

MORALITY TURNED UPSIDE DOWN:
BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF APOSTASY IN THE BOOK OF JUDGES

Dr. Ed Hindson
Distinguished Professor of Religion
Liberty University

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Judges introduces the reader to the turbulent days between the Israelite conquest of Canaan and the rise of the Kings of Israel. In the process of cataloguing the history of this period, the book also explains the reasons for Israel's turmoil and instability during that time. A simple outline of the Book of Judges (Heb *Shophetim*) may be summarized in three key points:

- I. Reason for the Judges: Apostasy 1:1 – 3:4
- II. Rule of the Judges: Six Cycles 3:5 – 16:31
 - A. Othniel vs. Cushan (Syrians)
 - B. Ehud vs. Eglon (Moabites)
 - C. Deborah and Barak vs. Jabin and Sisera (Canaanites)
 - D. Gideon vs. Midianites
 - E. Jephthah vs. Ammonites
 - F. Samson vs. Philistines
- III. Ruin of the Judges: Appendix 17:1 – 21:25
 - A. Idolatry: Michah & Danites
 - B. Immorality: Gibeonites & Benjamites

For the purpose of illustrating the pattern of apostasy in ancient Israel this paper will focus on the appendix (ch. 17 – 21). In these chapters a clear pattern emerges: spiritual / religious compromise leads to moral corruption which results in civil catastrophe. While these accounts pertain to historic Israel and are not specific prophecies about current events, they certainly display a biblical pattern which has been all too often repeated in other nations which have claimed to follow God.

RUIN OF THE JUDGES

A. Idolatry of Micah and the Danites.

17:1-5. The last five chapters of the book of Judges formulate the appendix and supplement the author's history of the period of the judges. Virtually all commentators agree that these chapters are out of sequence with the chronology of the rest of the book and actually occurred during the early period of the judges. Pfeiffer (p. 261) notes that rabbinic commentators placed the story of Micah in the time of Othniel. These appendices do not contain any references to great leaders or national oppressions. However, they are of great interest in the study of the history of Israel; for they reveal the condition of Israelite spiritual life during the time of the judges. While God was raising up unusual leaders from time to time to deliver the people from bondage, these incidents clearly indicate that the general quality of Israel's spiritual life was extremely low during that entire period. Davis (p. 143) notes that these chapters deal with the subject of spiritual apostasy as it affected both individual families and the nation as a whole. Since this narrative follows the story of Samson, who was of the tribe of Dan, this section seems to have been placed here in logical, rather than chronological, order.

Micah had stolen **eleven hundred shekels of silver** from his wealthy mother. While the eleven hundred pieces of silver correlate with the amount paid to Delilah by each of the lords of

the Philistines, it is highly unlikely that she is the mother of this incident. In Hebrew Micah's name means "who is like Jehovah!" (Cassel 228) notes that such names were usually only given in homes where Jehovah was at least outwardly recognized. His mother, then, pronounced a serious curse (probably in the name of Jehovah) on the one who had taken the money. Fearing the power of his mother's curse, Micah confessed that he was the one who had taken the silver. Ancient peoples greatly feared the power of a parental curse (cf. Sirach 3:9). His mother's strange response was **Blessed be thou of the LORD, my son**. Literally "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing" (Jas 3:10). Apparently, she feared the silver had been taken by someone from whom she would never be able to recover it; and she was relieved to discover that her own son had it.

This parental relationship serves as an illustration of the permissive spiritual condition that was prevalent in Israel at that time. Micah **restored** the silver to his mother, who claimed that she had dedicated the silver unto the LORD. However, her concept of dedication certainly was not in accordance with the Mosaic Law since she had decided to make a graven image with it. She then took only two hundred pieces of silver and gave it to her son for the purpose of having the idol made. The details of the story are not sufficient enough to help us understand why these things happened the way they did. Perhaps she felt guilty about the manner in which she had acquired the large sum of money, and therefore her son felt justified in taking it. She, in turn, was relieved to discover that he still had it; and it is possible that she claimed to have dedicated it to Jehovah merely as a justification for having the money in the first place! It seems unusual that she only gave a small portion of it to her son, if in fact she had really dedicated the money to the Lord for the purpose of making the image. Nevertheless, the image was made of carved wood, overlaid with silver, with the detail-work being done by a founder (or silversmith).

