



KINGDOM PERPETUITY

Forty Daily Devotionals
from the Book of Judges
(Based on the NKJV)

Introduction

The book of Judges is the second of the historical books of the Bible and covers a period of about 350-400 years that fall between the death of Joshua and the beginning of the monarchy in Israel. Even though some have made some speculation about authorship, we are never told who wrote this book. Because of the repeated phrase “in those days” we can safely conclude that someone wrote this book in retrospect – looking back at what God had already done. The “judges” that God raised up to help perpetuate His kingdom were more like military leaders than judicial officials. Within this book, there is a continuous cycle of God’s people sinning against Him; God allowing an enemy to chastise them; God’s people crying out to Him for deliverance; and God sending a leader to deliver them from the oppression of their enemies. Each of these occurrences of deliverance seems to be followed by a period of obedience and peace. However, this cycle of “from sin to suffering to salvation” continues throughout the book and, in the end, we find Israel pretty much where they were when the book started. Each of the stories in the book helps us to see how God used circumstances and people to provide Kingdom Perpetuity for His chosen people.

Daily Reading Schedule

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| Day | Scripture Reading | Date |
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Day 1: Judges 1:1-18

“Then Judah went up, and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand...”
(Judges 1:4)

On the same day that Aaron died, God instructed Moses to take Aaron’s priestly garments “and put them on Eleazar,” Aaron’s “son” (Numbers 20:25-18). Before the death of Moses, God provided clear instructions as to who should follow him as the leader of His people. Moses was instructed to, “Take Joshua...and lay your hand on him...so Moses took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before the congregation” (Numbers 27:18-22). The first verse of Judges mentions the death of Joshua. It is apparent that the children of Israel had not been given any instructions as to who would replace Joshua, so they “asked the LORD... ‘who shall be first to go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them?’” Judah had the largest army and had been the tribe that had led Israel throughout their long march through the desert, so God announced that Judah would go up and that He had already “delivered the land into his hand” (v. 3). So, “Judah went up, and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand” (v. 4). The language in these first verses of Judges finds God’s people first doing exactly what they *should* do – they obeyed God fully, defeated their enemies, and drove them completely from the land. I am sure that all of those involved in that great conquest learned then what we know to be true today - when God’s people are fully obedient to Him, He is faithful to bless them abundantly.

Prayer Emphasis: Notice that verse 3 reveals that Judah went to Simeon seeking his help in the battle against the Canaanites but verse 4 gives all of the credit for the victory to God! **Seek** the cooperation of others but **rely** only on God for your victory!

Day 2: Judges 1:19-36

“But the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem; so the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.” (Judges 1:21)

The first part of chapter one finds the tribe of Judah, with God’s help, doing everything that God told them they *should* do. However, in verses 18-20 we find this same tribe becoming content with what they *could* do. Verse 19 clearly indicates that Judah “could not drive out the inhabitants of the lowland.” One has to wonder if the same amount of prayer had been offered up for the second phase of Judah’s conquest as had been offered for the first. Notice that in verse 4 we are told that “the LORD delivered” Judah’s enemies “into their hand” while verse 19 says that “they drove out the mountaineers, but they *could not* drive out the inhabitants of the lowlands.” Is it possible that God’s people forgot to seek the help of God in this second phase of their battles? It is easy for any people to become too reliant on self and, therefore, too independent of the Savior! After Judah’s early victory, it seems that God’s people began to spiral down – going from what they *should* do to what they *could* do, and ultimately to only what they *would* do. In verse 27 we are told that “Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shean and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor...or the inhabitants of Ibleam...or the inhabitants of Megiddo.” Verses 29-31 teach us that the tribes of Ephraim, Zebulun, and Asher, were also guilty of not fully obeying God’s command to completely drive out their enemies. By the time the first chapter of Judges closes, we find God’s people in a state of complete disobedience as they eventually became content to simply dwell “among” their enemies!

Prayer Emphasis: Seek to be fully obedient to God as much as humanly possible! **Take** every command of God personally and **pursue** its fulfillment faithfully. **Refuse** to become a “settler” who is content with anything less than God’s best for your life.

