

# THE HERALD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

*November / December, 2005 No. 6*

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## The Book of Judges

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# In the Beginning

## The Book of Judges

One of the most fascinating periods of Israel's history was the period of the judges. Most of the episodes of this period are recorded in the Book of Judges, supplemented with the story of Ruth, and the several chapters of 1 Samuel. Notwithstanding the large amount of history thus recorded for us, many of the narratives are not well remembered. We trust this issue will refresh the minds of the brethren on the narratives, and draw to their minds various spiritual lessons appropriate to their Christian lives.

The principles of faith operating in the heroes of faith during this period provide good examples for us of devotion to God against great difficulties. The apostle Paul drew from these records several demonstrations of faith to include in the "cloud of witnesses" that he refers to in Hebrews chapter eleven. In Hebrews 11:32 he mentions specifically Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah and Samuel. Each of these is discussed in this issue.

In addition to lessons of faith, trust, and loyalty amid the most pressing of difficulties, God has also provided in the backdrop of this period of history allegories pertaining specifically to the call of the saints during the present Gospel age. These also are discussed.

We open with an overview titled *The Book of Judges*, explaining three parts of the book and how the various narratives are related to one another. The next article, *Deborah, Gideon and the LORD*, treats the second and third oppressions of Israel with a variety of practical lessons, interesting insights, and historical connections.

In *Jephthah's Vow* we are reminded of the sober nature of our pledges before God, and the necessity of performing our sacred commitments. At the same time, this article shows that the great sacrifice made by Jephthah did not involve human sacrifice, which was abhorrent to God. *Thoughts on the Book of Ruth* recounts the lovely story of this young Moabite widow who cherished the hopes of Israel and faith in Jehovah, and became an ancestress of our Lord Jesus.

*The Song of Deborah* is a verse-by-verse examination of the faith of Deborah and Barak, confronting the strongest military foe of their day and region. We close with *Samson*, and *Samuel, a Prophet and Judge*, two remarkable men of faith who fought to free the Israelites from their Philistine oppressors. We hope these lessons prove instructive, helpful, and encouraging.

## An Overview

# The Book of Judges

*Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.—Hebrews 11:33,34*

David Rice

The Book of Judges covers more than three centuries in the experience of Israel. The book opens with a reference to the death of Joshua, but the record of his passing is included in the closing verses of Joshua. He died at the age of 110 years, the same age as Joseph about two centuries earlier. Both Joshua and Joseph represented Christ, and the burial of each is referred to in Joshua 24:29-33. Joshua was buried in part of his inheritance, Timnath-serah in the mount of Ephraim, and Joseph was buried in Shechem which was earlier purchased by Jacob for one hundred pieces of silver (or “lambs” of silver, Joshua 24:32, margin). Also mentioned is the passing of Eleazar, son of Aaron, leaving his son Phineas to inherit the office of high priest.

## Overview

The narratives in Judges are mostly sequential, other than the last two episodes. After recounting the exploits of the various judges, excepting Eli and Samuel who are held over until the book of Samuel, the narrator included what became chapters 17, 18, 19 and 20 which record episodes from relatively early in the period of Judges. Chapters 17 and 18 explain how many of the tribe of Dan forsook their appointed allotment southward in Israel, and took over a portion northward in Israel where the city of Laish had been. In the process they adopted an idolatrous form of worship in “Dan until the day of the captivity of the land” (Judges 18:30). In this way they fulfilled the ominous warning of Jacob’s dying words: “Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward” (Genesis 49:17) Probably through this bad example, “Dan [would] judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel” (verse 16). That is, Dan would prove a test to the remainder of Israel, by which the other tribes would be judged.

Chapters 19 and 20 presumably occurred after the Dan episode. These chapters recount an egregious sin in the tribe of Benjamin, which the men of Benjamin refused to correct when demanded of the other tribes to deliver up the offenders. For this cause a civil war ensued which devastated Benjamin. The tribe was in peril of being extinguished. At last a remnant was spared, suitable for preserving the life of the tribe, and many years later from this tribe came Saul, the first king of Israel. During this civil war Phineas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, was high priest (Judges 20:28), by which we know the episode was relatively early in the period.

In a general overview, the Book of Judges, preceding the kingdom period, represents the Gospel age, which precedes the Millennial kingdom of God's plan. The various backslidings of Israel, the resulting oppressions, and subsequent deliverances, represent periods of backsliding, oppression, and deliverance of spiritual Israel during the Gospel age. The Dan episode represents that part of spiritual Israel which fails to overcome, and fails to secure the prize of life. In harmony with this symbolism, the tribe of Dan is absent from the listing of the "tribes" of spiritual Israel in Revelation chapter seven. Benjamin, who as a person sometimes represented the Great Company class, represents this class here also. The members of the Great Company are in peril of losing their lives, but are eventually spared as a mercy class, though through trying ordeals and tribulation (1 Corinthians 3:15; Revelation 7:14).

Thus Judges represents all three classes of those who follow Christ in the Gospel age: those who gain the victory, those who fail to gain life, and those who are mercifully cleansed through trial. These classes are presented in this order in Judges, and also in Revelation chapter seven. With this the narrative of Judges closes. However, a third narrative follows which is segregated into its own book, namely the Book of Ruth. That book explains the descent of King David from Ruth the Moabitess and Boaz the son of Rahab and Salmon. The child of Ruth and Boaz was Obed, the father of Jesse, who fathered David. The closing verses of Ruth identify ten generations following Judah, culminating in King David, which may synchronize with Deuteronomy 23:2 which also specifies a requirement of about ten generations.

### **The Main Part of Judges**

The first sixteen chapters of Judges cover the Judges from Othniel to Samson inclusive. Joshua 24:31 had said that "Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that he had done for Israel." Chapter one of Judges then explains the victories of Israel in that interim during which the elders of Israel outlived Joshua.

They inquired of God, and he said the tribe of Judah would lead the battle against the remaining Canaanites. The tribe of Judah persuaded the tribe of Simeon to make common cause against both their enemies, and they were victorious. Judges 1:22-26 reports that Joseph (Ephraim) was also victorious, and this was a fitting legacy to Joshua who was of that tribe. But the other tribes were not as faithful and not as victorious. Judges 1:21,27-36 specifically mentions problems for Benjamin, Manasseh, Ephraimites of the coast, Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali and Dan.

Chapter two opens with a message from God through an angel stating that because of Israel's spirit of accommodation to the Canaanites God would "not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you" (Judges 2:3). So it is with us. God gives us victories over the spiritual enemies we have within and without—self, the world, and the devil. But if we do not follow these victories with determined desire and perseverance to subdue the inclinations to sin, we

are in peril. If we learn to accommodate sin within and the world without, they will be stumbling stones to us in the future.

This was also true collectively. Early in the age the zealous word of Christians was blessed by God in a great increase in the number of Christians. Persecutions rose from Pagan Rome, but ultimately God granted a great triumph of Christianity over paganism. Then a spirit of accommodation to the allurements of the world crept into the church, and the results of apostasy were bitter.

When we once meet temptation, and resist successfully, let us be eager for further victories. If instead we seek comfort, and accommodate the spirit of the world, we solicit danger. The blessed spirit of devotion begins to fade, robbing us of joy and peace. A dimming of spiritual senses brings a thin veil over our hearts. Our fervency slacks, and the enemies are always present to entice us. Thus our complacency allows “thorns” and “snares” to beset us, as God permitted to Israel of old (Judges 2:3).

The place of this angelic encounter was named “Bochim,” weeping, after the weeping induced in Israel by this message (Judges 2:1, 5). So let us weep, outwardly or inwardly, if we recognize a lack of earnestness in our Christian warfare. Then let us repent, and rise to the spiritual battle again, “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Judges 2:8 repeats the record of Joshua’s death from the closing verses of Joshua. Perhaps this means this episode at Bochim preceded the passing of Joshua. But it is more probable that it is repeated merely to connect to the thought following: “Also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel” (Judges 2:10). Following this is a summary of what followed in later years—apostasy, oppression, deliverance, in a repetitive cycle.

Judges chapter three mentions some of the lands and peoples which were not dispossessed by Israel. Then, with verse 8, begins the account of the first oppression of Israel. This was not a captivity, as would happen in later centuries by the Assyrians and Babylonians. This, and subsequent chastisements in Judges, were periods of oppression when they were dominated by a foreign power, or a rival Canaanite power. This evidently meant taxation of their produce and various restrictions on their freedoms, sufficient to make the burden increasingly unbearable, and direct them back to their benefactor, Jehovah.

Afflictions do the same to us. They turn our minds back to our great benefactor, our heavenly Father, and his agent for our blessing, our dear Lord Jesus. The bitter herbs of the Passover represent bitter trials in life which whet our appetite for the Lamb. They make us appreciate more deeply the freedom we have in Christ, freedom from sin, from the blight of a tinged conscience, into the joys of devoted living with a sense of satisfaction and peace in serving God with a pure heart.

## Oppression and Deliverance

There were several cycles of oppression, deliverance, and ensuing peace. The first oppression was by Chushan-Rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia, who oppressed Israel eight years (Judges 3:8). Strong's Concordance gives the meaning of this name as "Cushan of double wickedness." Clearly the "Rishathaim" part was a pejorative, and his actual name was Chushan, or Cushan. If this man was indeed a notable king of Mesopotamia, it might be possible to connect him with some personage of history. The value of thus linking the scriptural narrative to the history of contemporary nations, is to augment the sense of real history in this passage, which many in our day are inclined to dispute.

There was, in ancient times, a kingdom which ruled the territory between Assyria in the east on the banks of the Tigris River, and the Hittite empire in Asia minor. That was the kingdom of Mittani. For a time it was the strongest empire of the ancient near east. It conquered and subsumed Assyria, dominated the Hitties, reached west to the Mediterranean Sea, and having crossed the Euphrates in the north, reached southward to touch the northern border of Israel. If Cushan was a king of Mittani, then this passage in Judges tells us that for eight years that empire also extended its reach southward into the land of Israel.

The names of the kings of Mittani during their days of power are Parsha(ta)tar, Shaushtatar, Aartatama, Shuttarna, Artasshumara, Tushratta, Shattiwazza, Shatturara, and Wasashatta. Among these, the most likely candidate for matching the name is Shaushtatar. At first glance the names appear dissimilar. But the transliteration of ancient names is flexible in several ways. For example, an ancient Sumerian king Shulgi is sometimes reported as Culgi, so the opening Sh may be rendered C. The letters r and n are sometimes exchanged for one another, so that Nebuchadnezzar is also reported in the Bible as Nebuchadrezzar, and Achan as Achar. The closing "tatar" in the name Parsha(ta)tar evidently is on occasion reduced to the briefer "tar." Applying these modifications, and the usual flexibility of vowels in Semitic languages, Shaushtatar becomes Cushtan. It is easy to see in this the similarity to Cushan, specially if one pronounces the "t" in Cushtan as one would in the word Tzar. Shaustatar, or Cushtan, was king of Mittani at the height of its expansion. On this basis also, he is likely to have been the one who carried the reach of the Mittani empire southward into Israel for a time.

Othniel, a nephew of Caleb, stepped forward with courage and faith, defeated the forces of Chushan-Rishathaim, and peace ensued for forty years (Judges 3:9-11). After the passing of Othniel the Israelites again slipped into sin and God allowed Eglon, king of Moab, to invade Israel (Judges 3:12). Unlike Cushan, however, Eglon apparently moved the seat of his rulership to within the borders of Israel itself. He "gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees" (Judges 3:13).

The city of palms is Jericho, on the west side of the Jordan. The following narrative, through the remainder of chapter three, shows that Eglon and his Moabite forces were

there, west of Jordan, when Ehud launched a campaign of deliverance for Israel. To avoid the escape of the many thousands of Moabite troops, they “took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over. And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men ... and there escaped not a man” (verses 28, 29).

That Eglon possessed Jericho during his eighteen year oppression suggests he rebuilt the city. Dwelling among a subdued enemy as he did, the motivation to build the walls of the city was evident. Joshua had decreed that the city was not to be rebuilt after he destroyed it during the invasion of Canaan, many years before. This gentile ruler evidently had no regard for the warning, but in the end lost his life as a consequence. In the aftermath of Ehud’s victory the land had rest even longer than before, namely eighty years.

During this time evidently the Philistines were troublesome to Israel, and “Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel” (Judges 3:31).

Judges chapter four, however, records that Israel fell into sin again after the passing of Ehud, and God permitted Jabin, king of Canaan who reigned from the city of Hazor, to oppress Israel for twenty years. Hazor was one of three cities which Joshua had burned—Jericho, Ai, and Hazor. In Joshua’s day it was described as “the head of all those kingdoms,” and its king even then used the same name, Jabin, as in this oppression perhaps a century and a half later (Joshua 11:1,10). It had taken a long time for the Canaanites to return to the desolate city, increase their population, and become a dominant force again. But because the Israelites had not followed up their early victory with others, these were among the thorns in their side left to chastise them for their backsliding. The twenty-year oppression ended when Deborah and Barak, mighty through faith, called on Jehovah, and he wrought a wonderful deliverance against great military strength. Thereafter the land again had rest, this time for forty years (Judges 5:31).