Micah then set the idol in a shrine, which the AV calls a house of gods. Cundall (183), rightly questions the legitimacy and sincerity of both her behavior and his. Micah also made an ephod and teraphim, which served as additional idols or representations thereof.

The recurring statement “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes” appears throughout this section of the book of Judges (cf. 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) and is intended to explain the moral relativism of the times. Rather than follow the law of God, man had become a law unto himself. In this incident we see people who claim to know the Lord (and to be dedicated unto Jehovah) lying, stealing, conniving, and justifying their own behavior. Davis (p. 143 ff.) notes three characteristics of spiritual apostasy in this story: religious syncretism moral relativism, and extreme materialism. Wood (p. 147 ff.) notes several sins that openly occurred in this account: (1) The failure and apostasy of the Danites; (2) the making of graven images; (3) unauthorized priests serving for hire; (4) establishment of private worship sanctuaries; (5) the movement of the Levites from their assigned cities; and (6) the justification of stealing.

7-13. An unnamed young man, a **Levite** from the town of **Bethlehem Judah** (of the **family of Judah**), wandered northward into Mount Ephraim, where he came upon Micah. Discovering that he was unemployed and away from his normal responsibilities, Micah hired him to be their private family priest. The Levites, according to the Law of Moses, were assigned specific cities in which to live and serve. Since Bethlehem is not listed as a Levitical city (cf. Num 35:1-8, Josh 21:1-41), it is questionable what he was doing there in the first place. The statement that he could not **find a place** would seem to suggest that he was an opportunist looking for the best situation that would satisfy him. Thus, he accepted Micah's offer of **ten shekels of silver by the year.**

Micah then **consecrated the Levite** (vs. 12), which he had no business doing. He then naively assumed that the **LORD will do me good**, since he had a Levite for a priest! It is obvious that Micah's motivation was based on superstition, not faith in God's revelation. Thus, we may conclude that the average Israelite, even a religious Israelite, was basically ignorant of the true content of the Law. It is difficult to imagine that a Levite would be content to accept such a position in spite of what he knew of the prohibitions in the Law regarding idolatry. Thus, the sin of the Levite contributed to the deepening of Micah's apostasy.

18:1-6. This chapter begins by noting again that there was **no king in Israel**, reminding us that much of the spiritual and political confusion of this time was due to a lack of unified leadership in the nation. There can be no doubt that these appendices were intended to bridge the gap and pave the way from the time of the judges to that of the monarchy which would be introduced in I Samuel. According to Numbers 26:43, the tribe of Dan had sixty-four thousand men. However, they were still unable to occupy the territory that was allotted to them because of the oppression of the Amorites and the Philistines. It should be remembered that the Samson narrative also relates to the tribe of Dan. Samson, the strongest man, came from Dan, the weakest tribe! The difficulties in the conquest and settlement of the land had caused a lack of precision regarding intertribal boundaries. The reference to the **camp of Dan** (13:25) indicates the unsettled situation of this tribe. In desperation, the Danites decided to seek a more secure location. Joshua 19:47 also refers to this migration and must be considered an editorial addition to that book in order to clarify a point.

The sending of **five men to spy out the land** was a common Israelite tactic. In the process of their search they came to Mount Ephraim to the **house of Micah**, where they lodged. Upon their arrival they recognized the Levite, apparently from a previous contact with him, and

questioned how he had gotten there. The fact that he had become a hireling did not seem to bother them at all, and they urged him to **ask counsel of God** that they might know what to do. Apparently, they assumed that the Levite could serve as a fortune-teller by use of his ephod. His encouraging report led them to believe that the expedition could expect the blessing of the Lord. His favorable reply had important consequences for subsequent events.