Day 3: Judges 2:1-10

“...But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? Therefore, I will not drive them out before you...” (Judges 2:8)

Chapter 2 begins with a visit and message from “the Angel of the LORD.” He reminded the people that He had been the One who had led them “from Egypt” and the One who had “brought (them) to the land” that He had promised to their fathers. He also reminded them of His command that they “make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land” and of His command that they should “tear down” the pagan altars that they encountered. How sad it must have been for them to hear God tell them what they had failed to do. It must have been even more disheartening for them to think beyond *what* they had done and to try to answer God’s question as to *why* they had not been obedient to His commands. Imagine how these disobedient servants must have felt when they were *reminded* of God’s faithfulness *to them* and then *reprimanded* for their lack of faithfulness *to Him!* God’s statement that the surviving enemies would “be thorns in their sides” is a direct quote from His earlier warning to them back in Numbers 33:55. This message from God cut deeply and we are told that “all the children of Israel...lifted up their voices and wept” (2:4). We are also told that the people “called the name of that place Bochim” (v. 5). Bochim means “weeping” and it is only mentioned here in this second chapter of Judges. Is it possible that God is trying to teach us that there is a very unique kind of sorrow that comes to those who willfully disobey Him?

Prayer Emphasis: Realize that there is never a good reason for disobedience! God’s Word was given so that we might know how to please Him by fully obeying His commands. Be careful to **hide** God’s Word in your heart (memorize it) so that you might not sin against Him.

Day 4: Judges 2:11-23

“...They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.” (Judges 2:19)

Although we are not certain as to who wrote the Book of Judges, it is apparent that it was written sometime after the events recorded therein. Since we find the phrase, “In *those days* there was no king in Israel” at least three times in this book (17:1; 18:1; and 21:25) we have to conclude that it was written *after* the time that the kings were established. How often we hear the phrase, “Hindsight is 20-20.” As the writer (possibly Samuel) looked back on the times following the death of Joshua he was forced to record some sobering facts about the stubbornness of God’s people. During the approximate 340 years that God led His people by “judges,” Israel had no king – only God in heaven. At certain times God brought forth a leader for the nation. These leaders would bring revival to God’s people and then simply fade away into obscurity. No doubt, this was one of the ways that God was trying to teach His people that their ultimate faith should be in Him. One can only imagine how heartbreaking it must have been for God to watch as His people did the things that are recorded in Judges 2:11-12. Verse 15 is a reminder that all of the trouble that came against these disobedient people was simply a fulfillment of all that God “had said” and “sworn” to them. Even after their merciful God “raised up judges” to deliver them out of the hands of their enemies (v. 16) this rebellious people continued to follow their own “stubborn way” (v. 19).

Prayer Emphasis: Remember that God has told us in Revelation 3:19 that He chastises those whom He loves. **Believe** that God’s chastisement is *always* for our own good and that it is *always* administered with the hope of *repentance* and full *restoration* for the wayward child of God.

Day 5: Judges 3:1-11

“When the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the children of Israel, who delivered them: Othniel...Caleb’s younger brother.” (Judges 3:9)

The first five verses of Judges 3 reports that God allowed certain of the Canaanite kingdoms to survive so that “He might test Israel by them.” A careful reading of those verses will suffice to say that God’s people were slow learners! Verse 6 serves as a very sad report card on the progress of God’s people. It was bad enough that they allowed their children to intermarry with the people of the lands, but the fact that “they served their gods” had to be a great insult to God! When God’s children “did evil in the sight of the LORD” and “forgot the LORD their God,” He allowed them to fall into the hands of the king of Mesopotamia and where they served him for eight years. But, “when the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer...who delivered them: Othniel...Caleb’s younger brother” (3:9). Othniel was the first of 15 judges that God sent as deliverers to His people. Only 13 of them are covered in Judges. The final two, Eli and Samuel, are discussed in the first two chapters of 1 Samuel. Othniel was first mentioned in Joshua 15 where we find the story of Caleb offering his daughter as a reward to the person who could capture a certain city. Although this was not the first time that God’s Spirit empowered His people, Othniel was the first of whom it was ever written, “The Spirit of the LORD came upon him” (3:10). This man’s faithful service led to a 40-year period of “rest” for God’s people (v. 11).

Prayer Emphasis: Strive to do well in your times of testing. **Refuse** to forsake the Lord for any reason or to bow down before any other god. **Remember** that it was the “Spirit of the LORD” that enabled Othniel to serve God and His people in a mighty way.

Day 6: Judges 3:12-30

“But when the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for them...Ehud, the son of Gera, the Benjamite...a left-handed man...” (Judges 3:15)

As it was with Othniel, God called Ehud, the second of the judges, to serve in a time when “the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD” (v. 12). We are told that God “strengthened” the king and people of Moab against His own people because of their evil lifestyles. How sad it is to read that the Israelites who had earlier been delivered by God, through Othniel, were sentenced to live in servitude to Moab for 18 years (v. 14)! But the stories of the judges are shining examples of the grace of God. Again “the children of Israel cried out to the LORD” and again “the LORD raised up a deliverer” (v. 15). It is no surprise that God would mention that Ehud was a Benjamite, but it is a bit unusual that God would mention that he was “a left-handed man” (v. 15). Ehud took it upon himself to deliver the “tribute” (taxes) to the king. However, the taxes were not all that he took with him on his visit to the king. We are told that he “made himself a dagger” that was “double-edged and a cubit (approximately 18-20 inches) in length” which he hid “under his clothes on his right thigh” (v. 16). The story is pretty clear. With some trickery, Ehud found a way to catch the king of Moab alone and then stabbed him with his dagger. Just as God disclosed that Ehud was left-handed, He also disclosed that the king of Moab was “a very fat man” (v. 17). Perhaps that is why Ehud made such a long dagger!

