if an oath was made before God and then broken, God Himself would bring vengeance
 - So no one was going to be the first person to test the oath
 - Furthermore, in v.5 we learn the tribes took a second oath to kill town or village in Israel that refused to contribute soldiers to the battle against Benjamin
 - They took the second oath to compel participation in the war by all other tribes
 - And all those who participated in the battle also took the wife oath
 - So as Israel seeks wives for the Benjamites, they realize in v.6 that they are between a rock and a hard place
 - Everyone who participated in the battle against Benjamin pledged a wife oath never to give wives to the Benjamites
 - And those in Israel who didn't participate in the battle must be executed for not taking up arms
 - So it seems there is no hope of finding wives and As the people say, one of the tribes is cut off
- This situation illustrates perfectly why scripture warns us never to take oaths that bind us before God
 - The reason is because we cannot be sure what God will do in the future

- And if you cannot control the future, then how can you be sure your interests will be well served by your commitment?
- What seemed like a good thing in the beginning might prove to be a terrible idea later
- That's what we see here
 - Israel was now committed by its own word to doing something contrary to its own best interests
 - Yet no matter how the circumstances transpire, God expects us to keep our oaths
 - That's why Jesus said don't make oaths before God...just determine to keep your promises when you say "yes" and "no"
- These people have acted rashly and sinfully in making vows against their brothers, and yet they don't see their predicament that way
 - Notice that as the people weep and lament in v.3, they blame the Lord for the situation
 - They ask God how He could allow this to happen, as if it was His idea to extinguish one of the tribes of Israel
 - The Lord didn't prevent it from happening, but that doesn't mean it was His fault
 - No more than Adam's fall in the Garden was God's fault
 - On the contrary, the people are standing in this situation because they are living without regard for the Lord or His law
 - In fact, the nation is acting exactly opposite to the Lord's commands
 - In Deuteronomy 7 the Lord instructed the nation to extinguish all the people of Canaan upon entering the land
 - And not to marry the women of Canaan lest they become entangled in idol worship
 - Now we're about to see Israel doing exactly the opposite
 - They are extinguishing away their own people in the tribe of Benjamin

- And by their stupid oath, the people seem to leave the surviving Benjamites with no choice but to marry Canaanites
- In all that we've studied in this book, all the tragedy, all the depravity and arrogance, this is the icing on that cake of sin
 - The people of God are doing the enemy's work for him
 - They are murdering thousands of their own in the land
 - While preparing to intermarry with the very people who live under God's curse
 - I imagine the enemy and his demons were celebrating in this day, giddy at the prospect of watching Israel destroy itself
 - But we know the Lord will not allow his people to come to their end, so the rest of the chapter describes how Benjamin survived
 - But as we read what happens, take note that the solution is not one given by God
 - It comes from the very same group who created the problem in the first place
 - And it comes in the very same way, with men doing what was right in their own eyes

Judg. 21:7 "What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since we have sworn by the Lord not to give them any of our daughters in marriage?"

Judg. 21:8 And they said, "What one is there of the tribes of Israel who did not come up to the Lord at Mizpah?" And behold, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh-gilead to the assembly.

Judg. 21:9 For when the people were numbered, behold, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead was there.

Judg. 21:10 And the congregation sent 12,000 of the valiant warriors there, and commanded them, saying, "Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the little ones."

Judg. 21:11 "This is the thing that you shall do: you shall utterly destroy every man and every woman who has lain with a man."

Judg. 21:12 And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead 400 young virgins who had not known a man by lying with him; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

Judg. 21:13 Then the whole congregation sent word and spoke to the sons of Benjamin who were at the rock of Rimmon, and proclaimed peace to them.

Judg. 21:14 Benjamin returned at that time, and they gave them the women whom they had kept alive from the women of Jabesh-gilead; yet they were not enough for them.

Judg. 21:15 And the people were sorry for Benjamin because the Lord had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.