7-13. The northward journey of the spies would take them about one hundred miles from their original starting point in an attempt to find a new settlement. They wandered beyond the region occupied by the Israelites into a small, fertile valley populated by people of Phoenician origin (Zidonians). The original name of the area was **Laish**, and it is referred to as Leshem in Joshua 19:47 and appears Lus in the Egyptian texts of the nineteenth century B.C. It has been identified by archaeologists as Tell el-Qadi, being about half a mile in diameter. The text notes that they were dwelling there **careless . . . quiet and secure**, meaning at peace and ease. However, the spies found that the city had no strong central government that it was far removed from the Phoenicians of Zidon itself. It was cut off from Syria by Mount Hermon and from Phoenicia by the anon range. The statement that they had no business with any man means they had no treaty with neighboring peoples to protect them event of an attack. Thus, it was an ideal for the battle-weary Danites to conquer. Upon returning to Zorah and Eshtaol, where the Danite camp was, the spies encouraged them to go and capture Laish. Therefore, **six hundred men** were sent out as a warrior party to take the city (vs. 11). The context clearly indicates that their wives, children, and possessions went with them. On their journey they stopped at **Kirjath-jearim** (city of forests). This location was just three hours from Eshtaol, and the Danite encampment nearby was called **Mahanehdan** (the camp of Dan). The fact that the author says it was called that **unto this day** indicates that the location bore the same name in the day, or time, of the author. From there the expedition reached **mount**

Ephraim and to the house of Micah.

14-29. The continued description of the spiritual wickedness of the time is clearly evident in this account. Upon their arrival at the house of Micah, the five spies entered the shrine and stole the idol, the ephod, and the teraphim. With the support of the six hundred warriors they then persuaded the Levite to accompany them and serve as the priest to the entire tribe. It should be noted that a man who would be willing to hire his services out in the first place would always be willing to accept a better offer from someone else. Note that the text says that **the priest's heart was glad** (vs. 20); and so they departed with their families, the priest, and the cult objects, assuming that all of these would bring the blessing of God. Their attitude is not much different than that of the ungodly Philistines who assumed that cultic objects were good luck charms that would automatically bring the blessing of heaven.

The expedition was overtaken by Micah's neighbors (vs. 22), and they **cried unto the children of Dan**. The Danites' response, **What aileth thee** indicates their despicable attitude toward the one from whom they had stolen these things. Micah protested that **Ye have taken away my gods which I made**, and the children of Dan threatened to kill him and his household unless they let them go. Realizing that he was inadequate to stop them, Micah had no other choice than to let them go. The story has a definite note of irony to it in that Micah paid the silversmith to build the idol, bought the priest and the cult objects hoping they would bring him good luck, and then lost them. The Danites now take the same objects, assuming they will bring them good luck; but instead, the tribe turns to blasphemous idolatry. After this encounter, they came to Laish and destroyed the city which they **burnt . . . with fire**. The text notes that they were successful because there was **no deliverer** since they were so far from Zidon. It was on that location that they built a city of their own to dwell in, which they called **Dan** after the name of their forefather.

Even McKenzie (p. 160) fully accepts the story of the Danite migration as being historical. Its location was in the valley near **Beth-rehob** (house of the open place). It is possible that this is to be associated with the Rehob of Numbers 13:21, the most northerly city observed by the twelve spies. Since this site is also called “Dan” in Judges 5:17, it is possible that the events in this chapter occurred before the war with Sisera.

30-31. In addition to building a city of their own, the Danites set up a sanctuary and installed **Jonathan, the son of Gershom** as their priest. Also, **Micah's graven image** was worshiped by them during the entire time that the **house of God was in Shiloh**, referring to the location of the tabernacle during the period of the judges. In other words, the Danites had their own private sanctuary and did not recognize the location of God's true sanctuary at Shiloh. The reading, **the son of Manasseh**, is due to a scribal emendation introduced into the Hebrew text. The Hebrew consonants *msh* are the same for the name of Moses (the true father of Gershom, Ex 2:21-22) and for Manasseh. All commentators agree that original reference was to Moses, but observe that the ancient scribes removed his name because of its associations with idolatry. In reality, Moses was not responsible for the idolatry in which Jonathan participated. It is also interesting that the alteration of the name to that of Manasseh corresponds with the wicked king of Judah (II Kgs 21:1-2). It is also important to observe that Dan was one of the two cult sanctuaries set up by Jeroboam I in his attempt to counteract the temple worship center at Jerusalem. Cundall (p. .191) suggests that the golden calf, or bull, which he set up may have been modeled after the molten image of Micah. Jeroboam's cult centers at Dan and Beth-el were opposed by the true priests of Judah throughout Israel's history.