Prayer Emphasis: Find the word “again” in verse 12 and circle or underline it in your Bible! **Ask** God to help you to **remember** how dangerous and destructive sin can be and to help you to **avoid** making the same mistakes over and over again. Be the one that breaks the cycle!

Day 7: Judges 3:31-4:12

“After him was Shamgar, the son of Anath, who killed six hundred men of the Philistines with an ox goad; and he also delivered Israel.” (Judges 3:31)

Since we will have the opportunity to read about and then discuss Deborah and Barak in tomorrow’s devotional verses, I am going to spend our time today talking about Shamgar. What you read about Shamgar in Judges 3:31 is pretty much everything that Bible history has to say about him. He is mentioned once more, by Deborah, in Judges 3:5. Other than these two times, he is not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. His story is like many of the little towns that we encounter in our car trips – about the time you get *to it* you are already *through it!* Our focus verse is a brief statement about a brave man, who during one of the times that Israel lived under the cruel oppression of the Philistines, was led and empowered by God to rise above his fears and anxieties and fight back! While none of Shamgar’s *words* are ever recorded, his *works* are forever remembered. To rise up and kill 600 Philistines was a mighty task, but to do it with nothing but a sharpened stick was something that could only be done through the power of God. 1 Samuel 13:19-21 speaks of the Philistines not allowing the Israelites to have a “blacksmith” because the Philistines feared that they might “make swords or spears” that could be used in rebellion against them. An ox goad was nothing more than a sharpened stick! The story of Shamgar is a story of a man that *took what he had* and, by the power of Almighty God, *did what he had to do!*

Prayer Emphasis: Waste no time lamenting over what you don’t have and take an inventory of what God has made available to you and then **use** it – to the best of your ability – in His grace and for His glory! **Refuse** to live a life of defeat and **dare** to make a difference in the world around you!

Day 8: Judges 4:13-24

“Then Deborah said to Barak, ‘Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the LORD gone out before you?’” (Judges 4:14)

After the death of Ehud, Israel returned, once again, to doing that which was declared to be “evil in the sight of the LORD” (Judges 4:1). Once again Israel “cried out to the LORD” (4:3) and once again God sent a deliverer. This time he sent a woman named Deborah, who, with the help of Barak, freed God’s people from their bondage to yet another enemy (4:2). Today’s Scriptures begin by describing the strength of Israel’s enemy. Sisera was apparently the leader of Canaan’s armies and we are told that he had “nine hundred chariots of iron” at his disposal as well as a very large army of foot soldiers who hailed from all of the regions around Canaan. Against great odds, God told Deborah to send Barak to wage warfare against this fearful troupe reminding him that, “This is the day in which the LORD has delivered Sisera into your hand” (v. 14). It is clear that the victory gained on that day was God’s doing because we are told that “the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak” (v. 15). Sisera abandoned his chariot and tried to run away on foot “but Barak pursued the chariots and the army...and (eventually) all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left” (v. 16). Sisera hid in “the tent of Jael” and it was there that she killed him by driving a tent stake through his temple. Deborah, Barak, and Jael were all involved in this great victory but the children of Israel knew that “on that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan” in their presence (v. 23).

Prayer Emphasis: **Take** a little walk down Memory Lane and recall some of the godly women that God has used to help you throughout your Christian life and walk. **Pray** for the women in your life and in our church today. We are so blessed to have so many wonderful, Spirit-filled women in our church!