Chapter six recounts the oppression of Midian for seven years and the deliverance by Gideon. Another forty years of relative peace followed (Judges 8:28). After Gideon’s passing, his ruthless son Abimelech conspired to have his many brothers slain, save for Jotham who escaped. Abimelech reigned as king for three years before civil war erupted, in which many of his subjects, and he himself, lost their lives. In the course of this rebellion the city of Shechem was destroyed. Some researchers believe they have identified this destroyed city, and its great tower which was burned, in which perished a thousand refugees (Judges 9:45-49, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, July/August, 2003).

This takes us to chapter ten of Judges, which mentions Tola, son of Puah of Issachar, who judged Israel twenty-three years, and was succeeded by Jair of Gilead who judged twenty-two years. But Israel continued to sin “and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria ... Zidon ... Moab ... Ammon, and ... the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served him not” (Judges 10:6). So on this occasion God allowed something heretofore never mentioned in the three centuries since their entrance into Canaan—namely, two simultaneous oppressions. “The anger of the LORD was hot against Israel,

and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines [in the southwest] and into the hands of the children of Ammon [in the east]” (Judges 10:7).

The Ammonite oppression endured eighteen years and was relieved by Jephthah, who subsequently judged for six years. He was followed by Ibzan of Bethlehem for seven years, Elon of Zebulun for ten years, and Abdon of Ephraim for eight years. (See Judges 12:7-14.)

The Philistine oppression was evidently more protracted. As we understand the narrative, this is the oppression addressed in chapter thirteen and forward, which endured for forty years (Judges 12:1). During this time Samson was born, and an angel predicted that he would begin to deliver Israel from this bondage. After he matured, and began “judging” Israel in the sense of avenging them against the Philistines for twenty years, he died heroically in the fall of the temple of Dagon (Judges 16:25-30). This collapse, and the death of so many of the Philistine nobility, evidently opened the way for the full deliverance which followed shortly under Samuel (recounted in 1 Samuel chapter seven).

### **Conclusion**

Thus ends the record of Judges. The main lesson is clear and evident—fidelity to God brought blessings, and infidelity brought heartaches. It is so with us today. Fidelity to God, setting aside the enticements of this world and its attractive baubles, leads to a rich and Godly experience. The blessings we are promised during this age of faith are not temporal, but vastly more wonderful, grand, and surpassing than any which could be imagined in ancient times. We have the promise of “glory and honour and immortality, eternal life” through “patient continuance in well doing” (Romans 2:7). Meanwhile we have peace of mind, knowing we are seeking to please our heavenly Father. Even in the present we can achieve “an hundredfold” of joy and blessing (Matthew 19:29). We breathe a sweeter air and enjoy a loftier spirit than the world is capable of appreciating. We seat our affections in the heavens, where we are called to live for the ages of eternity.



## The Mighty Judges

# Deborah, Gideon, and the LORD

*And the land had rest forty years.—Judges 5:31; 8:28.*

*James Parkinson*

The time of Deborah and Gideon was one of the high points in Israel's history under the judges (deliverers). Many times "the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD" (Judges 4:1, ASV).<sup>1</sup> Then, when Israel was sore distressed and cried unto the Lord, "the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those that despoiled them" (Judges 2:16, ASV).

As we open Deborah's page of history, the Canaanites had subjected Israel in the north, and to the west of the Judean Hills. The capital of Canaan was the large and mighty city of Hazor, ten miles north of the Sea of Galilee. The Canaanites maintained an iron-fisted control by the military high technology of the time—nine hundred iron chariots, 50% more chariots than the Pharaoh of the Exodus had (Judges 4:3; Exodus 14:7). From the south, the Midianites and their Amalekite and Arab allies tyrannized by sheer numbers of both soldiers and camels.

### The Courageous Prophetess

Deborah was a prophetess of the Lord, who lived and worked around six to twelve miles north of Jerusalem. When the Israelites came to her for judgment against the heavy hand, she called for Barak to come from the holy city of the tribe of Naphtali (about eighty miles to the north). She told him in the name of the Lord to gather ten thousand men from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun and take them to Mt. Tabor on the northeast side of the great plain, northeast of Megiddo and Taanach. The Lord would then draw the Canaanite army, their chariots and their captain, Sisera, to the River Kishon at the foot of Mt. Carmel's northeastern slope. And there Barak would resoundingly defeat them.<sup>2</sup>

Barak was apprehensive that so few and ill-equipped Israelite troops could defeat such a well-equipped and trained army. He agreed to go only if Deborah had the courage to go with them. She did and she went. Only now Captain Sisera was to be slain by a woman, for which Barak would receive no glory.

Details of the encounter, omitted in the historical account of chapter four, are hinted at in Deborah and Barak's victory hymn of chapter five (see "The Song of Deborah," p. 21). From the height of Mt. Tabor Deborah could see the storm clouds approaching from over the Mt. Carmel range, and she knew when they would reach the road Sisera and his army were traveling. That road is well south of the River Kishon, at the foothills, so that Sisera's band could not have seen the clouds blowing in from behind the mountains.

Sisera doubtless exulted as he watched his nine hundred chariots rolling downhill towards the poor Israelites. Then the storm clouds hit, first dumping water upstream, and then striking Sisera and his band. The chariots became mired in the mud, the archers could not see to shoot their arrows, and the suddenly-unsupported foot soldiers panicked and fled. The flash flood killed many of them. The Israelites then chased the rest and turned the battle into a rout.<sup>3</sup>

Sisera sized up the situation in time to give up his horse-and-chariot to the mud and run away from the crowd. He ran a few miles to Kedesh-Kishon, to the tents of Heber and his wife Jael, who had been allies. Jael let him hide in her tent (giving the appearance he was violating her marriage) and gave him warm milk to drink to put him to sleep. While he slept she took a hammer and tent-pin and executed him, which was according to the word of Deborah. Barak, pursuing Sisera, arrived minutes later, and Jael showed him the dead body.<sup>4</sup>

After this great victory, Israel continued the struggle against Jabin, the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed him. And the tribes of Israel had forty years of peace in their lands.

### **The Emboldened Wheat Farmer**

Meanwhile, the main Jordan Valley was still under the control of the Midianites, with their Amalekite and Arab allies.<sup>5</sup> These allies had destroyed Israel's crops and stolen their animals. Israelites fled their farms and hid in the multitude of caves that are in the Judean hills. Then the Lord sent a prophet to stress to Israel that when they had compromised to worship Baal and the other gods of the Amorites, they had abandoned the Lord, who had in turn abandoned them to their enemies.

The angel of the Lord then appeared to a poor, but strong man, Gideon, who was secretly harvesting wheat. The angel commissioned Gideon to save Israel from the hand of Midian. Gideon put on a rock the meat of a young goat and unleavened breads; a pot of broth he poured out. The angel gave him a sign by causing fire to come out of the rock and consume the meat and breads. That night Gideon used a bullock to throw down the local altar of Baal and the associated wooden Asherah idol, and he replaced them with an altar to the Lord (Judges 6:11-27).

In the morning the men of the nearby city called for the death of Gideon, likely in fear of Midian. Gideon's father, Joash, refused their demand, saying, "Let Baal contend against him." He renamed his son, Jerubbaal, meaning, "Let Baal contend."

The Midianites recognized Gideon's action as a revolt. They came amassed with their allies and encamped in the Jezreel valley, north of the river, and at the foot of the Hill of Moreh and of a lesser hill to the southeast of it. Their army covered the valley for numbers. In contrast to the Canaanites, who had relied on the high technology of the time, the Midianites used huge armies to simply overwhelm their victims. Here the soldiers numbered at least 135,000 (Judges 8:10).

By contrast, on the other side of the river Gideon was gathering an Israelite army, which numbered a mere 32,000. Gideon wanted the Lord's reassurance that he was doing the right thing so he put out on the ground a woolen fleece and asked for a sign that the fleece alone be wet with dew in the morning. When it was so, he put out the fleece again and asked for a sign that the fleece be dry, but the ground be wet with morning dew. Again, the Lord made it so.

But then the Lord told Gideon that his army was too large and needed to be reduced, lest Israel boast that they had won by their own strength. Gideon followed directions and told all those who were fearful to return; 22,000 returned. Only the 10,000 who were fearless remained. Again the Lord told Gideon to reduce the army by watching the way they would drink water at the spring of Harod. Those who put their mouths to the water (as a dog drinks) were to be sent home, but those who lapped up water in their hands to drink were to go for the battle. The latter, who were able to watch while they were drinking, numbered only three hundred.

The Midianites had seen 32,000 soldiers, and almost all had disappeared in two waves. They must have wondered where these soldiers had gone. Where was this imminent threat?

The Lord told Gideon in the night that he could take his servant and go down to an outpost of the Midianite camp and listen to what they were saying. There they heard one tell of his dream that a barley loaf (a symbol of Israel) tumbled into the camp of Midian and flattened its tent; his friend interpreted it to mean that the Lord had given up Midian and their whole camp to the sword of Gideon. Then Gideon was emboldened to return to the three hundred, and say, "Arise, for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian" (Judges 7:15)

Gideon gave to each a trumpet and an empty pitcher with a torch put inside. And he told them to do as he did when he got to the outermost part of the camp. He divided them into three companies, presumably to block the three roads out of the camp: upstream to the west, downstream to the east, and between the two hills on the north.

At about ten p.m. the Midianites set the middle watch of the night. Before the watchers had time to become acclimated, Gideon and his hundreds blew the trumpets, broke their pitchers to let their light shine, and shouted in unison, "The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon" (Judges 7:20).

The nervous soldiers near the outer reaches of the camp, and therefore nearest Gideon's men, were frightened to see the lamps (normally representing at least a thousand soldiers each) and to hear the battle trumpets and shouting; they fled from the Israelites. The rest of the camp saw the lamps of captains, and saw the inrushing soldiers, whom they naturally presumed to be Israelites. The battle was on, and it was every man's hand against his neighbor.

Messengers gathered the soldiers of three northern tribes, Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh, who then pursued the scattering foreign soldiers. Gideon sent messengers also to the tribe of Ephraim, to block the escape of those crossing the river southward. Ephraim slew the two great military chiefs, one at a rock, and the other at a winepress.<sup>6</sup> Gideon and the many who now joined him were faint, but continued the pursuit until they caught up with the Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, and fifteen thousand of their Arabian allies. Those kings had slain Gideon's brethren so they in turn were slain, and the power of the enemy was destroyed. Israel then had peace in its land for forty years.

### **Archaeology and the Peace in Israel**

The forty years peace in the camp of Israel evidently did not extend to Israel's enemies: "And the hand of the children of Israel prevailed more and more against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan" (Judges 4:24, ASV). Not only did the Israelites make progress against their enemies, with the waning of Jabin and the fall of Midian, the several Canaanite princes struggled also against each other and appealed to Amenhotep III and Akhenaton (Amenhotep IV) of Egypt, the only remaining major power. The situation is well documented in archaeological discoveries at el-Amarna in Egypt, and its Royal Archives.

Lab'ayu, prince of Shechem, writes to Amenhotep III, "To the king, my lord and my Sun-god: Thus Lab'ayu, thy servant, and the dirt on which thou dost tread. At the feet of the king, my lord, and my Sun-god, seven times and seven times I fall."<sup>7</sup>

"... My crime is namely that I entered Gezer and said publicly: 'Shall the king take my property, and not likewise the property of Milkilu [prince of Gezer]?' I know the deeds which Milkilu has done against me. Further, the king wrote concerning my son. I did not know that my son associates with the 'Apiru [Hebrews], and I have verily delivered him into the hand of Addaya"<sup>8</sup> (EA No. 254—EA means "El Amarna" tablet).

Birdiya, prince of Megiddo (in the neighborhood of Barak's battle), writes, "... we are not able to go outside the gate in the presence of Lab'ayu, since he learned that thou hast not given archers; and now his face is set to take Megiddo, but let the king protect his city, lest Lab'ayu seize it. Verily, the city is destroyed by death from pestilence and disease" (EA No. 244).

Mut-ba'lu, a prince south of the Sea of Galilee (in the neighborhood of Gideon's battle), writes, "Again, at the instance of the house of Shulum-Marduk, the city of Ashtartu came to (my) help, when all the cities of the land of Garu [Gerasenes?] were hostile ... and when Hayanu and Yabilima were captured"<sup>9</sup> (EA No. 256).

In the south, where Midian and their Amalekite ally had dominated, Shuwardata,<sup>10</sup> prince of Hebron, writes, "The chief of the 'Apiru [Hebrews] has risen (in arms) against the lands which the god of the king, my lord, gave me; but I have smitten him. Also let the king, my lord, know that all my brethren have abandoned me, and it is I and 'Abdu-Heba (who) fight against the chief of the 'Apiru. And Zurata, prince of Accho, and Indaruta,

prince of Achshaph, it was they (who) hastened with fifty chariots—for I had been robbed (by the ‘Apiru)—to my help; but behold, they are fighting against me, so let it be agreeable to the king, my lord, and let him send Yanhamu, and let us make war in earnest, and let the lands of the king, my lord, be restored to their (former) limits!”<sup>11</sup> (RA, xix, p. 106).