The reference to the **day of the captivity** may refer either to the ultimate northern deportation by Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, or, more likely, to the time of the Philistines' overthrow of

Shiloh. Throughout its history, Dan was known as a center of idolatry and became a symbol of the apostate tribe of Israel. Thus, it is not named in Revelation 7 as one of the twelve tribes of the future kingdom. In the list that appears in the Apocalypse, the tribe of Levi appears in the inheritance in the place of Dan, and the tribe of Ephraim is referred to as the tribe of Joseph. Thus, in the irony of history, the tribe of Dan, which stole the Levite and the image from an Ephraimite, is replaced in the list of God's people by those very tribes. It is not improper to suggest that the tribe of Dan is a type of Judas Iscariot, the apostate disciple. It is certainly interesting to note that while we also normally speak of twelve apostles, in reality there were thirteen. Judas, the apostate disciple, corresponds to Dan, the apostate tribe, both of whom lose their true inheritance in the kingdom of God.

B. Immorality of the Gibeonites and Benjamites. 19:1-21:25.

19:1-9. This chapter also begins with the note that there was no king in Israel, referring to the lack of authority that prevailed in the nation at the time. This narrative also centers on a certain Levite from Ephraim who was married to a concubine from Bethlehem-Judah. Thus, the similarities between the two stories should be observed. The time of the incident would appear to be early in the period of the judges, since Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, is mentioned in 20:28 and the tribal league is still functioning by combined action: There is no mention of the Philistines, who would have suppressed such action during the latter part of the Judges' period. Cundall (p. 193) correctly observed that the reference from Dan even to Beer-sheba (20:1) was probably added later by an editor to explain the entirety of the land. The concubine **played the whore** (vs. 2), i.e., was sexually unfaithful to her husband, and returned to her father. While this section of the book of Judges centers on the resulting civil war between the tribe of Ben in and the other tribes of Israel, it also reveals the moral laxity of this period throughout Israel.

After **four whole months** the Levite returned to Beth-lehem to recover the concubine. Concubinage, though certainly not an ideal one, was nevertheless recognized as a legal marriage. When the Levite arrived at the girl's house, her father **rejoiced to meet him** and persuaded him to remain for four days. However, her father seemed reluctant to let her go and persuaded the Levite to remain most of **the day**. He remained until **afternoon**, and her father again attempted to get him to stay another night. Perhaps fearing that he would never be able to leave with the girl, the Levite refused to stay, took the girl and departed later in the day.

10-21. Beth-lehem was about six miles south of ancient Jerusalem; and Gibeah, their destination, was about five miles north of the town. Preferring to reside in an Israelite city, "they probably passed on beyond Jerusalem because, at this time, it was still under Jebusite control. Thus, the inhospitality of the Gibeonites was all the more hideous. By sunset, the Levite, with his wife and servant, arrived at **Gibeah, which belongeth to Benjamin**. They had made only about a ten-mile journey that afternoon, indicating that their departure could not have been much earlier than 3:00 pm. **Ramah**, mentioned as an alternate stop, was yet two miles further north. However, the little group found no place to lodge in Gibeah, the city that would become the birthplace and subsequent capital of Saul (I Sam 10:26).

The failure to offer hospitality was a breach of etiquette rarely found in the ancient East, where it was considered a sacred duty. Instead of being received by the Benjamites of the city, the group was offered lodging by another Ephraimite, also a stranger in the city (vs. 16). The reference to their going to the **house of the LORD** may mean that they planned to stop off at Shiloh on their return to Mount Ephraim; or it may have merely been a ploy to gain the desired hospitality, since they would appear to be on a journey of religious purpose. The story is similar to that of Lot and his two angelic visitors at Sodom. The man met them in the street and urged them

not to lodge. Instead, he brought them into his house where they were attacked by the men of the city, who desired a homosexual relationship with them.

22-30. The men of the city surrounded (beset) the house and beat on the door, demanding that the man be brought out that they might **know him**, implying intimate sexual relationship. That their desire was for homosexual sin is indicated by the host's response, **Do not so wickedly**. The men of the city are referred to as **sons of Belial**, meaning worthless or ungodly. Psalm 18:4-5 clearly implies a relationship between Belial and Sheol; thus, the term was idiomatic for "sons of hell." In desperation, the host offered his daughter and the concubine in place of his guest. There can be no doubt in the comparison between this incident and that of Genesis 19 that homosexuality was considered the worst possible sin of sexual violation. That the Levite and his host would sexually offer the women to the men in place of a homosexual relationship was certainly not a godly choice. Either sexual sin is equally wrong; however, the reaction of these spiritually impoverished people shows that even in a time when sexual immorality was prevalent, homosexuality was still regarded as the worst possible form of sexual abuse!