Day 9: Judges 5:1-15

“Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day...” (Judges 5:1)

It may be that your Bible has a title over Judges 5 that reads, “The Song of Deborah.” Barak’s role in this significant act of praise and adoration for God is often overlooked. Back in Judges 4:4 we read that Deborah was “a prophetess” but it is clear that she must have been a poetess as well. This song that makes up the whole of chapter 5 was written after the tradition of other great songs of victory in the Bible. It is similar to the songs of Moses and Miriam that were sung after God’s great victory over the armies of Pharaoh and recorded in Exodus 15. Singing comes naturally to those who are experiencing God’s victory in their lives. Our songs of praise may not be pleasing to others, but God truly enjoys hearing His children singing His praises! The first two lines in this song tell an interesting story. They speak of the great benefits that come to God’s people “when leaders lead” (5:2). Leadership is a key component in any organization – including the church of God. God gifts many of His people with the ability to lead and then expects them to do it. But the church is not just blessed by leaders who lead. It is also greatly blessed by “people” who “willingly offer themselves” (v. 2). There are at least eight translations of the Bible that use the words “volunteer” or “volunteered” to express the meaning of what the people did for God. A key to the great sense of “willingness” may be found in verse 9 where we are told that the leaders of Israel also “offered themselves willingly with the people.” When the leaders lead and the people lead by following, we have the makings for a song that is surely beautiful to the ears of God.

Prayer Emphasis: **Pray** for the many volunteers that serve throughout the various ministries in our church. **Pray** for our church officers, for those who serve as deacons, on the church council, or on one of our many committees or leadership teams. **Pray** for our choir as they lead us in worship. **Express** your appreciation to someone from one of these areas today.

Day 10: Judges 5:16-31

“Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD! But let those who love Him be like the sun when it comes out in full strength.” (Judges 5:31)

There are many wonderful lines and themes in the Song of Deborah and Barak but “the LORD” appears to be the main subject of this outpouring of praise. In the New King James Version of the Bible you will circle the word “LORD” 14 times as you read the words of this song. Take the time to count this blessed word in your own Bible while circling or underlining it. We might also notice the numerous times that God is referenced by pronouns in this song. It is clear that this song is about God and the wonderful things that He had done for His people. It was a time when God’s people decided to “count their many blessings” and “name them one by one” so that they could clearly see “what God had done.” It is a song that recounts many of the great victories that God had provided Israel *in the past*. It is also a song that praised God for the great victories that they were experiencing *in the present*. However, it was also a song that praised God for all of the victories that He would ultimately provide *in the future*. The line “Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD” (v. 31) clearly indicates that God’s people fully expected Him to continue to lead them to great victories in the future. While the future holds great anticipation for victory for those who love and follow God, it holds nothing but defeat for those who oppose God – from the lowest foot soldier of the devil to Satan himself.

Prayer Emphasis: We make many choices during the course of our days but the choice to serve and follow God is the wisest of all. **Choose** to remain faithful to God and **live** in such a way that it is clear to all that you are a servant of our great King!

Day 11: Judges 6:1-10

“Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years.” (Judges 6:1)

Is the story of Judges beginning to sound like a “broken record” to you? The first verse of today’s reading references “the children of Israel” doing “evil in the sight of the LORD.” For the “record,” this makes the sixth time that we have read that phrase thus far in Judges. Watch for it as you read along because we will see it twice more before we finish the book. Another important phrase is often repeated in this book. You might read back through the first five chapters and note how many times we are told that God “delivered” from or “sold” them into the hands of an enemy. Such was the case with Israel just before the beginning of Gideon’s service as a judge and deliverer of Israel. God’s people had once again done “evil in the sight of the LORD” and He had, once again, “delivered them into the hand of” an enemy. This time it was the Midianites whom they were forced to serve for seven years. This was a time of great oppression for God’s people. It led to them abandoning their homes and living in “the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which (were) in the mountains” (6:2). Every year the Israelites would plant their fields only to have their enemies come and plunder their crops at harvest time (vs. 3-4). It was a time of great desperation for God’s people. However, we will soon see God turning these days into a time of great deliverance.

Prayer Emphasis: **Imagine** the drudgery of working all year only to see it all disappear into the hands of an enemy. The Midianites made the IRS look like a bunch of softies! **Pray** for wisdom so that you might live in obedience and victory and enjoy the fullest blessings of God.

Day 12: Judges 6:11-27

“So Gideon built an altar there to the LORD, and called it ‘The LORD is Peace...’” (Judges 6:11-12)

During a time of great oppression against the people of Israel God sent a very special messenger to a man named Gideon. This messenger came bearing words of great comfort and assurance, saying to Gideon, “The LORD is with you” (v. 12) and “You shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites” (v. 14). We are told that Gideon prepared a roasted goat and some unleavened bread for his visitor only to have the “Angel of God” direct him to “lay them on a rock.” After Gideon had done as he was commanded, “the Angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that was in His hand and touched the meat and the...bread” before causing “fire” to rise “out of the rock and consume the meat and the...bread” (v. 21). It was only after this miracle was performed in his presence that Gideon realized that he had been speaking with God! It was then that he “built an altar there to the LORD, and called it ‘The LORD is Peace.’” In this story we see Gideon, after one brief visit from God, go from hiding behind a winepress to building a place of worship for God. Our story of peace outlines very easily. It is clear that Gideon’s peace was first founded on *the presence of God*. He said, “I have seen the Angel of the LORD face to face” (v. 22). Gideon’s peace was also founded on *the power of God*. In verse 17 he had asked God to give him “a sign” that God was with him. In verse 21, that convincing miracle is described. It was after this miracle that Gideon has his own “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” moment (see Philippians 4:13). This leads me to say that Gideon’s peace was also founded on *the promises of God*.