But ‘Abdu-Heba, prince of Jerusalem, writes, “Behold the deed which Milkilu and Shuwardata did to the land of the king, my lord! They rushed troops of Gezer, troops of Gath and troops of Keilah; they took the land of Rubutu; the land of the king went over to the ‘Apiru people. But now even a town of the land of Jerusalem, Bit-Lahmi<sup>12</sup> by name, a town belonging to the king, has gone over to the side of the people of Keilah. Let my king hearken to ‘Abdu-Heba, thy servant, and let him send archers to recover the royal land for the king! But if there are no archers, the land of the king will pass over to the ‘Apiru people.”

The princes of Canaan were in great fear of the Hebrews—the Israelites. They were begging the kings of Egypt for help.<sup>13</sup> But the eighteenth-dynasty kings of Egypt may have remembered that they and the Hebrews alike had been enemies of the Hyksos king at the time of the Exodus.<sup>14</sup> They may also have respected the plagues and miracles the Lord had wrought.

### **The Power of God**

The God who had created natural law was also able to use his natural phenomena. There may not be anything supernatural about a cloudburst and a flood over the banks of the Kishon River, but the timing of it was precise. Sisera’s host was mired down and swept away.

Midian therefore stayed to the east of the Kishon River and its potential to become a swamp. They relied not on high technology but instead on an allied force too massive to be resisted. By stratagem of surprise, the Lord used their own armies to destroy one another.

In modern application, neither western high technology nor eastern masses of humanity have been able to stop the rebuilding of natural Israel nor halt the development of spiritual Israel.

### **Lessons for the Practicing Christian**

There are several lessons that the practicing Christian may draw from Deborah and Gideon. Chief among these:

- ◆ Once the child of God is able to clearly distinguish the will of God, he is to do according to that will, to the extent of his ability. (Deborah, Barak, and Gideon all did, and were rewarded accordingly.)

- ♦ Just as did Deborah, the child of God is to look to heaven for his direction, not to earth. While he is not to ignore the ground beneath, his deliverance comes from above. The course of life is prescribed in the word of God. Let each learn to behave himself accordingly.
  - ♦ While the Christian is not to make trial of the Lord, yet prayer for guidance is appropriate. Gideon twice asked that the fleece and the ground be contrasted by the morning dew. The fleece—representing the Lord’s sheep—is first watered (in the Gospel age), and only afterwards the ground—representing the world—is watered (in the Millennial age) (Judges 6:36-40). If an apparently good work for the Lord may jeopardize one’s fellows, it would be prudent to ask the Lord for a confirmation whether this work is indeed his will. One must be prepared to accept the answer, whether it is the answer one wishes or not.
  - ♦ Of those who willingly answered the call, more than half were fearful and were sent home. Most of the rest were fearless, but not circumspect; they also were sent away. Scarcely 1% passed both tests. We, too, may be rejected either because we are fearful or because we are rash.
  - ♦ Just as with Gideon, it is in the breaking of one’s own vessel—self-sacrifice—that the light shines from the child of God. Let each take up his cross and follow Christ. It is good to ask, What would Jesus do in my circumstances? Then have the courage to do accordingly.
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#### **End Notes**

1. The word “again” is omitted in Judges 6:1 (and otherwise only in 2:11 and 3:7). This absence suggests that Gideon’s forty years of peace is the same as Deborah’s forty years of peace. The two great victories were only about ten miles apart. The Kishon and Jezreel Valleys are connected along a slightly elevated divide.
2. Interpreting the names, the account might be: Bee, the wife of Torches, dwelt between High Place and House of God in the Doubly-Fruitful hill country. She called for Lightning, son of My Delightful Father, to come from the Holy City of Naphtali (My Wrestling) and to gather ten thousand men from My Wrestling and its Neighbor to Mt. Mound. The LORD will draw Battle Array, captain of the army of Whom God Watches, king of the Merchants, to the Winding River for his defeat.
3. Even had some horses been unharnessed, the distance back to Harosheth was somewhat greater than the ten miles a fresh horse can run before resting. A horse can run faster, but a man can run longer. (Few horse races reach three miles, but a Marathon is twenty-six miles.) Therefore, a strong Israelite could have pursued and eventually overtaken horse and rider.
4. Some think of this battle as a type of the French Revolution, linking the flood to the mass of peoples overflowing their government. Others may look for fulfillment in World War I, or in the Armageddon yet to come. (The subsequent forty years of peace in Israel might well typify the thousand-year kingdom of Christ.)
5. To have had access to the Jordan Valley, it might be inferred that these southern tribes had also subjugated the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites (Idumeans). Two Midianite kings fled across Jordan, suggesting such control.

6. The Ephraimites were jealous that they had not had the major role (though the LORD had not called them). Gideon's soft answer placated them this time. Their pride was based on Jacob's blessing of Ephraim, and on the preeminence of Joshua and Deborah, both Ephraimites. That pride was later to cause their own destruction in the time of Jephthah (Judges 12:1-6). There is a lesson here for the Christian: Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18).

7. "Seven times and seven times" prefaces most of the Palestinian letters to the king of Egypt; it implies a double oath.

8. "Addaya was the Egyptian resident governor of Palestine, with his seat at Gaza." The el-Amarna letters are here taken from *The Ancient Near East* [ANE], ed. James B. Pritchard, Vol. 1; Princeton Univ. Press, 1958, 1973.

9. "Mut-ba'lu (literally "Man of Baal") was prince of Pella in the northern Jordan Valley, opposite Beth-Shan; Ayab (Ayyab, Hebrew Job) was prince of Ashtartu (biblical Ashtaroth) in Bashan. The land of Garu lay in southern Golan between Pella and Ashtartu. Yanhamu, to whom the letter is addressed, was a high Egyptian official of Canaanite ... origin, who seems to have been the Egyptian governor of Palestine at the beginning of the reign of Akh-en-Aton."

10. "An Indo-Aryan name," "like most other princely names of northern Palestine at that time."

11. "This letter, from the beginning of Akh-en-Aton's reign, is an extraordinarily illuminating illustration of the situation in Palestine at that time. Just who this redoubtable 'Apiru chieftain was we do not learn, since the proud feudal princes disdained even to mention names of the semi-nomadic 'Apiru. However, he was sufficiently dangerous to unite the arch-foes, 'Abdu-Heba and Shuwardata, and to induce them to offer fifty chariots (a very considerable offer for Palestinian chieftains) to the princes of Accho and Achshaph in the Plain of Acre, far to the north. One suspects that Milkilu of Gezer and Lab'ayu of Shechem, who are not mentioned at all, were—either or both—involved with the 'Apiru."

12. "An almost certain reference to the town of Bethlehem, which thus appears for the first time in history. Keilah may have been the home of Shuwardata, prince of the Hebron district."

13. Their professed allegiance to Egypt could hardly have preceded Barak's victory. (Amenhotep's death and the beginning of Akhenaten's reign is commonly dated somewhere around January 1363 B.C., although an earlier co-regency has not been ruled out. Donald B. Redford, *J. Near Eastern Studies* **25**, 2, p. 113-124 (April 1966).)

14. At the time of the Exodus, Hazor had been a major Hyksos site, and allied with the Egyptian Hyksos dynasty. Thus, the Canaanites had been enemies of Amenhotep's dynasty, which afterwards drove out the Hyksos dynasty.

## Keeping a Promise

### Jephthah's Vow

*What more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about ... Jephthah.  
—Hebrews 11:32, NIV.*

*Michael Nekora*

The account of Jephthah in Judges 11 is quite peculiar. Superficially it appears that an army captain heartlessly killed and burned his daughter because God gave him a victory in a war against the Ammonites. Yet Hebrews 11:32 lists him as a hero of faith. How could a man who did that to his only daughter be commended by anyone?

This is the account of his vow:

“And Jephthah made a vow unto the LORD: ‘If you give the Ammonites into my hands, **whatever** comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD’s, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering.’ Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the LORD gave them into his hands. He devastated twenty towns ... When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of tambourines! She was an only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter. When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, ‘Oh! My daughter! You have made me miserable and wretched, because I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break.’ ‘My father,’ she replied, ‘you have given your word to the LORD. Do to me just as you promised, now that the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the Ammonites’” (Judges 11:30-36, *NIV*).

When Jephthah said “Whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me,” the Hebrew verb is masculine. Since he had no sons, he certainly was not thinking about a human being. But now he is confronted with the unexpected: the first thing out of his house was his daughter. Is he prepared to offer her as a burnt offering as he said he would?

It is because of Jephthah’s faith that he is listed as a hero in Hebrews 11:32. His word is his bond so what he has vowed he will pay. His daughter similarly shows complete devotion to fulfilling a promise made to God, whatever it may be. So was Jephthah duty bound to offer his daughter as a burnt offering? No, he was not.

The law provided a way of escape whereby money could be substituted for people: “Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When a man shall make a singular vow, the persons shall be for the LORD by thy estimation. And thy estimation shall be of the male from twenty years old even unto sixty years old, even thy estimation shall be fifty shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary. And if it be a female, then thy estimation shall be thirty shekels” (Leviticus 27:2-4).



The number of shekels to be substituted depended upon sex and age. The chapter goes on to describe how to value even unclean beasts which could not be offered to God because only clean male animals were acceptable as burnt offerings. The law was clear: humans were not to be killed and burnt as an offering to God. The heathen nations did such abominable things and God condemned Israel when they copied that behavior: “They have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as offerings to Baal—something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind” (Jeremiah 19:5, *NIV*).

Jephthah could have substituted money in the place of his daughter. Although that would fulfill the letter of the law, in his sight it did not fulfill the spirit of his vow. He had said, “Whatever comes out of the door of my house ... will be the Lord’s, and I will sacrifice it.” In his mind substituting money would not do. He knew he should give his daughter to God much as Hannah was to give her son Samuel at the end of the period of the Judges. Hannah said to Eli the priest: “For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him: therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD” (1 Samuel 1:27,28).

So what happened to Jephthah’s daughter? She remained unmarried and had no children. This was a heavy penalty in Israel. All the women prayed that they might be the mother of that “seed” which was to bless Israel. Jephthah’s daughter never had that chance. Being barren was considered a curse from God; being a mother was a great blessing. Of course the daughter remained alive. “The daughters of Israel went yearly to **lament** the daughter of Jephthah” (Judges 11:40). This is the only place in the Bible where this Hebrew word is translated “lament.” The word means to “give praise” (some Bible margins have “to talk with”).

Jephthah’s vow meant a life without a husband for his daughter and that affected him in a direct way. Since she was his only child, there was none to continue his line. His name must perish out of Israel. That, too, was a heavy penalty according to the thinking of the people at that time. And all this happened because of a vow uttered rashly. Perhaps Solomon was thinking about Jephthah when he wrote, “It is a trap for a man to dedicate something rashly and only later to consider his vows” (Proverbs 20:25, *NIV*).

We can commend Jephthah for being as good as his word. Would we do as well? Have we ever said, “If only thus and so, I’ll do such and such?” Did we do it? Perhaps not. Like the Pharaoh of Egypt, once a plague was removed and normal conditions returned, he never did what he said he would do. Those who try to do what Jesus would do ought to be as good as their word.

## Naomi and the Moabitess

### Thoughts on the Book of Ruth

*Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.—Ruth 1:16.*

*Ioan Hosu*

It appears that the Book of Ruth was written by Samuel, the prophet, between 1046 and 1035 B.C. It is an impressive story of the way a Gentile woman came to be numbered among the ancestors of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). Though the book follows the book titled “Judges,” the narrative actually occurred early in the period of Judges, for Boaz, who would marry Ruth, was the son of Rahab who lived at the time of Israel’s conquest of Canaan.

Due to a great famine that came over the country, a family from Bethlehem in Judah decided to leave the land of Israel and live for a while in the land of Moab. The man was Elimelech, his wife was Naomi, and their two sons were Mahlon and Chilion (Ruth 1:2).

Naomi’s husband died and the two sons married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. Shortly after that, Naomi’s two sons died also. Soon she heard that “The LORD had visited his people” and now there was food in the land. Naomi decided to return home, and her two daughters-in-law did not want to leave her. Then Naomi said to them: “Go, return each of you to her mother’s house! May the LORD deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband” (Ruth 1:8,9, *NASV*).

At Naomi’s supplication, Orpah returned to her people. But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me” (Ruth 1:16,17, *NASV*). Hence they traveled together to Bethlehem. After reaching the city, Naomi did not want to be called “the pleasant one” any longer, since as she declared, “the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me” (Ruth 1:20). Then she said, “call me Mara,” which means bitter.

### Ruth in Israel

One day Ruth asked her mother-in-law for permission to go to the field and “glean among the ears of grain,” and she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, a rich man who was of the family of Elimelech. When Boaz saw Ruth, he asked his servants, “Whose young woman is this?” A servant replied, “She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab.” Boaz, the master of the field, encouraged Ruth to continue to stay close to his servants during the entire

harvest time, to work in his field, and to drink water out of his jars. When Ruth saw Boaz' care toward her, she fell on her face before him and was very amazed, not understanding why he should take such notice of her. Boaz replied, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you did not previously know. May the LORD reward your work, and your wages be full from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge" (Ruth 2:11,12, *NASV*).