- We see how the solution begins in v.7...not with a word from the Lord, not through a judge or prophet, but from the people themselves
 - They ask what should we do to solve this problem?
 - More specifically, they ask how can we get around our own oath?
 - In other words, they want to violate the spirit of their oath while appearing to keep the letter of the law
 - People in general, and especially the Jewish people, have always been experts at this sort of thing
 - The Pharisee and scribes were always on the lookout for ways to avoid their own rules and circumvent the Law without appearing to violate the law
 - Sinful men want the credit for piety without actually denying themselves the pleasures of sin
 - We want to be righteous in the eyes of men only
- As the people seek for a solution to their dilemma, they find hope in v.8 as they learn that one village in Israel didn't heed the call to join the battle
 - The town of Jabesh-gilead was located on the east side of the Jordan river near the edge of Jewish settlement in the land
 - The people of Israel are under oath to destroy the inhabitants of this town
 - Yet they see this town as source of wives for the Benjamites
 - How will they get around their vow though?
 - Simple...they ignore it at least part of it
 - They elect to send 12,000 warriors to destroy the people of the town

- More vengeance on top of vengeance, murder on top of murder, sin on top of sin
- And the final sin was to disobey their own oath
- They determine to leave any virgin woman untouched so she can be taken as a wife for the Benjamites
 - The people had no basis for making this distinction, since their oath placed the towns under the ban for failing to answer the call to arms
 - Nevertheless, they do what's right in their own eyes
 - They are making up the rules as they go
 - By killing all the men, children and married women, they feel justified in leaving the virgins alive
- After they wipe out the town and collect the virgins, they realize they have only 400 women, which is 200 too few to give each Benjamite a wife
 - The number 4 in scripture symbolizes the fallen earth, while the number 2 is the number of division or separation
 - The suggestion is that God limited Israel to obtaining only 400 women through their scheme as a commentary on their sin
 - The schemes of men will always lead to a fall in keeping with the ways of the world
 - And in this case, it's easy to see how Israel's scheming has produced nothing but a downward spiral of calamity
 - Such is the world's wisdom
 - And the number 2 reminds us that the sin of the people has divided them from God and from each other
 - They are not walking in unity as a nation nor in fellowship with the God Who brought them into the land
 - This is a fundamental principle of our sin, that it divides us from one another in the body and it breaks fellowship with the Lord
 - Our faith in Jesus Christ saves us from the eternal judgment that our sin deserves, since He took that penalty in our place

- Nevertheless, a believer's sin produces negative earthly consequences, including distancing us from an abiding walk with the Lord by His Spirit
 - We move outside His will, which has the effect of making it easier to indulge our flesh further
 - Which is why scripture issues such strong warnings against believers living in unrepentant sin
 - We're playing with fire, as if walking on a tightrope from which we may slip at any point
 - And we may never recover from that fall
 - Our soul will be saved in the end, but our life of shipwrecked faith will be a testimony against us
- As the tribes lament the inadequate supply of virgins, once again they blame God in v.15
 - And once again, this is not God's doing
 - How interesting that they never seek God's counsel before they act
 - And yet they are quick to blame Him when their own plans fail to work
 - This shows you how stubborn and ignorant they have become
 - So now they need a second plan to find the additional 200 wives needed for the men on Benjamin

Judg. 21:16 Then the elders of the congregation said, "What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?"

Judg. 21:17 They said, "There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, so that a tribe will not be blotted out from Israel."

Judg. 21:18 "But we cannot give them wives of our daughters." For the sons of Israel had sworn, saying, "Cursed is he who gives a wife to Benjamin."

Judg. 21:19 So they said, "Behold, there is a feast of the Lord from year to year in Shiloh, which is on the north side of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south side of Lebonah."

Judg. 21:20 And they commanded the sons of Benjamin, saying, "Go and lie in wait in the vineyards,

Judg. 21:21 and watch; and behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to take part in the dances, then you shall come out of the vineyards and each of you shall catch his wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin.