Prayer Emphasis: **Read** and seek to **memorize** Philippians 4:13! If you can come to **believe** this great promise from God you will soon find yourself building your own altars and naming them “The LORD is Peace!”

Day 13: Judges 6:28-40

“But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; then he blew the trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him.” (Judges 6:34)

In the desperate times that Gideon and Israel were experiencing at the hands of the Midianites, God led them to do four very basic things. He asked them to *remember the past*, to be *reminded to pray*, to *reconsider their priorities*, and to be *restored by His presence*. As we consider these important points, we also have to consider that the power to motivate people *for* God can only come *from* God. Throughout the Bible the trumpet is used as a type of the Word of God. What did Gideon do when “the Spirit of the LORD came upon” him? He blew the trumpet! If there is anything lacking in God’s churches and among God’s people today, that lack often falls to the fact that we do not have Spirit-filled leaders who are committed to sounding God’s trumpet! Because Gideon was willing to blow “the trumpet” he was able to gather enough people “behind him” (v. 34) so that God’s purposes could be accomplished. He was also able to equip “messengers” who were willing and able to go out and recruit others to join in God’s mighty cause (v. 35). When Gideon’s heart was plagued with doubt, God provided a special sign – not once but twice – to encourage Gideon. As we read the words “as You have said” we see that God had already promised Gideon that his work would be successful. Nevertheless, Gideon asked God to prove His promises to be true twice and God, in His divine patience, was willing to provide Gideon with the validation that he needed to move forward.

Prayer Emphasis: Take some time to **thank God** for the longsuffering and patience that He has exhibited in your own life and for the times that He has been willing to support you in your own times of doubt and disbelief. **Allow** God’s Word to encourage you and then use it to **encourage** someone else today.

Day 14: Judges 7:1-12

“And the LORD said to Gideon, ‘The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself...saying My own hand has saved me.’” (Judges 7:2)

Today’s Scriptures contains one of the most curious stories in the Bible. Gideon had been called and commissioned by God to lead Israel in a battle against the Midianites. In response, Gideon gathered an army of 32,000 men (see v. 3). Then God spoke to Gideon and said, “The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me’” (7:2). So God instructed Gideon to announce, “Whoever is fearful and afraid” could “turn and depart at once” (v. 3). Imagine Gideon’s shock to see 22,000 of his warriors pack their stuff and go home! He probably thought, “I might have been a little too convincing for my own good!” But even then God was not satisfied. He told Gideon that, “The people are still too many!” Therefore, He instructed Gideon to bring his army “down to the water” so that He could “test them for (him) there” (v. 4). You know how the story goes from there. After this time of testing, Gideon saw his army reduced from 10,000 to a mere 300! But God was quick to encourage Gideon by saying, “By the three hundred men” who passed this test, He would “deliver the Midianites” into his hand (v. 7). The purpose for God’s test was simple. As kind and gracious as God has proven Himself to be, there is one thing that He refused to share with anyone and that one thing is His glory.

Prayer Emphasis: **Trust** the fact that God always has a reason for what He does. Seek to **serve** Him in such a way that He is never robbed of His glory or honor. **Remember** that God has a purpose for every trial and **believe** that He is always working with our best interest in mind.

Day 15: Judges 7:13-25

“And every man stood in his place around the camp...” (Judges 7:21)

When we consider the fact that the Midianite army was 135,000 strong (see Judges 8:10), we could think that Gideon’s army of 32,000 might have been too small. Even with 32,000 warriors Gideon’s army was going to face odds greater than 4 to 1! After his army was reduced by 22,000 to a mere 10,000 those odds increased to over 13 to 1. But now, with an army of just 300 men, Gideon was facing odds of 450 to 1! I am sure that Gideon, and his men, considered victory to be virtually impossible against such great odds! Then, imagine Gideon’s surprise when God ordered him to divide “the three hundred men into three companies” and to arm them with only trumpets and torches! The trumpets were actually ram’s horns that were used as signaling devices during battles. The torches were to be concealed in “pitchers” which were nothing more than clay pots. Yet the story ends in a great victory for God and His people. It was a great victory that could only be attributed to the presence and power of God. However, there was one key command that had to be fully obeyed. “Every man” of the Israelites had to stand “in his place around the camp” of the Midianites. When each of Gideon’s men obeyed the commands of God, and “stood in his place” and “blew the trumpets,” God caused a great confusion to come upon the much larger army of the Midianites to the point that they “set every man’s sword against his companion throughout the whole camp” (v. 22).