Upon returning home, Ruth told her mother-in-law all that happened to her and how she had found favor in the eyes of Boaz. Naomi counseled Ruth on what to do to become Boaz' wife, for he was a close relative and he had the right to redeem her. When Boaz saw her, he said, "May you be blessed of the LORD, my daughter. You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich. Now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence. Now, it is true I am a close relative, however there is a relative closer than I" (Ruth 3:10-12).

The very next morning, Boaz took men of the elders of the city and called upon the relative that had the right to redeem Ruth. And Boaz said to him, "On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased, in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance" (Ruth 4:5, *NASV*). But that man, the closest relative, did not want to redeem Ruth, for fear of jeopardizing his own inheritance. Thus, Boaz redeemed Naomi and Ruth, the young Moabite woman, and everything that belonged to the family of Elimelech. According to a well-established custom of the time, the two men exchanged their sandals before the elders of the city. So, Ruth became the wife of Boaz and she gave him a son. They named him Obed. Obed was the grandfather of David.

### **Spiritual Lessons**

We notice that Ruth, the young Moabite woman, was blessed by God for she was an honest woman, humble and faithful, who loved her mother-in-law very much. Out of this story, we learn more significant lessons yet. In Israel, names had deep significance. The name Ruth means "friend, the one that gets close, friendship, beauty." Further, we know that the name Naomi means "the pleasant one." Boaz means "the one with power, through Him [God] I am strong." Obed means slave, servant of God, worshipper. Ruth, according to the meaning of her name and according to her attributes of character, represents the bride of Christ. She became the wife of Boaz (a type of Christ) because she listened to her mother-in-law, which typifies the prophets of the Old Testament.

In the same manner, the Church of God will become the bride of the heavenly Bridegroom, for she looks up to and listens to the advice left by the prophets of old (Psalm 45:10,11). As Naomi, at the beginning of their ministry the prophets were full of happiness and zeal for the name of the LORD, but this ministry brought them much

sadness, bitterness, and suffering, as was the case of Jeremiah, Micah, Elijah, John the Baptist, and many others.

Ruth was by birth a Moabite, a Gentile, but she adhered to the faith of Israel and gleaned what she could during the time of barley harvest. Barley is associated with Christ; for example, the firstfruits of the barley harvest represent the raising of Christ from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20; Leviticus 23:10). Gideon, who represents Christ, was also pictured by barley (Judges 7:13,14). Thus Ruth represents the Gentiles who humbly sought the blessings of Christ by seeking the Messiah of Israel during the harvest which opened the Gospel age.

The Bible account also tells of an individual whose name is not given (Ruth 4:1), who was the closest relative of Naomi. This man did not want to redeem Ruth, only the family of Elimelech. This person appears to represent the Law, which was given to the people of Israel. This law did not provide any promises or provisions to anyone except to the people of Israel.

From the word of God we see that Jesus Christ, represented in Boaz, did not redeem Israel and the Gentiles until he brought the ceremonial Law to an end (Ephesians 2:11-18; Romans 10:4).

We believe the child born to Boaz and Ruth, raised by Naomi, represents the human race during the times of restitution. The Lord Jesus with the church will bring forth from death the entire human family, which, during the Millennial age, will receive instructions from the Old Testament prophets. As Naomi was very happy because her beloved daughter-in-law gave birth to a son, the same prophets will be very happy at the sight of the entire human race coming out of their graves.

## A Stunning Deliverance

# The Song of Deborah

*Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song.—Judges 5:12.*

*A Verse-by-Verse Study in Judges 5 by Carl Hagensick*

Repetitive warfare punctuated the period of the judges of Israel. Among their foes were the Philistines in the south and the Canaanites in the north. Deborah of Ephraim and her general, Barak of Zebulun, were particularly concerned with an oppression by the Canaanites during the reign of Jabin of Hazor. The account of this battle is related in “Deborah, Gideon, and the LORD,” p. 8.

After obtaining the decisive victory and the death of Jabin’s general Sisera, Deborah wrote a victory song much as Moses and Miriam led Israel in song after the successful crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 15).

### Introduction—Judges 5:1-3

*Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying, Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves. Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing praise unto the LORD God of Israel.*

Though little is known of Barak’s father Abinoam, the fact that he was from Kedeshnaphtali, a Levitical city of refuge (Joshua 20:7), implies that either Abinoam was a Levite or that he fled there for refuge; if the latter, it might explain Barak’s secondary status. Barak himself, however, was sufficiently faithful to be listed as a hero of faith in Hebrews 11:32.

Deborah begins her song with praising the Lord for the victory, but is quick to add her appreciation of the willingness with which ten thousand Jews put their lives on the line to defend the nation against the superior armaments of the armies of Sisera. It is unclear whether the kings and princes to whom she addresses her words were leaders in Israel who helped in her struggle, or rulers of surrounding nations encouraged to reflect on the power of Israel’s God.

As Deborah and Miriam sang hymns of praise for miraculous deliverances from the hands of the enemy, so it is appropriate today for Christians to likewise take time after a spiritual victory to compose a hymn or testimony of thankfulness. As with Deborah, such testimony should first show gratefulness to God, but also include appreciation of fellow Christians who joined in our struggles, either through their prayers (James 5:16) or by words of encouragement, counsel, or other substantial assistance.

### **Praising God's Methods—Judges 5:4,5**

*LORD, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water. The mountains melted from before the LORD, even that Sinai from before the LORD God of Israel.*

It seems odd that all three of the geographical places named in these verses (Seir, Edom, and Sinai) are in the south of Israel, whereas the battle concerned a foe from the north and took place in the northwest by the river Kishon, a stream that flows from Mt. Carmel.

Undoubtedly the method God used to bring victory to Barak's army was a flash flood of the river, brought on by a sudden storm making the approach route for Sisera's chariots not only impassable but actually bogging them down in the mire. The march of God from Seir and Edom suggests that this storm approached from the southeast, quite contrary to the usual middle eastern squalls, which blow in over the Mediterranean in the northwest before turning south along the Jordan river valley and being dissolved in the arid Negev desert.

The quaking of the earth may be understood as either an earthquake accompanying the downpour or figurative language of the trembling of the people at the intensity of the rainfall. The likeness to the quaking is described as reminiscent of the quaking of Mt. Sinai at the giving of the Law covenant.

So with the Christian, the dark clouds that seem to cause the deepest distress are the very means for discomfiting the foes of the new creation.

### **Effects of Oppression—Judges 5:6-8**

*In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travelers walked through byways. The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel. They chose new gods; then was war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?*

The judgeship of Shamgar was some hundred years before that of Deborah. Thus it is intimated that dire conditions had existed for about a century. This does not necessarily mean that Jabin's domination in the north was that long, for the oppressors faced by Shamgar were the Philistines (Judges 3:31). In fact there is evidence of Canaanite influence immediately preceding Shamgar, for the name of his father Anath is that of one of the three principal goddesses of Canaan, either the wife or sister of Baal and associated with lust and war (*Insights Into Bible Understanding*, "Anath.")

It was not just the organized oppression of Gentile kings exacting heavy taxes. The general condition of lawlessness among highwaymen made the roads unsafe and forced the local population to seek narrow lanes to avoid being robbed. Even today one deep ravine in northern Israel is known as the "valley of the robbers" since the bandits could attack easily from their hiding places in the surrounding forested hills.

The term “inhabitants of the villages” which appears in italics in the King James version is more correctly rendered “the rulers ceased in Israel.” In other words, there was a period of time in which no judge was raised up to deliver the oppressed Hebrews. The “they” in verse 8 apparently refers to those who should have been the leaders of the people. Much of the blame for Israel’s desperate circumstances rested on their shoulders. Those to whom the safety of the people had been committed became instead the very ones who helped sponsor idolatry.

How true, even in our day, those entrusted with the spiritual welfare of their flocks frequently depart from the teachings of the Bible, substituting the gods of humanism, secularism, or the creedal gods of the dark ages.

The fact that there was not one spear among forty thousand of the Jews may well indicate that the northern oppressors, like those of Philistia, had imposed a forced embargo on the smithy trade among the Jews (1 Samuel 13:19-22).

### **Appreciation for the Governors—Judges 5:9-11**

My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the LORD. Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way. They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, even the righteous acts of his rule [ASV] in Israel: then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates.

Deborah’s praise of the governors of Israel is in contrast to her attitude toward “those who ride on white asses” and those that “sit in judgment” and those that “walk in the way.” According to *Insights Into Bible Understanding*, “Governors in Bible times generally had military and judicial powers and were responsible to see that the tribute, tax, or revenue to the king or superior ruler was paid by the jurisdictional district or province that the governors ruled.” As such, they often served as tax collectors, and Deborah praises their willingness to join in revolt against the oppressive taxation by the Canaanite king.

Deborah asks three groups to consider or meditate on this nobility, for thus is the thought of the Hebrew *siyach*, translated “speak” in verse 10. The riding on white asses, or ass colts, was sometimes the privilege of the descendants of a judge, as was the case with the sons of the judge Jair (Judges 10:4). These sons of judges often did not have the same piety as their more illustrious fathers. Thus the conduct of the governors was to be an object lesson to them, as it was to lesser local judges who sat in judgment at the city gates and to those who walked by the way, an idiomatic expression for those who went along with popular opinion and did not have the strong character to stand for Israel. (Similar English idiom: those who take the path of least resistance, or, those who go with the flow.)

Verse 11 indicates another dimension of the oppression, speaking of armed men gathering at the wells. Since it was the women who most often did the water drawing,

they were specially delivered in this battle. Along with verse 30, the implication is strong that it was customary for these women to be violated by these armed oppressors. This might be why it was a woman, Deborah, calling herself “a mother in Israel,” who rose up in rebellion rather than her male contemporaries.

The *American Standard Version* translates the latter part of verse 11, “There shall they rehearse the righteous acts of Jehovah, even the righteous acts of his rule in Israel. Then the people of Jehovah went down [again] to the gates.” None would rejoice more than the Hebrew women when the oppression was over and it was again safe to go down to their own judges in the gates of the cities.

### **The Refrain—Judges 5:12,13**

*Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam. Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the LORD made me have dominion over the mighty.*

This refrain, possibly repeated at the end of the song, marks a transition in the poem from a theme of thanksgiving to the mention of the roles played by the various tribes and then strikes a derisive satirical note in a final rejoicing over the defeat of the hated foe.

In the latter verse above Deborah mentions two dominions; first, the dominion of the surviving warriors over the less honorable nobility who chose to avoid the conflict, and second, her personal exaltation over the other tribal judges who lacked the courage to foment the rebellion against the Canaanites.

### **Tribal Reactions—Judges 5:14-18**

*Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against Amalek; after thee, Benjamin, among thy people; out of Machir came down governors, and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer. And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart. Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the seashore, and abode in his breaches. Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeopardated their lives unto the death in the high places of the field.*

One of the main distinctions between the period of the judges and that of the kings was the alliance of the tribes. During the judges, each tribe acted separately and cooperated only on selected occasions, whereas the kings ruled over a much more structured nation where, when they went to war, they went unitedly. Deborah’s song demonstrates the varying decisions of the different tribes. Deborah singles nine of these tribes out for specific mention. Judah, Simeon, and Manasseh are not mentioned. This omission may indicate the extent of control that Midian, Amalek, and the Arabs had just before Sisera’s defeat.



**Ephraim** joined in the battle. Ephraim played a dramatic role in the earlier defeat of Moab and Amalek in the days of the judge Ehud, by providing him a refuge after he slew Eglon with a dagger (Judges 3:13-30).

**Benjamin** is briefly mentioned as the second tribe to contribute forces to the tribal coalition.

**Machir**, from Manasseh (Numbers 26:29), founded a dynasty that conquered Gilead (Numbers 32:39,40). Manasseh is noted for supplying governors, military chiefs and tax enforcers.

**Zebulon** furnished those who handled “the pen of the writer,” more appropriately translated as “the marshal’s staff” in the *American Standard* translation. These would have been the leaders who were in the forefront of Barak’s forces. They were also a northern tribe under the oppressive taxation of King Jabin.

**Issachar**, seemingly the southernmost tribe directly affected by the Canaanite occupation, provided foot soldiers for the battle.

**Reuben** did not participate. Their inheritance was in the south and not directly affected by Jabin. Reluctantly they declined, since it was the time for their sheep to bring forth new lambs, thus they were held back by the temporal interests of their bleating flocks.

**Gilead**, being unaffected in trans-Jordan, also declined with the aforementioned segment of Machir.

**Dan** remained in his ships, not willing to jeopardize his profitable sea trade and his alliance with Tyre and Sidon.

**Asher** also was involved in maritime pursuits and was safely protected by the deep ravines, or “breaches” that led down from the anti-Lebanon mountains to the Mediterranean. Thus they felt secure and had no desire to risk their security and prosperity by joining against the powerful kingdom of Hazor.

**Zebulon** and **Naphtali**, being most affected, provided a great number of troops to hold the high ground overlooking the plain of Jezreel where the battle took place.