Judg. 21:22 "It shall come about, when their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, that we shall say to them, 'Give them to us voluntarily, because we did not take for each man of Benjamin a wife in battle, nor did you give them to them, else you would now be guilty.'"

Judg. 21:23 The sons of Benjamin did so, and took wives according to their number from those who danced, whom they carried away. And they went and returned to their inheritance and rebuilt the cities and lived in them.

Judg. 21:24 The sons of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family, and each one of them went out from there to his inheritance.

- In v.16 the elders of the tribes ask what shall they do to save Benjamin, since the women of the tribe are destroyed?
 - But of course that destruction was their own doing, yet they speak of it as if it was an unavoidable tragedy outside their control
 - Then in v.17 they declare that Benjamin must not be allowed to die out
 - Again, it sounds as if they are the Red Cross coming to the aid of the unfortunate victims of some natural disaster
 - They were the perpetrators of the very disaster they now wish to mitigate
 - And the plan they devise this time is another attempt to circumvent their own ill-conceived oath
 - No man in Israel can give his daughter to a Benjamite or else he must be killed because of the wife oath
 - But what if a daughter is taken *involuntarily* by a Benjamite?
 - Then the father would be innocent of breaking his oath, since he didn't knowingly offer his daughter against his own oath
- So that becomes the solution for this people
 - The elders instruct the remaining 200 Benjamites to hide in the fields outside the town of Shiloh before an upcoming festival

- The young daughters of the town would come out into the field to participate in the festival dances as was custom
 - So when the Benjamites hiding in the field see these women, they are told to kidnap a woman as wife and take them home
 - The elders devise this plan unbeknownst to the fathers of the town of Shiloh
 - And they know that once it comes to pass, the fathers and brothers of these women will be outraged as they should be
 - They will demand justice, since their rights were violated
 - The marriage was arranged properly, there was no dowry paid and the women were forced against their will
 - The elder say in v.22 that they will respond to the men of the town by saying you should be happy we took these women this way
 - They will say we could have taken them in battle, which means they could have done to Shiloh what they did to Jabesh-gilead
 - Or they say they could have required the men to break their vows, which would have meant death as well
 - So in light of the alternatives, they should be happy to allow this kidnapping
 - We can see how their twisted logic allows them to act with such obvious injustice while still declaring the outcome to be good
 - This story started with the brutal rape of one woman because of the sin of the Benjamites
 - And that moment led to a remarkable and tragic chain of events that has produced an astounding amount of suffering, death and injustice
 - One rape of one illegitimate wife has ultimately led to the rape of 600 illegitimate wives by the Benamite men
 - And the number 6 in scripture represents sinful man
 - That's why this story is the capstone account for the times of Judges
 - On the surface, it seems like men doing what's right to stop depravity and save a tribe of Israel

- But the truth is this is a story of reckless, unrestrained men living without regard for God or His commands
- It's this contradictory nature of Israel's existence that the writer wants us to understand
- Notice in v.24 we're told that the people return to their families and to their appointed places in the land
 - This phrase may sound familiar to you
 - It's similar to the ending of the prior book, the book of Joshua

Josh. 24:26 And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord.

Josh. 24:27 Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be for a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord which He spoke to us; thus it shall be for a witness against you, so that you do not deny your God."

Josh. 24:28 Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to his inheritance.

- At that time, Joshua reminded the people they must live according to God's law, not their own
- They returned to the part of the land, to their inheritance, with a warning not to deny the God Who delivered them into the land
- Now in Judges we hear the people are once again returning to their inheritance
 - From outward appearances, everything seems normal
 - It's as if nothing has changed in the past 300 years
 - But that's just illusion
- In the final verse of the book, the writer leaves us with the most important point of the story, the theme of the entire book

Judg. 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

- From an earthly point of view, life in Israel may appear to be in keeping with the times of Joshua
- But spiritually, the nation is in crisis and at risk of annihilation
- This is a nation that needs a king, a savior, a new "Joshua"