Prayer Emphasis: Determine to be obedient to God’s commands even when you do not fully understand what He is doing. **Realize** that every spiritual victory must come from His mighty hand. **Do** what He commands you to do and you will soon see Him doing all that He has promised to do for you.

Day 16: Judges 8:1-17

“When Gideon came to the Jordan, he and the three hundred men who were with him crossed over, exhausted but still in pursuit.” (Judges 8:4)

There is a wonderful truth to be gleaned from today’s focus verse. Even after engaging an army of 135,000 heavily armed and well trained soldiers, Gideon’s entire little army of 300 men was still fully intact. The Bible states that these men were “exhausted but still in pursuit.” The word that is translated “exhausted” here in the NKJV is translated various ways in other translations. Some say that these men were “faint” while others use words or terms like “weary,” “very tired,” or even “bone-tired” to describe their physical condition. In spite of their weariness, these men remained in pursuit of their enemy. Gideon sought support and supplies from some of the neighboring cities only to find that they refused to help until they were convinced as to who was going to win the final battles of this war (8:5-6). It is not uncommon to encounter those who are not willing to fight the good fight or even render support to those who do. It is from the tenth verse of chapter eight that we were able to determine the size of the army of God’s enemy, the Midianites. Even after 120,000 had fallen on the night of Gideon’s God-directed attack, still 15,000 of their army remained alive. From what we have read, it is obvious that these 15,000 Midianite “commandos” are now running for their lives and in great fear of God’s smaller army of just 300! Never forget that Gideon’s army had no swords or spears in their hands. However, they were armed with something better – something more powerful than any weapon that might be carried in their hands. These men had a faith in God that enabled them to see the job through until it was finished.

Prayer Emphasis: Commit now to seeing the “good fight” through to the very end. **Read** 2 Timothy 4:7 and see where Paul stated that he had “fought the good fight...finished the race (and) kept the faith.” **Plan** to do likewise.

Day 17: Judges 8:18-28

“Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, ‘Rule over us...for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian’ but Gideon said to them, ‘I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you.’” (Judges 8:22-23)

When all of the fighting was finished and God’s enemies had been fully delivered into the hands of Gideon and his army, the men of Israel then came to Gideon with the request that he “rule” over them. I don’t think this request was as offensive to Gideon as their reason behind it. They wanted him to “rule” over them because they were doing what God feared that they would do from the very beginning! They were attributing their victories to Gideon and giving him the credit for their deliverance! I sometimes mention the New Century Version of the Bible to you. It is a translation that was actually born from the pages of a children’s Bible and it is written at about the fifth grade level. That translation allows us to see deep into the hearts of these people. It has them saying, “*You saved us from the Midianites. Now, we want you and your son and your grandson to rule over us*” (emphasis added). We see from this story that the desire for a human king did not come suddenly upon Israel. They had lived under a king while they were in bondage to Egypt and they had not enjoyed that experience. Yet here they are asking to be under the rule of a man after they had been given so much from God. Gideon would have nothing to do with this plan. He knew who his King was and he had no intention of abandoning Him now.

Prayer Emphasis: Realize that God got His people out of Egypt long before He was able to get “Egypt” out of His people. Spiritual growth is a process. We often make the same mistakes more than once. **Ask** God to grow you into a stronger and deeper relationship and commitment to Him.

Day 18: Judges 8:29 - 9:15

“...Listen to me, you men of Shechem, that God may listen to you!” (Judges 9:7)

Even though Gideon was obviously very busy for God, he must have spent a good amount of time at home! We read today where he “had seventy sons of his own offspring” (8:30). One of his sons (Abimelech) was born in Shechem (8:31). After Gideon’s death, the people soon forgot all he had done for them and all he had tried to teach them. How sad it is to read that, “as soon as Gideon was dead...the children of Israel again played the harlot” by beginning to worship false gods (8:33). It is sadder still to read the report that “the children of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side” (8:34). This means they had forgotten more than just their most recent victories under the leadership of Gideon. They had also forgotten all of the victories that God had provided for them up until that time. But the story grows worse. We are told that the people of Israel did not “show kindness to the house of...Gideon in accordance with the good that he had done for Israel” (8:35). The people had earlier requested a king and Abimelech was more than willing to comply with their foolish request. Beginning in his own city, he began to pave his way to a throne with the blood of his own brothers (9:5). He was ultimately named “king” by the men of Shechem. However, Gideon had one son (Jotham) who survived the slaughter of his brothers. He stood before his people and declared that even the trees knew their true purpose and did not desire to be anything but what God designed them to be. However, the “bramble” (a worthless, non-productive vine) was more than willing to accept the assignment of men over the purpose for which God had designed it.