There is a lesson here for all God’s people not to refrain from giving assistance to our brethren for fear of financial loss, or out of the sense of personal security that says, “This is your battle to fight, it does not affect me.”

### **The Battle at Taanach—Judges 5:19-23**

*The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money. They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength. Then were the horsehoofs broken by the means of the pransings, the pransings of their mighty ones. Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty.*

Although many of the nobility did not join the fight, Deborah calls all of the fighters “kings,” for they acted as kings should act, protecting Israel against oppression and fully conquering the promised land. Their battle was not mercenary, they took no spoil, but fought out of pure patriotism, reminding one of the victory of Abraham in saving Sodom for Lot’s sake (Genesis 14:22,23).

The stars fighting, whether referring to angels or the elements themselves, might imply that some of the battle at least was still being fought at night. A bright night would enable the Israelites to more easily find the discomfited and deeply mired soldiers of Sisera.

It is from the song, and not the account of the battle in the previous chapter, that we learn the method God used was a flash flood down the Kishon River. The Kishon flows for about twenty-three miles from the hills of Taanach through a narrow mountain gorge to the sea. Usually dry in summer, spring rains can quickly cause a rushing torrent and swell the river to as wide as sixty six feet. Such a sudden onsurge of water would overwhelm the prancing horses and thoroughly mire down the scythed steel chariots.

Although Meroz has not been positively identified, it has been identified by some archaeologists with Khirbet Marus, some five miles south of Barak’s home town of Kadesh-naphtali. The curse on the city was probably occasioned by their failure to stop and capture the fleeing Sisera.

### **Jael—Judges 5:24-27**

*Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent. He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish. She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen’s hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples. At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell down dead.*

Although Heber had been a guide for the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt, his descendents fell into idolatry in their city of Arad in southern Judea. It may have been for this reason that Heber separated himself from his fellow Kenites and settled in Zaanaim, near Kadesh[naphtali] (Judges 4:11). He and his wife evidently were proselytes to Judaism and sought to be faithful to the Mosaic covenant.

When Sisera approached her tent in acute thirst requesting water, she flattered him by offering milk and butter, a potion which, when warmed, induces sleep. As he slumbered, she took a tent peg and, with the blow of a heavy hammer, slew the general by driving it through the temples.

It was for this act of heroism that Deborah lavishes praise on Jael. By thus meeting his death at the hand of a woman, the prophecy was fulfilled that Barak would not receive the glory for the victory (Judges 4:9).

### **A Satire—Judges 5:28-31**

*The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots? Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself, Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey; to every man a damsel or two; to Sisera a prey of divers colors, a prey of divers colors of needlework, of divers colors of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil? So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years.*

Deborah closes her song on a satirical note, mocking the mother of Sisera for anticipating the victorious return of a conquering general. She sarcastically pictures her attendants as saying he will quickly return in triumph, bringing vast spoils. Referring to the loot as containing “a damsel or two” for each soldier gives further weight to the removal of sexual exploitation as one of the elements of the Canaanite oppression which was especially galling to Deborah.

The brightly colored needlework, while referring to any garment, seems to be applied specially to shawls that would be “meet for the necks of them that took the spoil.”

The song ends, like it begins, praising Jehovah, and neither Barak nor Jael, as the ultimate cause of victory. May it be thus, she pleads, to all tyrants who oppress the people of God. The enemies are temporary but the shining prospect of those who are the Lord’s is to shine eternally as the sun—the Sun of Righteousness with “healing in its wings” (Malachi 4:2).

While the song and story of Deborah has many applications to the final battle of Armageddon, it also contains a lesson for all Christians as they battle the foes of the world, the flesh, and the devil in their personal lives. Every time we experience a personal victory, let us lift up our hearts and voices in a hymn of testimony and praise.

## He Stood Alone

### Samson

*And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone.  
—Genesis 2:18.*

*Richard E. Evans*

As the age of the Judges came to a close, God found it necessary to again chasten his people Israel. However, even as he chastened them, he set in motion a plan that would moderate the experience and ultimately bring about redemption.

#### The Birth

“And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years. And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. . . . And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him” (Judges 13:1-5,24).

The angel of the LORD declared to the mother of Samson that her child would begin the deliverance of Israel from the tyranny of the Philistines.

This declaration probably occurred at about the same time Hannah’s petition for a child was granted by Eli (1 Samuel 1:17). These two acts of grace revealed God’s love for his elect people and his tender care of them. Even as he chastened, he prepared deliverance by bringing forth two men of faith in different parts of the nation. Both would be a “judge” for his people, a “deliverer.” “And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge” (Judges 2:18).

The work Samson would begin, Hannah’s child Samuel would afterward bring to completion.

#### Samson’s Judgeship

Samson was active as a judge for twenty years. “And he [Samson] judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years” (Judges 15:20). Two great battles between Israel and the Philistines acted as bookends to that judgeship. The first was the devastating defeat of Israel at Ebenezer in which the Ark of the Covenant was lost: “And the Philistines fought,

and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. And the ark of God was taken” (1 Samuel 4:10,11). Upon hearing of the unprecedented loss, Eli fell, broke his neck, and died (1 Samuel 4:18). At that time Samson would have been a teenager.

The second battle of note came shortly after Samson’s death. As the forty years of oppression were to come to an end, God gave Israel a liberating victory at Mizpeh under the leadership of Samuel: “And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them ... So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel” (1 Samuel 7:11,13).

This Israelite victory was preceded by a twenty-year period during which the Ark of the Covenant, after its return by the Philistines, rested in the home of Abinadab (1 Samuel 7:1,2). Hence, Samson’s judgeship followed Eli’s death and took place during the latter half of the forty years of Philistine domination. It coincided with the time the Ark was in the house of Abinadab.

### **The Good Report**

As God’s chosen, Samson stood alone, not for a few hours, not for a few weeks, but for much of his adult life. He lived a life of rejection by the very people for whom he was judge and savior. Then, this man of faith died alone in the midst of his enemies.

“And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets ... And these all [including Samson], having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise” (Hebrews 11:32,39).

Because of his faith Samson was given a “good report.” This report was not gratuitous. Samson believed God and lived his life accordingly. For example, following the tremendous exertion involved in the slaying of a thousand men he had a life-threatening thirst. With complete certainty he called upon the God of Israel and water came forth: “And he [Samson] was sore athirst, and called on the LORD, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised? But God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw [Lehi, meaning “jaw,” was the name of the place—verses 9,14,19], and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived” (Judges 15:18,19).

God had promised Samson’s mother her son was to do a work. Samson’s faith in that promise gave him the boldness to ask for water—no, to claim his right for water. Believing God, he had the confidence to stand alone against that army of Philistines with only a jaw bone; and before that to stand alone against a lion with only his bare hands (Hebrews 11:33). Samson’s faith was great. He “obtained a good report”!

## The Life

The Old Testament account of this faithful man is brief. In addition to the angelic announcement of his birth only three episodes are recounted from a life that spanned some forty years:

- ♦ First, Samson's courtship and marriage to a daughter of Israel's oppressors, his fight with a lion, the wedding feast and his riddle, his wife's death, and the ensuing conflict with the Philistines—a period of only a few months.
- ♦ Second, his visit to Gaza and the taking of the city gate—parts of two days.
- ♦ Third, his courtship of Delilah, her betrayal and his capture, then his victory in death—another period of a few months.

## A Nazarite?

Most English versions render the angel's birth announcement in a way to suggest Samson was subject to the conditions of the Nazarite vow. This vow, however, was not something to be imposed, but was to be a voluntary act, a free-will offering to God (Numbers 6:21).

The Hebrew word translated "Nazarite" means "separated," "set aside," "consecrated." Rotherham's translation of the angel's words to the mother makes clear the relationship Samson enjoyed: "Now therefore, beware, I pray thee, and do not drink wine or strong drink, nor eat anything unclean; for lo! thou art about to conceive and bare a son, and no razor shall come on his head, for one separate unto God shall the boy be from his birth, and he shall begin to save Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (Judges 13:4,5, *Rotherham*).

The only condition placed on Samson's separation concerned his hair. The prohibition regarding drinking and eating was addressed to the mother, not to the son, and it was a prohibition modern science has shown to be wise for pregnant women.

A Nazarite vow was something to be freely taken for a short term, not something to be providentially demanded for a lifetime. There is no indication that Samson took such a vow or was obligated to live within its requirements. In fact, while under the direction of the spirit of the Lord he killed over a thousand men (Judges 14:19; 15:8,14,16). If he was under a God-imposed vow, this would present a serious dilemma: "When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the LORD ... All the days that he separateth himself unto the LORD he shall come at no dead body" (Numbers 6:2,6).

## The Marriage

When Samson was in his late teens, he was led by the Lord to marry a daughter of the Philistines. This was shortly after Eli's death and the return of the Ark, about the

midpoint of the Philistine oppression. “Then his father and his mother said unto him [Samson], Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well. But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines” (Judges 14:3,4).

Unlike Samson’s later involvement with Delilah, there is nothing said about him loving this daughter of a Philistine. Here again the translation may be misleading. The use of the word “pleaseth” may result in the conclusion that Samson’s motivation was selfish and lustful, the act of a willful teenager. The marginal reading presents the literal and more correct rendering: “Get her for me; for she is right in mine eyes” (Judges 14:3, margin; also LXX, YLT). She was right for Samson not because of love, or lust, but because it was the Lord’s will for him. It would provide “an occasion against the Philistines.”

The events that grew out of the wedding feast proved that contention. Samson did much damage to the Philistines; and it was done in such a way as not to bring down Philistine wrath on his countrymen.

At that time, following their defeat and temporary loss of the Ark, the people of Israel were demoralized and unable to challenge their oppressors. The marriage provided a means of limiting the suffering while restricting the conflict to Samson personally. He alone would incur the wrath of the enemy. He alone would be pursued.

This is exactly what occurred following Samson’s destruction of Philistine farmland with fire: “Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi [meaning “Jaw”]. And the men of Judah said, Why are ye come up against us? And they answered, To bind Samson are we come up, to do to him as he hath done to us. [Philistine wrath was directed solely against Samson.] Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? what is this that thou hast done unto us? And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them. And they said unto him, We are come down to bind thee, that we may deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines. And Samson said unto them, Swear unto me, that ye will not fall upon me yourselves. And they spake unto him, saying, No; but we will bind thee fast, and deliver thee into their hand: but surely we will not kill thee. And they bound him with two new cords, and brought him up from the rock” (Judges 15:9-13).

The fear that overwhelmed these three thousand men of Judah, and their desperate willingness to give Samson to the enemy, was no doubt the consequence of the ruinous defeat at Ebenezer and the loss of the Ark. Though it is not stated, these men may have outnumbered the Philistines as much as three to one, however, their fear made them weak.

## A Unique Ministry

Though brief, the account of the marriage and its aftermath reveals significant differences between Samson and other faithful ones used by God. Others came forth as a result of national repentance and a turning to God for help so their task was one of leadership. They did not fight alone, but led the men of Israel. No such turning, however, preceded Samson's "separation." The people did not receive him nor rally to his support. Unlike the others, Samson did not lead Israel into battle. He fought alone! Unlike the others, national repentance came after his judgeship, after his victory in death.

His burning of Philistine farmland and the single-handed defeat of a thousand men had to have had a moderating effect on Philistine conduct. The economic impact must have weakened them. Following on the heels of their experience with the Ark (1 Samuel 5:1 to 6:21), the Philistines, no doubt, exercised a bit more caution in their dealings with the people of Israel.

## Gaza

During his judgeship Samson went down to Gaza. The reason for the visit is not recorded. An unfortunate assumption often made is that it was lust since Samson chose the house of a harlot for his rest (Judges 16:1). Nothing in the account, however, supports such a conclusion. Apparently it was not uncommon in that day for the houses of harlots to function as inns, as they did in the days of Joshua when the spies stayed with Rahab in Jericho (Joshua 2:1).

There was probably a practical, but less sensational, reason for the visit: "There was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel: for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears: but all the Israelites went down to the Philistines, to sharpen every man his [plough]share, and his coulter, and his axe, and his mattock" (1 Samuel 13:19,20). The Philistines had a technological advantage and they jealously guarded it.

Whatever the reason for Samson going to Gaza, the removal of the city gate demonstrated once more to the Philistines the great power of the God of Israel. Though God was using them to chasten his people, they did not have complete freedom to do as they willed.

The Bible does not indicate the time of this visit to Gaza, but it was probably near the end of Samson's twenty-year judgeship. His great defeats against the Philistines would have faded in their memories. The removal of the gate jarred them and renewed in them a desire to get rid of this thorn in their flesh. So the subsequent bribery of Delilah to betray Samson was probably a direct outcome of the removal of Gaza's gate. Her betrayal, however, would result in Samson's victory in death and begin the deliverance God had promised.



## Delilah

As Samson's time came to a close, his love for a woman did come between him and his relationship with God. In spite of the unfounded assertions made by many commentators, the silence of the Bible indicates they both were unmarried. Also, there is nothing said about Delilah's race or religion. She could have been a Hebrew. Both peoples lived in that area, and the name Delilah is Semitic in form.