Verse 25 indicates that the Levite himself brought her forth unto them and surrendered the concubine to their immoral sexual desires in an attempt to protect himself. The statement that follows is one of the most tragic in all of Scripture. The text says **they knew** her, and abused her all the night, meaning that she was sexually assaulted the entire night by the men of the city. This abuse was kept up until morning, when they let her go. She returned, undoubtedly with a great deal of difficulty, and fell down at the door of the man's house. The next statement is equally as shocking as the abuse that had taken place; for verse 27 says and her lord rose up in the morning, implying that he had slept that evening while she was undergoing such a terrible fate.

The wickedness of the men of the city was matched by the inconsideration of her hus-

band, who gave her away and slept calmly all evening, expecting her to be ready to depart with him the next morning. Instead, he discovered her lying dead upon the threshold of the house. The statement, But none answered (vs. 28), indicates that she was unable to answer because she was dead. Only then was the Levite outraged, and he loaded her dead body onto one of the animals and continued his journey. It was not until he arrived at home that he took **a knife . . . and divided her . . . into twelve pieces**. This method for rallying a nation was normally done by dismembering animals (see I Sam 11, where Saul divided a yoke of oxen in order to rally the twelve tribes of Israel together). The verb "to divide" refers to a ritual dissection (cf. Ex 29:17; Lev 1:6). The Levite sent the twelve pieces of her body to the twelve tribes of Israel in an effort to rally the nation out of its lethargy and to a willingness to acknowledge its responsibility.

Davis (p. 149) states, "This act on the part of the Levite was designed to get action, and it worked!" It must be assumed that the tribe of Benjamin was included in the summons, but refused, thus identifying themselves with the action of the men of Gibeah. The shock of seeing the girl's dismembered body and undoubtedly hearing the story of this undeniable outrage against the law of God caused Israel to consider this the greatest atrocity of the nation's early history. It brought a tremendous reprisal. **Consider of it, take advice, and speak your minds**. The verbs which close the chapter are perfects of consequence, expressing the results which the Levite expected from this action (see Keil and Delitzsch, p. 446).

20:1-8. According to the text, **four hundred thousand footmen** responded to this challenge. It should be noted that this was the only incident in all of the time of the judges when the entire nation, and all the tribes, rallied in a concerted effort for any reason. In later times only a few tribes would rally to support one another; and by the time of Samson, which closes the period of the judges, he was able to rally no one to support his cause. The phrase **from Dan even**

to Beer-sheba does not likely indicate that this event took place chronologically after the capture of Laish by the Danites, but was probably inserted in the final editing of the book to clarify the extent of Israel's territory and the extensive nature of the response of the people to this challenge. In ancient times Mizpeh was the central assembly point of the tribes (cf. I Sam 7:5). It is usually identified today with Tell-en-nasbeh, about eight miles north of Jerusalem.

Some have questioned the size of the number of the Israelite force of four hundred thousand, since only forty thousand were involved in the conquest of Jericho (cf. I. W. Wenham, "The Large Numbers of the Old Testament," in *Tyndale Bulletin*, 18, 1967, pp. 24ff.; and R. E. Clark, "The Large Numbers of the Old Testament" in *FTVI*, 87, 1955, pp. 82-92). While the word which is translated thousand (Heb *'elep*) may refer to family units, that alone does not eliminate the possibility that there really were four hundred thousand men at Mizpeh. The severe nature of such an atrocity, in a nation that considered itself to be a theocracy, would have brought the greatest possible response at this point. The fact that so many men showed up in response to the Levite's call does not mean that these men were a normally standing army, but rather, that every man who was capable of holding a sword arrived in angry retaliation for the hideous nature of the deed that had been done. The report of the Levite (vss. 4-6) certainly recounted the awful deed that had been done, in that the rape of his concubine had brought about her death; and undoubtedly a homosexual assault on him would have done the same. However, it is also important to note that his account of the incident leaves himself blameless, whereas, the inspired historian's account makes it clear that he was not blameless in his actions.