Prayer Emphasis: Be a Jotham and not an Abimelech! **Refuse** to promote yourself over others and be content to live out the life and purpose that God has in mind for you. **Remember** that His plan is always best!

Day 19: Judges 9:16-33

“And it shall be, as soon as the sun is up in the morning, that you shall rise early and rush upon the city...”
(Judges 9:33)

Verses 16-21 are a follow up to the message that Jotham delivered to Abimelech and those who had anointed him as their king in Shechem. He questioned their “truth and sincerity in making Abimelech king” and told them that they had not “dealt well with Jerubbaal (Gideon) and his house.” He reminded them that his father had “fought for (them), risked his life, and delivered (them) out of the hand of Midian.” He delivered a burning message to the people of Shechem with a warning that God’s judgment would soon fall upon them if they were following Abimelech and not God. Verse 22 tells us that three years passed between the time that God had Jotham deliver His message to Abimelech and Shechem and before the hand of God against them became evident. First, we are told that “God sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech” (v. 22). Abimelech will soon become just another of many who had to learn a hard lesson about sowing and reaping! He had sown violence against his own brothers and now his followers were plotting to sow violence against him by setting a trap for him and his army. Their intention was to lure him out of the city and into an open area where they could then attack him and the defenseless city.

Prayer Emphasis: Believe that God’s Word is true and that we will reap what we have sown (see Galatians 6:7). **Understand** that the time of *reaping* often comes much later than the time of *sowing*. **Remember** that three full years passed before Abimelech was forced to have a taste of his own medicine.

Day 20: Judges 9:34-57

“Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father by killing his seventy brothers. And all the evil of the men of Shechem God returned on their own heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.” (Judges 9:57-58)

When we consider what the Bible teaches about sowing and reaping, we come to three simple conclusions. The first biblical law of sowing and reaping is that *we always reap exactly what we have sown*. We do not plant corn in our gardens and expect to reap melons. Whatever we have planted is what will grow in our garden. The second law is that *we always reap sometime after our sowing*. The Bible says, “Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days” (Ecclesiastes 11:1). What will you find after many days? Exactly what you had earlier “cast” upon the waters! The third biblical law of sowing and reaping is that *you always reap more than you have sown*. God’s Word says, “They sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind” (Hosea 8:7). If a kernel of corn would produce only another kernel, we would do well to simply hold on to the one that we already have. But one kernel of corn will produce a stalk of corn and multiply itself many times over. Today’s story, and focus verses, contain one of the many lessons that God desires to teach us about sowing and reaping in the pages of the Bible. Ultimately, “all of the evil” that the men of Shechem had done to Gideon and his family “God returned on their own heads” and the very same “curse” that Jotham was sent to warn them of came against them.

Prayer Emphasis: Pray for wisdom before you say or do anything that might be harmful to anyone, especially a fellow Christian. Carefully **examine** the harmful things that have come your way to see if you might be familiar with them. **Check** any stones that might be cast at you to see if your own fingerprints are not found on them. They might be the very same stones that you earlier threw at others.

Day 21: Judges 10:1-18

“After Abimelech there arose to save Israel Tola...he judged Israel twenty-three years...after him rose Jair...and he judged Israel twenty-two years.” (Judges 10:1-3)

It is interesting to note that the two men who served the longest terms as judges are two of the least known men in the Bible and their stories are very brief with almost no facts regarding their terms mentioned in the Scriptures. We are provided with a pretty clear ancestry for Tola but we are not provided even that for Jair. Some think that Jair’s lineage is not given because he was a descendant of Tola. There are two key words found in their brief stories that help us to understand that they were considered “judges” in every sense of the word. For Tola, it is the word “save” that is found in verse one when we are told that “Tola...arose to save Israel.” The word that is translated “save” there is translated “deliver” or “defend” in other translations. However, it is the same word that is used to express what the earlier judges had done for Israel as they “saved” or “delivered” them from the oppression of their enemies. In the case of Jair, we read that “he judged Israel twenty-two years” (v. 3). The word that is translated “judged” to describe the work of Jair is the same word that is translated “judge” to describe the work of those who came before and after him. So, both of these men were “judges” in the truest sense of the word and both of their terms were longer than any other judge mentioned in this book. Eli’s term as judge lasted 40 years, but we do not read about him until we get to the book of First Samuel. It appears that immediately after the 45 years that these men served God’s people, “the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD” (v. 6).