When a broad view is taken of Samson's life, his failure because of love is understandable. Though married at an early age, before he could enjoy the fruits of that relationship it was lost. Shortly thereafter his countrymen rejected him. They took him captive and turned him over to the enemy. Apparently he lived alone for the subsequent years, carrying the burden of his rejection. He probably had few friends as most would be in awe of his great accomplishments through faith.

Also, much of Israel probably would be unable to face him because of the shameful way they had treated him. This would have been especially true for the three thousand that not only turned him over to the enemy but, no doubt, stood by and watched as he fought that enemy alone. By not going to his aid their sense of guilt may well have been great and would have hindered any future relationship with Samson.

There is little wonder, then, that Samson would be blinded by this love for a woman, and he did love Delilah. His conduct was not motivated by lust as so often declared, but by love: "And it came to pass afterward, that he [Samson] loved a woman" (Judges 16:4).

Here is a great lesson for all who have responded to the call to be of God's heavenly priesthood. God is a jealous god and all who serve him must love him more than anything, any person, of this physical world: "For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (Exodus 34:14).

Because of his great need for human companionship, Samson was not able to see Delilah's weakness. His love led him to share a confidence she could not keep. For a brief time in his life his love for the physical was greater than his love for the spiritual. The desire to love and be loved is a strong human need. Those who are to be of the church, however, must always mind the words of Jesus: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37).

All who have had a secret, and a loved one who is aware there is a secret, know it can introduce a seriously divisive element into the relationship. It is very difficult not to share a secret with those with whom one shares life—especially if it is known there is a secret.

In any event Samson revealed his secret. His hair was cut and his strength departed from him. He was taken captive and blinded.

## **The Death**

In spite of his lapse, however, Samson accomplished God's purpose. In his chains he called upon God with the faith he exhibited throughout his life, and he was heard. "O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God" (Judges 16:28).

After being lead to the pagan temple and placed between its two great pillars, he again called out to his God: "And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life" (Judges 16:30).

The destruction of that pagan temple, and the death of a great number of prominent Philistines, set in motion the events that led to the Israelite victory at Mizpeh under Samuel's leadership (1 Samuel 7:5-13).

## **Undesigned Coincidence<sup>1</sup>**

Samson's victory in death explains an otherwise inexplicable text. Samuel had gathered Israel at Mizpeh not to do battle, but to pray. As indicated by the text, this was a consequence of a great change that had come over the people: "All the house of Israel lamented after the LORD" (1 Samuel 7:2).

This text appears without explanation. There is no indication for the cause of Israel's lament, for its sudden change of heart.

If Samson's victory in death happened just before this change, as seems to be the case, then it provides the probable explanation. That great act of self-sacrifice combined with the people's sense of guilt could have been the catalyst that brought on Israel's lament; and it was that lament that led to the subsequent removal of Philistine domination.

"Israel lamented after the LORD. And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods [male gods] and Ashtaroth [female god] from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim [Baals, male gods] and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only. And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the LORD" (1 Samuel 7:2-5).

It was at Mizpeh that God gave Israel its release from Philistine rule. So, as the angel of the LORD declared, Samson did begin the deliverance of Israel (Judges 13:5).

## The Lesson

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, and all the faithful of old, believed God, believed in his promise. So did Samson! His life reflected that belief. Jehovah God is not ashamed to be called the God of Samson (Hebrews 11:16).

Rejected by his people and destined to a life alone, Samson was a man who lived a life in faith. God has given his example that all with a similar faith might learn and stand firm in like circumstance. His faith in such extraordinary experiences should strengthen the faith of all who come after so they are undaunted when they encounter their “lion,” or the army of their enemy. When they experience rejection of family and of friends, they can recall how Samson’s faith remained strong though he stood alone. Even in his blindness he knew he could call upon his God and he would be heard.

In the common trials of daily lives Samson’s faith sets forth a challenge, an inspiration, particularly if one must stand alone.

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1), just as Samson ran the race before him.

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1. For other undesigned coincidences that substantiate the Bible as the Word of God see *Undesigned Coincidences in the Writings of the Old and New Testament*,“ J. J. Blunt, 9th edn., 1869.

## The Last Judge

# Samuel, a Prophet and a Judge

*To obey is better than sacrifice.—1 Samuel 15:22.*

*Robert Whittaker*

Although two books in our common version Old Testament are named after Samuel, he wrote neither. Perhaps this is why in the Septuagint the books are named Kings I and II, while Kings III and IV are what we know as first and second Kings. Samuel lived in the transition period between the deliverers of Israel called judges, and the anointed kings of Israel. As God's dedicated servant, he functioned in a dual role of prophet and judge.

### Biography

Samuel was an Ephraimite, born to Elkanah and Hannah. Elkanah had another wife, Peninnah, who bore him at least four children, but it was Hannah whom he loved most. Hannah, long-time barren, was under duress from her rival Peninnah. In this we see the wisdom of the higher standard of marriage in New Testament times: one woman, one man.

Elkanah was a religious man and made a yearly pilgrimage to Shiloh, a place in Ephraim where the tabernacle was pitched. This annual pilgrimage was required of every Israelite male at Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. Elkanah would take his whole family with him. On one poignant visit Eli the priest noticed Hannah's unusual behavior: her lips were moving but no words came out. He mistook her actions for being drunk, so much so that he rebuked her. We sometimes make a similar mistake in rebuking our brethren. "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20), said Jesus, but fruit is of gradual development and manifests itself in a continuous ripening or progression in a right or wrong moral condition. Therefore, judgment needs to be withheld until the situation more clearly manifests the fruitage.

Hannah explained to Eli that she was praying out of grief but did not give the details. Eli, realizing his error, responded with a blessing, "May the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him" (1 Samuel 1:17, *NIV*) and as high priest his words carried authority from God. As members of a royal priesthood our words carry authority also, and so we are admonished to speak as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11). Hannah took comfort in his words for we read that she then "ate something, and her face was no longer downcast" (1 Samuel 1:18, *NIV*) She had heard words of hope and her faith laid hold on this hope. So with us, "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

In her prayer to Yahweh, Hannah made a vow that if the Lord gave her a son, she would give him back to the Lord for all the days of his life and that no razor would ever be used on his head. This was a Nazarite vow for life. Samuel's hair would have grown quite long and heavy as he matured. He would have been unmistakably marked as one consecrated

to Yahweh's service. This was also true of the apostle Paul who speaks of bearing the marks of the Lord Jesus in his body. Paul's life bore witness to his dedication and so with us, as we age, our manner of life should give evidence that we have been with Jesus and learned of him.

It is unusual that a parent could make a vow regarding the future direction of a child, but if we consider it from the viewpoint of Hannah and apply the vow only to what she would do, all seems harmonious. She would give her son to the Lord's service while he was still under age to make such decisions, and she would not cut his hair. Later, when Samuel was of mature years, he would need to decide for himself whether to continue in the service of the Lord or not. With Samuel his early dedication continued and the proverb, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6) was proven true.

### Keeping our Vows

Elkanah went up once a year with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the Lord and to fulfill his vow, probably at the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall of the year. We are not told what his vow was but we discern he was a reverent man. He believed, "when thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it" (Ecclesiastes 5:4). Hannah too had the same commitment; she would pay her vow as soon as Samuel was weaned which would have been about three years of age. She stayed behind with the consent of her husband: "Do what seems best to you ... stay here until you have weaned him; only may the LORD make good your word" (1 Samuel 1:23, *NIV*—a footnote says "your" is the reading in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Septuagint, and Syriac). We too should feel under constraint to pay our vows.

It is hard to grasp what went through Hannah's mind as she brought her young boy to Eli the priest, knowing she must give him up. Samuel, too, would find it heart-wrenching to leave his mother at such a tender age. We imagine there were both visible weeping and suppressed emotions. Samuel would not have a normal life; Hannah would not be a normal mother. A consecrated life is not normal as the world sees it.

However, the supreme source of Hannah's joy is not in Samuel but in God who answered her prayer. At the end of the prayer recorded in the second chapter, she includes prophetic testimony: "He [God] will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed" (1 Samuel 2:10, *NIV*). Samuel was to have a part in this fulfillment for he would be God's instrument in anointing both Saul and David in due course. Samuel would form the bridge, the transition from God's theocracy through judges (deliverers) to God's theocracy through kings (subordinate rulers). In a sense, Samuel was the last of the judges, although he is also referred to in Scripture as a prophet (Acts 3:24; 13:20). When he delivered the Israelites from the Philistines, he was doing the work of a judge (1 Samuel 7:3,5,13).

Every year Hannah would make the pilgrimage with Elkanah. There she got to visit Samuel, though the visit was short. She gave him a new robe to replace the robe of the

previous year. Thus his mother remembered him year by year as he grew. In one visit Eli blessed the parents, “May the Lord give you children,” for having given up Samuel. This prayer was answered with three sons and two daughters. “The blessing of the LORD brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it” (Proverbs 10:22, *NIV*). Surely, Hannah was richly repaid for any short-term sorrow she may have felt.

### **Established as Prophet in Israel**

“Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with men” (1 Samuel 2:26, *NIV*). This reminds us of Luke’s comment that Jesus “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52, *NKJV*). Such is a sanctified life. Others do notice it.

In chapter three the Lord spoke to Samuel who may have been twelve at this time (Josephus, *Antiquities* 5, 10, 4). We are informed that in those days the word of the Lord was rarely heard and there were not many visions. Therefore, when the Lord spoke to Samuel, neither he nor Eli immediately recognized that the Lord was calling. Not until the third call did Eli recognize the Lord wanted to communicate with Samuel, and he gave Samuel instruction on how to respond. So it is with us: the Lord wants to communicate his word but we are slow to respond. “Speak, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:10, *NIV*). This is the state we get ourselves into when the word of the Lord is rarely heard. We need to read it daily to have its influence current in our lives.

On the fourth call Samuel answered and the Lord told him shocking news unfavorable to Eli and his house. Previously, a man of God had told Eli that his sons and his line would be cut off from being priests because of the sons’ contemptible treatment of the priesthood responsibilities. Now the Lord affirmed this to Samuel, who feared telling Eli such depressing news. Upon Eli’s strong command Samuel told him everything. This was the beginning of Samuel’s career as a prophet of the Lord. All Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet, for his words proved true, passing the test of Deuteronomy 18:21,22.

In fulfillment of the prophetic words the Ark was captured in battle, Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers, and Phinehas and Hophni, sons of Eli, were killed. The news of the Ark’s capture overcame Eli and he died in a fall at the age of 98. Eli had judged Israel forty years (1 Samuel 4:18).

The Philistines had a bad time with the Ark. First, Dagon was broken in a fall before the Ark. Then the people were afflicted with tumors and disease from an abundance of rats. Moving the Ark to successive cities only proved the supposition that the God of Israel was in the plague on the people, for the plague followed the movement of the Ark.

### **Established as Judge in Israel**

It was thought prudent to send the Ark back to Israel. So the Philistines loaded it onto a new cart, hitched up two untried cows that had recently given birth, added a guilt offering

of gold replicas of the tumors and rats, and sent all on their way with no driver. The cows headed straight for Israel, which convinced the Philistine rulers that the possession of the Ark was the cause of the plague. After a short stay in the town of Beth Shemesh, because of the death of seventy citizens on looking into the ark, it was sent to Kirjath-jearim where it was kept for twenty years. It is at this time that Samuel is reintroduced (1 Samuel 7:2,3). He took a reformer's position and the people rid themselves of their Baals and Ashtaroths, idols that they superstitiously worshipped. They repented and turned to serve the Lord only: "And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh" (1 Samuel 7:6).

What followed was a great victory over the Philistines, their long-time oppressors, in answer to prayer. The Lord scared the enemy into panic with loud thunders. The Israelites rushed down from Mizpah, created a great slaughter and recaptured lost territory, even from Ekron to Gath. To memorialize this occasion Samuel took a great stone, set it up where the battle took place, and named it Ebenezer, "stone of help." The Israelites, when they went that way, would see it and recall the Lord's help over the Philistines. Many Christians have "Ebenezer" experiences, times we are helpless and the enemy comes in like a flood. We are down, discouraged, and overwhelmed, but then we call on the name of the Lord for help and he responds with a providential leading that restores our hope and confidence in him to give us the victory. At these times we want to set up "stones of help" in our minds, remembrances, so that we recall the Lord's care and compassionate love as we continue our Christian walk.

Samuel continued to judge Israel all the days of his life and intended that his sons, Joel and Abijah, judge Israel after him. He even appointed them judges when he was old, but they perverted justice and took bribes. Israel clamored for a king, which displeased Samuel and the Lord, but the Lord granted their wish, and after explaining what difficulties life under a king would mean, Samuel was sent to anoint Saul the first king of Israel.

### **Interactions with King Saul**

The narrative continues with the establishment of Saul as king and Samuel's admonitions to the people not to turn away from the Lord to useless idols but to serve the Lord with all their heart. Samuel's words were backed up with power, for he called on the Lord to send thunder and rain in the dry season (1 Samuel 12:16-18). Their fearful response is a request for Samuel to pray for them, evidently for forgiveness in asking for a king. We can take Samuel's reply to our own heart: "Far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right. But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will be swept away" (1 Samuel 12:23-25, *NIV*).