9-25. Instead of taking the entire army, a lot was cast to determine to take one tenth of the men of the tribes against the city of Gibeali for the **folly** (wantonness or impiety) which they had committed in Israel. Noth (p. 105) regards the phrase folly that they have **wrought in Israel**

as a technical term signifying a violation of the divine law. The other tribes of Israel sent a warning to the **tribe** of Benjamin to put away evil from Israel by delivering to them the Gibeonites who had committed this crime. However, the men of Benjamin prepared themselves for war and went out to battle against the children of Israel (vs, 14), Instead of responding to this wickedness with an act of justice, the Benjamites attempted to defend the wicked men of Gibeah. This further serves to help us understand the ungodly conditions that prevailed at that time. Pfeiffer (p. 263 notes that the term to put away evil in Jewish liturgy meant the complete removal of leaven on the eve of the Passover. Thus, the Israelite desired to extirpate evil from the corporateness of the nation by punishing the offenders with death.

The Benjamites mustered a force of twenty six thousand men, plus seven hundred men who were inhabitants of Gibeah. Among all this people there were seven hundred **men left-handed** who **could sling stones**. Surprisingly, the outnumbered Benjamites, were able to win the first two bloody battles, but they were decisively devastated in the third encounter. The hilly terrain in the vicinity of Gibeah favored a defensive force, rather than an attacking force. Great numbers of men were of limited value, since they could **be** deployed effectively. The men of Israel went to the **house of God**, the rendering of Beth-el (RV RSV), located about five miles from Mizpah.

Surprisingly the Benjamites inflicted heavy casualties on the Israelite confederacy and killed twenty-two thousand men in the first engagement. The second engagement of the armies resulted in another defeat in which eighteen thousand men of Israel were slain. Though they had consulted the Lord up until this point, their failure would now drive them back to God in deep humility. Cundall states (p. 202), “to the tears of the day before were now added the discipline of fasting and offering of sacrifices, all of which suggest the sense of urgency with which they now sought the Lord!”

26-48. Commentators differ on the location of the house of God (vs. 31) during this period. Joshua 18:10 and I Samuel 1:3 indicate that the Ark of the Covenant was at Shiloh. This does not, however, mean that it remained at Shiloh from the time of Joshua until the time of Eli. It is possible that the ark was moved from Shiloh to Beth-el and back to Shiloh again. Nevertheless, there is nothing in the text itself to indicate that there is any reason to be concerned about erroneous information. One of two things seems obvious. Either they returned to Beth-el where the ark was at that time in order to inquire of the Lord, or this time they went to Shiloh to the ark of the Lord in order to be sure of receiving the right information. The chronology of the passage is further complicated by the statement that **Phinehas**, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, was the priest in those days. Phinehas was one of Israel's great heroes. As a young man, he had been commended by the Lord for his action at Shittim (Num 25); and he had taken a prominent role in the campaign against Midian (Num 31) and against the supposed apostasy of the eastern tribes (Josh 22). Thus, it is possible that this is the same Phinehas, who would now have been quite elderly.

This time God promised victory to Israel if they would go up against the Benjamites. In this engagement Israel used the same strategy that had been successfully employed by Joshua at Ai. They drew the Benjamites out of Gibeah to fight an Israelite army, which pretended to retreat, drawing the men away from the city. The Israelites then reformed at Baal-Tamar (unknown location) and the **liers in wait** came out from their ambush and attacked the city of Gibeah. The Israelites took the city and set it on fire. Seeing the smoke, the other Israelites stopped their pretended retreat, turned upon the Benjamites, and killed eighteen thousand of them. Verse 44 indicates that eighteen thousand men were killed by the ambush, five thousand more were killed in retreat, and two thousand more at Gidom (vs. 45). Therefore, a total of twenty-five thousand men that drew the sword were killed in all (compare the rounded figure in vs. 46 with

the twenty-five thousand one hundred of vs. 45). The slaughter was so unbelievably extensive that only 600 men of Benjamin remained; and they fled unto the rock Rimmon where they remained for four months (vs. 47). These were the only Benjamites to escape.

In the meantime, the enraged Israelite army turned on all the cities of Benjamin and slaughtered the women and children until none remained (21:16). Wood (p. 151) correctly comments that the slaughter was entirely unreasonable. The enraged Israelites had obviously overreacted to the situation. They were undoubtedly upset by the atrocity on the concubine that led to the initial skirmish, and then they were even more enraged by the heavy losses that had been inflicted on them by the Benjamites. However, when the slaughter was finished, they finally realized that they had virtually annihilated one of the tribes of God's people.