As children of the Lord, we have this same spirit of love for our brethren. We pray to our Father for the success of our fellow believers in prosecuting the Christian walk, that such be not overcome of sin, nor fall into the snare of the devil, but that each keep God and

Christ in his focus and not make idols of wealth, amusements, education, career, and self. The duty of every Christian is to teach the way that is good and right and to worship the true King, the giver of every good and perfect gift, to whom should be rendered our greatest thankfulness for his character and benevolence. The Lord will not coerce his people into doing good, but will allow us, if we so choose, to persist in an evil course and to suffer the fruits of unrighteousness.

### **King Saul**

King Saul started out well as humble and obedient, but shortly into his kingship he disobeyed greatly by offering the burnt-offering himself, evidently intending to make the fellowship offering too. Interrupted by the arrival of Samuel, his excuse was he couldn't wait any longer with the army losing heart and deserting him and the threat of a Philistine attack (1 Samuel 13:8-14). We too need to wait on the Lord in matters that are not our prerogative to do. As a result Samuel had to take a strong position and rebuke Saul. The loss for King Saul was tremendous: "Your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command" (1 Samuel 13:14, *NIV*).

Saul persisted in a progressively evil course. His next recorded interaction with Samuel is in chapter 15 where the Lord directed him, through Samuel, to totally destroy the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord" (Romans 12:19, *NIV*). Saul gathered a great army and wreaked destruction on the Amalekites but disobeyed in sparing Agag their king and the best of the animals. Saul also set up a monument at Carmel in his own honor.

When Samuel caught up with Saul, the confrontation was not friendly. Saul's first excuse was that the soldiers spared the best of the animals to sacrifice unto the Lord; his second, "I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them" (1 Samuel 15:24, *NIV*). It is within this context that we have the oft-quoted words, "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king" (1 Samuel 15:22,23). We see that the Lord lays a great premium on obedience; sacrifice is acceptable only when it follows obedience. We are informed that Samuel never visited Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him.

### **Anointing of David**

What follows is Samuel's anointing of David (chapter 16). Samuel was sent to Bethlehem, where Jesse and his eight sons resided. On seeing the eldest son, who evidently was striking in height and royal bearing, Samuel wrongly thought that this must be the Lord's choice. But the Lord said, "I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7, *NIV*). Thankful we are that the Lord looks at the heart: the



intentions, the character, and the thoughts. The choice went to the youngest of Jesse's eight sons: "He was ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features" (1 Samuel 16:12, *NIV*). Few of us possess the physically striking appearance that calls forth respect and submission from our fellow man, but David had not only the fertile heart condition the Lord desired, but also pleasing features that would stand him well in the Lord's providential development to leadership. With the anointing of David, the spirit of the Lord left Saul. This is the last we read of Samuel until chapter 25 where we are told that Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him.

### **A Faithful Judge**

Samuel, a faithful judge of Israel from his youth until his death, a Nazarite all his life, a fully devoted, consecrated man who maintained his zeal and obedience to the Lord and was so recognized by the people. "I have been your leader from my youth until this day. Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the LORD and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? ... You have not cheated or oppressed us, they replied. You have not taken anything from anyone's hand" (1 Samuel 12:2-4, *NIV*).

Samuel's faithfulness is attested in Hebrews: "What more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about ... Samuel ... who through faith ... administered justice, and gained what was promised" (Hebrews 11:32,33, *NIV*). Two aspects of Samuel's judgeship are here emphasized: his faith in God and his obedience to that faith. Judged victorious, he is now waiting in the sleep of death for the faithful of the Gospel age to also gain the victory of obedience to Yahweh through faithful recognition of our role in Christ. May the memory of Samuel's faithfulness be an inspiration to us as one of the great cloud of witnesses put forth in the Scriptures for our learning!

## New Orleans

# Restoring a City; Restoring a World

*“And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” – Acts 3:20,21*

**HURRICANES KATRINA AND RITA** with their resultant storm surges cut twin paths of destruction across America’s Gulf Coast from Texas to the Florida panhandle.

The damage from the storms was greatly multiplied when the levee separating the city of New Orleans from Lake Pontchartrain was breached, flooding as much as 80 per cent of the historic city that lay largely below sea level.

Some 500,000 people were displaced and uncounted others were left dead as a result of the catastrophe. In some places looting and gang violence occurred before being controlled by the authorities.

Evacuation of the homeless was delayed by both the flooded conditions and lack of initial organization by the various governmental agencies. This caused frustration and discontent among the people.

Some wonder at the timing of this calamity so soon after the U.S. pressured Israel to give up part of the Promised Land.

The hearts of all true Christians are touched with compassion at the human tragedy, especially with the unnecessary loss of life. However, the Bible does hold out a comforting message to those who have suffered. Jesus spoke of a time when “**all** that are in their graves shall come forth” (John 5:29).

The key word is “all.” This promise is reiterated by the apostle Paul: “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall **all** be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). The word “all” shows the inclusiveness of the promised resurrection: “all,” whether believers in Jesus or not, will come back to life, including all who lost their lives in Hurricane Katrina.

## Rebuilding a City

So vast was the destruction that some wondered how the city could be rebuilt. If it were to rise again, it would be a tremendous task costing billions of dollars adding further strain to an already burgeoning national deficit.

If the city is rebuilt, it must be accomplished in a series of methodical steps. These include:

1. Planning the operation and amassing the necessary manpower and machinery.
2. Repairing the breached levees.
3. Draining the water from the flooded areas.
4. Razing the existing structures that are too damaged to rehabilitate.
5. Drying out and cleansing the dangerously polluted ground that would support the new city.
6. Rebuilding the infrastructure of roads, underground cables, electrical grids, utility lines, sewer system, and everything else needed to support a metropolis.
7. Restoring the necessary services of police, fire protection, public service, schools, hospitals, and municipal government.
8. Rebuilding the houses, stores, factories, and ports to make the new city viable.

### **A Catastrophe of Biblical Proportions**

So great was the impact of the storm and the breached levee that many referred to it as being a storm “of biblical proportions.” It was unclear whether they were thinking of such scripturally-recorded events as the flood of Noah’s day, the utter desolation of Egypt by the ten plagues and the drowning of Pharaoh’s army in the Red Sea, or to the prophetic battles dramatically described in the apocalyptic writings in Revelation. The latter is more likely.

Revelation does indeed contain prophecies that speak of worldwide catastrophic events. The battles in this book are not to be taken literally, but are metaphoric descriptions of a collapse and destruction of the social order that now prevails.

The symbol of a storm is used by one ancient prophet: “Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and strong one; as a tempest of hail, a destroying storm, as a tempest of mighty waters overflowing, will he cast down to the earth with the hand” (Isaiah 28:2).

This storm of trouble will level the social structure of earth as we know it just as surely as Hurricane Katrina damaged New Orleans and leveled Gulfport and some other cities. Although the Lord is thus spoken of as devouring present society, it is not with a view to its annihilation; it is the first step in rebuilding a new and more equitable state of things for the inhabitants of planet earth.

Using ancient Egypt as representing the present conditions of the civilized world, we read: “And the LORD shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even to the LORD, and he shall be intreated of them, and shall heal them” (Isaiah 19:22).

This process is described in greater detail in Psalm 90:3-5: “Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men. For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up.”

Here we see both the justice and the love of God. In justice he sentenced mankind to death—destruction—and in love he promised a resurrection, saying, “Return, ye children of men.” By a flood of judgment he brought man into the sleep of death only to bring him forth as fresh as grass in the morning. Well did the psalmist write, “Weeping endureth for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psalm 30:5).

Psalm 90:6 identifies this “morning” as lasting a thousand years, the same as described in Revelation as when the church of Christ will “live and reign with him a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4). This is the period also known as the Millennium or “Christ’s thousand-year kingdom.”

### **Times of Restitution**

The work of this kingdom is identified as a period of restitution or reconstruction (Acts 3:19-21). As there is a series of progressive steps in rebuilding the destroyed cities of the gulf, so there is a series of such phases in the rebuilding of the world in the “times of restitution.” These include:

1. Leveling the old order so that the new can be built up (Isaiah 40:4; Revelation 21:5).
2. Establishing a framework for the new government by resurrecting the ancient prophets and installing them over his ancient favored people of Israel (Hebrews 11:35-40; Isaiah 1:26).
3. Bringing forth from the dead the residents of this new earth: “all that are in their graves” (John 5:29).
4. Building a spiritual infrastructure by turning man from sin to righteousness (Ezekiel 11:19).
5. Removing the pollutants of the earth and perfecting it so even the desert shall blossom like a rose (Isaiah 35:1).
6. Testing the resurrected human race to determine if they are sincerely committed to righteous living before giving them the gift of everlasting life (Revelation 20:7-9).

Such is God’s great plan for blessing all the families of the earth. And if God plans it, it will surely come to pass.

# News and Views

## Pastoral Bible Institute News

### PBI News

The Herald web site ([www.heraldmag.org](http://www.heraldmag.org)) has undergone a face lift to make it more attractive. Links have also been added to the home page to access The Herald magazine in either Polish or German, and the First Volume in any of 31 languages. Clicking a link immediately redirects the user to the web site containing the information.

## World News

### Religious

Europe is undergoing a massive population shift—some say the largest in more than a millennium—as Muslims from the Middle East and North Africa cross the Mediterranean in search of work and a better life. The Muslim population of Europe is increasing dramatically; in countries like France, it is already about six million, or 10% of the total, and could easily double in percentage terms in the coming 20 years.

—Wall Street Journal, 7/11/2005

In a chilling irony, women may actually have fewer rights under Iraq's new, "democratic" constitution than they did under Saddam Hussein. "The United States government has poured millions of dollars into democracy training for Iraqi women, and more than 1,800 Americans have died for Iraqi freedom. But it may turn out to be for Iraqi male freedom," said Katheryn Coughlin, program administrator for the American Islamic Congress, a nonprofit [agency] doing democracy training in Iraq. The country's secular civil code may be replaced with Islamic Shariah law under the new constitution, which restricts women's rights to an education, to careers and marriage partners of their choice, to divorce, and to inheritance.

—Boston Herald, 8/15/2005

In one of his first official acts, Pope Benedict XVI invited Rome's chief rabbi to his installation ceremony and issued special greetings to Jews. He also assured Muslims that the Roman Catholic Church wants to build "bridges of friendship." The pope is seeking to keep up interfaith momentum begun by John Paul II, who visited Rome's central synagogue in 1986 and a mosque in Damascus, Syria, in 2001, both papal firsts.

—St. Louis Post Dispatch, 8/14/2005

Every major religion except Islam is declining in Western Europe, according to the Center for the Study on Global Christianity at the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts. The drop is most evident in France, Sweden and the Netherlands, where church attendance is less than 10% in some areas. In 12 major European countries, 38% of people say they never, or practically never, attend church, according to the World Values Survey in 2000. France's 60% non-attendance rate is the highest in that group. In the USA, only 16% say they rarely go to church.

—USA Today, 8/11/2005

Three Indonesian women are on trial for teaching Christian songs to Muslim children. Muslim extremists are demanding the three women be put to death for allegedly evangelizing Muslim children. Prosecutors are calling for the women to receive five years in jail. By contrast, those convicted of the 2004 bombing that killed 10 people at the Australian embassy are serving only four years. Christians say this discrepancy reveals that Indonesia's legal system treats Christians and Muslims very differently.

—CBN News, 8/1/2005

## Social

The aid agency Oxfam warned that about 3.6 million people, about a third of them children, face starvation in Niger, a West African nation devastated by locusts and drought. The U.N.'s humanitarian agency estimates some 800,000 children under 5 are suffering from hunger, including 150,000 faced with severe malnutrition. This desert nation of 11.3 million regularly ranked among the world's least developed.

—Associated Press, 7/24/2005

More and more terrorists are using cell phones to remotely detonate bombs—and there's not much authorities can do about it. Cell phones have been connected to terrorist bombings in Madrid, Bali and Israel. Many roadside bombs in Iraq are believed to be triggered by cell phones. Train bombings in London have yet to be linked to the use of cell phone detonators but U.S. authorities were so worried, they shut down cell phone service in tunnels linking New York and New Jersey for two weeks immediately after the bombings.

—Investors' Business Daily, 8/29/2005

Japanese women have a life expectancy of 85.59 years, setting the world record for the 20th straight year, the government said. Girls born in Japan in 2004 can expect to live 0.26 year longer than those born in 2003, while Japanese male life expectancy was 78.64 years and placed second only to Icelandic men, who live an average of 78.8 years, the Health Ministry said in a statement. Japanese women have had the world's longest life expectancy since 1985. Researchers say Japan's traditional fish-based, low fat diet may be the secret to longevity.

—Associated Press, 7/22/2005

The number of home-schooled students in the U.S. rose from 850,000 in 1999 to at least 1.1 million in 2003. More than 2.2 percent of children through grade 12 are now home-schooled.