21:1-15. The tribe of Benjamin was now in danger of extinction. There were six hundred men remaining, but they had no wives and no children. The Israelites, in anger, had vowed never to give their daughters in marriage to the tribe of Benjamin. However, the extensive slaughter that had resulted from this civil war was so serious that the people came before God, and lifted up their voices, and wept sore (vs. 2). When the anger and emotion of battle had passed, the Israelites realized what had happened to them. The amphictyonic league of twelve tribes who were supposed to be the people of God had so degenerated spiritually from the time of their enormous victories under Joshua that they were now in danger of annihilating one another. The spiritual decline of this period was paralleled by a political decline that had weakened the very foundation of the theocracy. If we are correct in assuming that this incident occurred early during the time of the judges, it is no wonder that Israel was so easily overrun by her enemies throughout that period. The enormity of this slaughter must have certainly weakened Israel for many generations to come.

In the meantime, **the children of Israel repented** (vs. 6) for what they had done to the Benjamites, fearing that the tribe had been cut off permanently. Notice the sincerity and severity of oath-taking, in that they would not go against what they had **sworn by the LORD**. Finally, it was determined that no one had rallied to this battle from the city of **Jabesh-gilead**. In their anger, they had also sworn that anyone who did not respond to the call to assembly would be put to death. This would certainly explain why such a large number (four hundred thousand) responded to the call!

Now, to make things even worse, the army commanded **twelve thousand men to smite the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead** (vs. 10). The Gileadites were descended from Manasseh, the grandson of Rachel, and thus, were related to the descendants of Benjamin, her son. Throughout Israel's history, there *was* always a close link between the tribe of Benjamin and Jabesh-gilead (cf. I Sam 11). The Israelite army attacked the city and killed all the men, the married women, and the children, sparing only **four hundred young virgins** (vs. 12). These girls were brought to the camp at Shiloh; and it was decided that they would be offered as wives to the six hundred men of Benjamin, who were still hiding in the Rock of Rimmon. Thus, peace was made between the Benjamites and the Israelites, and they returned to take the women of Jabesh-gilead. However, there were not enough of them for every man to have his own wife.

16-25. In order to solve the problem of the inequity of only four hundred women being available to marry the six hundred Benjamites, the **elders of the congregation** decided that there must be an inheritance for the Benjamites that a tribe **be not destroyed out of Israel**. Still under the ban of the curse, by which they had determined not to give their own wives to the Benjamites, it was decided that they would capture two hundred **daughters of Shiloh** when they came out to **dance in dances** at the **feast of the LORD**. It should be noted, that Shiloh *is* referred to

here as being **in the land of Canaan** (vs. 12).

Cundall (p. 210) correctly observes that the reference to Shiloh need not cause the unnecessary alarm that it has to many commentators. It is obvious that at this time, it was not the location of the tabernacle. A careful reading of the entire books of Joshua, Judges, and I Samuel seems to indicate that while the tabernacle was originally located at Shiloh, it was apparently moved to Beth-el and later was permanently moved back to Shiloh, where it was eventually destroyed by the Philistines. The reference to the **feast of the Lord** is to be taken as a local ceremony, rather than one clearly attributed to the Mosaic law. In other words, this seems to have been a time of great confusion and religious mixing. While Shiloh had been totally under the control of the Israelites (see Josh 18), it is now referred to as being in **the land of Canaan**. Therefore, it is most certain that Israelites were still living there and that the worship of Yahweh was still recognized there; yet it was under the influence and control of the Canaanites.

The shift of the scene of these events to the area of **Rimmon**, where the Benjamites were hiding, would make Shiloh a more likely choice for the subsequent kidnapping. Archaeological excavations have identified Shiloh as Seilun, about ten miles northeast of Beth-el. It was here at this Canaanite enclave within Israel that a pilgrimage or feast (Heb *chag*) would be the scene of the kidnapping at the time of the vintage harvest. Therefore, the two hundred remaining men of Benjamin rushed out of the vineyard and grabbed the women **whom they caught** and took them back to their cities which they then repaired and dwelt in (vs. 231). The statement in verse 24 indicates that after this incident the men of Israel went back to their own inheritance.