—USA Today, 8/4/2005

Hundreds of Shiite Muslim pilgrims participating in an annual religious commemoration in northern Baghdad were killed Wednesday in a stampede on a bridge apparently triggered by fears of an insurgent attack. At least 845 pilgrims, most of them women, children and the elderly, died. The Ministry of Health said the toll could rise to 1,000 or more. It was the highest death toll in any single incident in Iraq since well before the 2003 U.S.-led invasion.

—Los Angeles Times, 9/1/2005

The death toll from record monsoon rains in western India totaled almost 700, officials said. Three people died after being crushed in a stampede at a Bombay shantytown, sparked by rumors of a tsunami and a burst dam. The city was hit by an unprecedented deluge of up to 37 inches of rain, the heaviest rainfall since India began keeping weather records in 1846.

—Associated Press, 7/29/2005

## **Political**

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and other senior Bush administration officials have abruptly stopped referring to the “war on terror.” Instead, they have replaced it with a new one: the “global struggle against violent extremism.” The old expression was too narrowly focused and thus, misleading, said Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Richard Myers, “If you call it a war, then you think of people in uniform as the solution.” The struggle against the enemies of civilization, Myers said, is “more diplomatic, more economic, more political than military.”

—Barron’s, 8/8/2005

Mark Rasch, former head of the Justice Department’s computer crime unit, has noticed a disturbing trend. Al-Qaida and other terror groups are trying to hire Internet hackers to penetrate government and commercial computer networks, he says. Rasch is now the chief security counsel for Solutionary, a provider of managed information security services. Rasch said that he had documented cases where Chechen rebels with hacking skills were being paid to hack into computers in the U.S. and steal money. He says that plans were recovered in Afghanistan that showed Al-Qaida wanted to attack networks in the U.S. that controlled so-called SCADA systems—computer networks that control heating, ventilation, power generation, air conditioning and dam gates. The Internet is a prime ground for these activities because of the anonymity it affords.

—Investors’ Business Daily, 8/18/2005

Robert Mugabe may be a pariah in western nations but his image clearly remains untarnished in the eyes of Chinese diplomats who named him an honorary professor. Undismayed by criticism of Mr. Mugabe's urban eviction program, which the UN says has made 700,000 poor people homeless, Beijing's foreign affairs college instead hailed his "brilliant contribution" to diplomacy and international relations. Such praise and the warm welcome given Mr. Mugabe by China's president underline Beijing's willingness to embrace leaders widely shunned in the west as part of its efforts to build international influence and ensure access to key resources.

—Financial Times, 7/27/2005

A Russian court ordered that the radical National Bolshevik Party be disbanded, a move rights activists and analysts said is aimed at silencing a group opposed to President Vladimir Putin and his government. The court didn't provide a reason for its ruling. "We haven't spilled a single drop of blood, we haven't pricked anybody with a pin," said Eduard Limonov, leader of the party and a writer who has sought change in Russia's constitutional regime. Critics complain that since Mr. Putin came to power in 2000, the Kremlin has turned parliament into a rubber-stamp body, put national television under state control and ended regional governors' elections to make them virtual appointees.

—Associated Press, 6/29/2005

In Britain there are 4 million surveillance cameras in public places. The average commuter has his or her image captured 300 times a day.

—The Washington Post, 8/4/2005

## Financial

How much will Hurricane Katrina cost? With the Federal Government spending more than \$2 billion a day in affected areas, some members of Congress are estimating that the bill could top \$200 billion. That's equal to nearly 9% of what the U.S. government spends each year. Washington is expected to borrow money without finding ways to pay for it. The bulk of the rebuilding costs will probably show up in next year's budget deficit, which was estimated—pre-Katrina—to exceed \$314 billion.

—TIME, 9/19/2005

With the US economy again seeming in good health, it has been tempting to forget about America's bloated current account deficit. The US has racked up a deficit of around \$2.25 trillion since 2001 without suffering the ill effects. But economists point out that US debt to the rest of the world looks set to rise steeply over coming years. By the end of 2005—for the first time since records began in the 1960s—the US is likely to be paying more to service its debts than it receives in foreign income. As this happens, America will find itself borrowing not just to fund current spending, but simply to service previous debts—a position more commonly associated with a developing economy.

—Financial Times, 8/10/2005



That the Chinese currency could occupy center stage on Wall Street is a reflection of how much the world has changed. In the longer run, the impact on trade and on the world financial system could be huge. The most immediate and potentially most significant is the impact on interest rates, as a result of China feeling less need to buy dollars to hold the yuan down. Higher bond yields could spill over into other sectors, pushing up mortgage rates and the costs of borrowing.

—Wall Street Journal, 7/25/2005

The World Bank could face a multi-billion dollar financing shortfall unless donor governments promise more money to fund the Group of Eight rich countries' debt relief proposal for poor nations. At meetings in London and Scotland, the G8 proposed that the bank immediately write off 100 per cent of the debt owed by 27 nations that have qualified. But the bank is concerned that the rich donor countries that finance the International Development Association—the bank's loan and grant arm—are not guaranteeing to compensate it for all the repayments it will no longer receive.

—Financial Times, 8/2/2005

By 2020, Russia will take over from France by becoming the largest food and grocery market in Europe. The Russian market will be worth €375bn by that time, rising from the current €134bn.

—Food Production Daily, 7/29/2005

It took us 125 years to use the first trillion barrels of oil. We'll use the next trillion in 30.

—Chevron Advertisement, 7/12/2005

## Israel

Israel is in the middle of what's being called the worst recession in its 55-year history. For a nation that boomed through most of the 1990s due to mass immigration, foreign investment and its high-tech industry, the fall has been fast and steep. The closure of thousands of businesses has been jarring. Approximately 1.2 million Israelis (almost a fifth of the population) are now living in poverty.

—CBN News, 7/31/2005

More than 1,800 North American Jews will move to Israel this summer. On July 13 [2005] two separate chartered El Al flights with 500 immigrants from the United States and Canada will arrive. This is the largest contingent of North American Jews to make aliyah in one day in Israel's history. Nefesh B'Nefesh has assisted more than 4,000 newcomers to Israel since 2002.

—Bridges for Peace website, 7/8/2005

In a simultaneous ingathering of exiles from two sides of the globe, two planes filled with new immigrants touched down in Israel on the morning of July 27—one from America and one from Ethiopia. The flight from the United States was the third of seven flights this year bringing immigrants from North America to the Jewish state. Eighty new immigrants also arrived in Israel on July 27 from Ethiopia.

—Arutz 7, 7/28/2005

Professor Chanan Eshel, an archaeologist from Bar-Ilan University, said on July 15 that the discovery of two fragments of a nearly 2,000-year-old parchment scroll from the Dead Sea area gave hope to biblical and archaeological scholars—frustrated by a dearth of material unearthed in the region in recent years—that the Judean Desert could yet yield further treasure. The two small pieces of brown animal skin, inscribed in Hebrew with verses from the book of Leviticus, most likely are from “refugee” caves in Nachal Arugot, where Jews hid from the Romans in the second century.

—Jerusalem Post, 7/19/2005

On July 27, Palestinian Authority (PA) Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia said Israel’s planned withdrawal from the Gaza Strip would eventually lead to its surrender of the Jews’ ancient capital, Jerusalem. “We are telling the entire world: ‘Today Gaza and tomorrow Jerusalem. Today Gaza and tomorrow an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital,’ ” Qureia said while reviewing PA security forces in Gaza. He insisted the Palestinian Arabs would never agree to end their hostility towards the Jews until the holy city was relinquished to their control. “Without Jerusalem, there will be no peace,” said Qureia a day earlier, amid reports Israel planned to build a new Jewish housing structure in the so-called “Muslim Quarter” of Jerusalem’s Old City.

—Jerusalem Newswire, 7/27/2005

A public opinion poll revealed a majority of Palestinian Arabs believe unrelenting Islamic terrorism brought about Israel’s decision to surrender control of the Gaza Strip and northern Samaria and uproot all Jews living there. Carried out by the Center for Opinion Polls and Survey Studies at An-Najah University in Shechem, the poll also showed nearly half of all Palestinians want to see anti-Jewish violence continue. Asked what factor they believed played the biggest role in causing Israel’s Knesset to approve the disengagement, 40% of respondents voted for “pressure caused by Palestinian resistance”—meaning the blowing up of Israeli buses, cafes, restaurants and shopping malls, as well as incessant rocket and mortar attacks.

—Jerusalem Newswire, 7/19/2005

The first stage of a state-of-the-art desalination facility has just begun operating at Ashkelon on Israel's southern coastline. Until two years ago the country's primary natural reservoir, the Sea of Galilee, dropped alarmingly and the water situation had become quite desperate. The Ashkelon facility is part of a national Desalination Master Plan, launched by the Israeli government in 2000, designed to help address chronic water resource problems. With virtually limitless amounts of seawater available the new plant, and other planned facilities, should allow Israelis and their neighbors to drink and irrigate more easily.

—www.israel21c.com, 8/7/2005

Workers repairing a sewage pipe in the Old City of Jerusalem have discovered the biblical Pool of Siloam, a freshwater reservoir that was a major gathering place for ancient Jews making religious pilgrimages to the city and the reputed site where Jesus cured a man blind from birth, according to the Gospel of John [9:1-7. This ... pool] was built early in the 1st century BC and was destroyed by the Roman Emperor Titus about AD 70. The excavators have been able to date the pool fairly precisely because ... ancient workmen ... buried four coins in the plaster [of the steps leading down to the water. ... All are from the period] 103 to 76 BC. That provides the earliest date at which the pool could have been constructed.

—Los Angeles Times, 8/9/2005

### **Book Review**

*The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*, Thomas L. Friedman. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005. 496 pages.

“Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low.” So states Isaiah 40:4. This is Friedman's third book on the topic of globalization. His lucid description about what's happening in the world today illustrates, but never quotes, Isaiah's prophetic image. The major developments of our time, he claims, is not the attack on the World Trade Center on 9/11 or the Iraq war. It is the convergence of technology and events that allow India, China, and so many other countries to become part of a global supply chain for services and manufacturing, creating an explosion of wealth in the middle classes of the world's two biggest nations. This is what gives them a huge new stake in the success of globalization. And with this “flattening” of the globe, which requires us to run faster just to stay in the same place, the world may seem to have gotten too fast for human beings.

Friedman's book is an essential update that nicely supplements what was written in *Studies in the Scriptures*, vol. 4, a hundred years ago. Friedman shows how globalization and cheap, ubiquitous telecommunications have finally obliterated all impediments to international competition. Those who are successful and the discontents are powerfully illuminated by him.

—Richard Doctor

# Short Features

## A Person of Character

Let's face it: It's not easy to become a person of character. It takes a good heart, but it also requires wisdom to know right from wrong and the discipline to do right even when it's costly, inconvenient or difficult. Becoming a person of character is a lifelong quest to be better.

A person of character values honesty and integrity, and pays whatever price is needed to be worthy of trust, earning the pride of family and friends and self-respect.

A person of character plays fair even when others don't and values no achievement unless it was attained with honor.

A person of character has strong convictions, yet avoids self-righteousness.

A person of character believes in the inherent dignity of all people and treats everyone with respect, even those whose ideas and ideologies evoke strong disagreement.

A person of character deals with criticism constructively and is self-confident enough to take good advice, admit and learn from mistakes, feel and express genuine remorse and apologize graciously.

A person of character knows what's important, sacrifices the now for later, is in control of attitudes and actions, overcomes negative impulses and makes the best of every situation.

A person of character willingly faces fears and tackles unpleasant tasks.

A person of character is consistently and self-consciously kind and empathetic, giving generously without concern for reward.

A person of character feels and expresses gratitude freely and frequently.

A person of character is not defeated by failure or dissuaded by disappointment.

A person of character seeks true happiness in living a life of purpose and meaning, placing a higher value on significance than success.

—Michael Josephson, *Commentary 401.4, March 17, 2005.*

## God Does the Unexpected

In spite of the patriarchal arrangement, God picks a woman to speak for him. Deborah is recognized as a prophet in Israel. This is just like God. He does not do the expected thing. When we meet Gideon, the next judge, he says of himself: “My clan is the poorest in all Manasseh and in all my father’s house none counts for so little as I” (Judges 6:15, *Knox*). When we meet Jephthah, we learn he was illegitimate (Judges 11:1). Although we know we should not judge a book by its cover, most of us do it anyway. God never does (1 Samuel 16:7).

We see in Deborah a respected woman in Jewish society. ... Women had a valuable contribution to make in Old Testament times and they have a valuable contribution to make within the body of Christ. Let no one ever say to any member, male or female, “I have no need of you” (1 Corinthians 12:21).

—*The Herald of Christ’s Kingdom, September/October, 1999*

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## Take Heed

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God” (Acts 20:28).

When the Spirit of the Lord raises leaders for the Lord's people, the result is wholesome. The Judges of Israel raised by the Spirit of God from time to time according to the need of the Israelites were Godly men of noble influence. Contrast this with the large majority of kings of Israel and Judah who led Israel in idolatry. Much better to accept the leading of the spirit. All who have influence among the Lord's people should be mindful that they represent the Lord. Their allegiance is to God, godliness, and truth. If this responsibility is kept in mind, their influence will be proportionately wholesome, godly, and spiritual.

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