While it is overlooked in most commentaries, the term inheritance (Heb *nachalah*) seems to be crucial to the understanding of the appendices. In the first section, the Danites gave up their inheritance and by ungodly means took another. In this account, the Benjamites nearly lost their

inheritance at the hands of their own brothers. The recurring theme, then, in the book of Judges has to do with Israel's inheritance which she is in danger of losing because of her violation of God's law. In the Law of Moses inheritance was apportioned by God self and then determined by lot under the leadership of Joshua. However, after the total victory under Joshua, Israel had now fallen into spiritual decline and was, therefore, in danger losing her inheritance. The theological concept underlying the proper understanding of the book of Judges is that the land belonged to Jehovah and that He had the right to apportion it to the people as He chose. The subsequent invasion of Israel's enemies, the resulting oppressions, and the threatened annihilation which culminated in the activities of the Philistines, were also God's means of challenging Israel's inheritance. Just because He had given her the land did not mean that she had an unconditional right to its blessings if she chose to live in rebellion to His laws.

The entire sweep of the Old Testament seems to make it clear that God's unconditional covenant with Abraham (Gen 15) guaranteed the land to Israel, but the conditional covenant (Deut 28) determined whether or not Israel would be allowed to remain there in blessing determined by her obedience to God's law. Therefore, under the leadership of Joshua the standard of the Law was maintained without compromise, and the blessing of the Lord was abundant. However, in the time of the judges religious and spiritual compromise and deterioration were so prevalent that the blessing was removed and Israel found herself temporarily under the curse of God. The roller-coaster effect that resulted meant that Israel, because of her disobedience, was unable to maintain a high level of stability throughout the times of the judges, Eli, Samuel, and Saul. Not until the time of David, and the centralizing of the nation under his leadership, would Israel again enjoy the abundant blessing of God.

Thus, the concluding statement of the book reiterates the self-justified form of situation eth-

ics that was prevalent in Israel at that time. **In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes** (vs. 25). In other words, the book closes with the reflection by the author on the absence of strong leadership and the lack of spiritual discernment that had led to the near total disintegration of Israel's uniqueness as a nation. The tragic comment of the inspired historian who wrote the book of Judges notes that a nation unified under Moses, and miraculously victorious under Joshua, had now fallen into sin, defeat, and disunity. Thus, the book of Judges gives us a picture of the tragic results of sinful compromise with an ungodly world. Fortunately, the appendix of the book of Ruth indicates that God was still at work among His people, even during this dark hour. A ray of hope was about to dawn through which God's man would come to rule His people.

Ed Hindson

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bruce, F. F. Judges. In *New Bible Commentary*. Ed. by F. Davidson. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954.
- Burney, C.F.. *The Book of Judges*. 2nd ed. London: Rivingtons, 1930.
- Cassel, Paul. Judges. In *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*. Ed. by J. P. Lange. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, reprinted, 1871.
- Cohen, A. Joshua and Judges. In the *Soncino Bible*. London: Soncino Press, 1950.
- Cooke, G. A. The Book of Judges. In *The Cambridge Bible*. Cambridge: The University Press, 1913.
- Cundall, A. E. Judges. In the *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1968.
- Davis, J. J. *Conquest and Crisis: Studies in Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969.
- Douglas, G. *The Book of Judges*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1881.
- Garstang, J. *Joshua-Judges*. London: Constable and Co., 1931.
- Keil, C.F. and F. Delitzsch. Joshua, Judges and Ruth. In *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*. Vol. IV. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted, 1950.
- McKenzie, J. *The World of the Judges*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1966.
- Moore, G. Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges. In *International Critical Commentary*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901.
- Myers, J. M. The Book of Judges. In *The Interpreter's Bible*. Vol. Z. New York: Abingdon, 1953.
- Pfeiffer, C. F. Judges. In *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1961.
- Hideout, S. *Lectures on the Books of Judges and Ruth*. New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1958.
- Simpson, C. A. *Composition of the Book of Judges*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1957.
- Thatcher, G. W. Judges and Ruth. In *The Century Bible*. London: Caxton, 1904.
- Watson, R. A. Judges and Ruth. In *The Expositor's Bible*. New York: Armstrong & Sons, 1899.
- Wood, L. *Distressing Days of the Judges*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975.