Prayer Emphasis: Remember that we do not have to be “well-known” to be “well-used” for God and His glory. **Seek** to serve God in a way that gives all of the attention and all of the praise for Him. It is what *God* knows and sees that really matters!

Day 22: Judges 11:1-22

“Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, but he was the son of a harlot...” (Judges 11:1)

Here is a story that will break your heart. Jephthah was obviously born from a relationship that his father had with a harlot. From what we will read about this young man, he must have been quite strong and valiant. He was obviously committed to God and to God’s people. Although there were many good things to be said about Jephthah, there was still this one caveat, “he was the son of a harlot.” That fact was *probably* an issue with many people and it was *definitely* an issue with his half-brothers. When his half-brothers “grew up, they drove Jephthah out” and said to him, “You shall have no inheritance in our father’s house, for you are the son of another woman” (v. 2). However, there came a time when this unwanted man became very much wanted. “When the people of Ammon made war against Israel...the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah” (v. 5). After Jephthah reminded them of the way that they had treated him in the past (v. 7) the people that had thrown him out did everything possible to get him to come back and defend them against their enemies. They were willing to agree to make this once undesirable family member their “commander” (v. 11). After that, Jephthah proved to be a good choice to lead the armies of Israel because he was very successful in battle and the armies of Ammon suffered great losses.

Prayer Emphasis: Avoid placing an asterisk (*) besides anyone’s name. **Remember** that we all have a past and that not one of us has ever lived a life that would not have demanded the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross to save us. **Learn** to allow the past to be just that – the past!

Day 23: Judges 11:23-40

“And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, ‘If you will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace...shall surely be the LORD’s, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.’” (Judges 11:30-31)

Who among us has not heard a sermon on Jephthah’s foolish vow? I will admit that this story has always been one of the most difficult that I ever attempted to explain. But there is an explanation that, when we compare Scripture to Scripture, seems satisfactory and very understandable. First, we have to remember that human sacrifices were forbidden by God’s Law (Deuteronomy 18:9-12). To understand what Jephthah meant when he said, “whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me...shall surely be the LORD’s, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering” we have to consider what the terms, “shall surely be the LORD’s” and “burnt sacrifice” represent. The phrase, “shall surely be the LORD’s,” meant that something would be consecrated to God and would be set aside for God’s purposes and glory. A “burnt sacrifice” represented something that was given entirely to God with nothing held back or kept for your own use. If we look back at Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8 we will see where Aaron and his sons were offered to the LORD as a “wave offering.” A wave offering was something that was completely consumed by fire. We know that Aaron and his sons were not killed as sacrifices but dedicated fully to God’s service. Verse 39 best defines Jephthah’s vow. There we are told that, “at the end of two months...she returned to her father, and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. And she knew no man. And it became a custom in Israel.” It appears to me that Jephthah’s vow was to commit his daughter to full-time service for God and that she never married or experienced motherhood.

Prayer Emphasis: Consider the promises that you make to God and their ramifications upon the lives of others. **Pray** for your own children today. **Commit** them to God’s service. **Be** an example of an obedient, serving Christian at all times.

Day 24: Judges 12:1-15

“After him, Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel...after him, Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel...after him, Abdon the son of Hillel...judged Israel.” (Judges 12:9-13)

Today’s focus verses contain three names that are probably unfamiliar to many students of the Bible. However, these three men committed 25 combined years of their lives in service to God and His people as the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth judges of Israel. Although there are other places and people who also had these names, Judges 12 is the only place that these three men are ever mentioned in the Bible. When we think about men like these, we should be reminded of the great “Hall of Fame” chapter (Hebrews 11) in the New Testament. In the first 35 verses of that chapter, we are reminded of the exploits of people like Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, and Rahab the harlot. Four of the judges that we have or will read about are mentioned. But, after listing many names of those who served God honorably, the Holy Spirit added the words “still others” in verse 36 (NKJV). In all, I found at least 30 translations of the New Testament that included the word “others” in that verse. When we think that no one notices, we should remember that God sees us among the “others” who have served Him faithfully. When you feel as if you are all alone, remember that there are many “others” who are faithfully serving God.

Prayer Emphasis: Remind yourself that you are not alone and that your work for God never goes unnoticed. **Realize** that any praise, honor, or glory that we could possibly receive in this life would be nothing when compared with that which is to come in our eternal home.

Day 25: Judges 13:1-14

“Again the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.” (Judges 13:1)

I am sure that most Christians have at least heard of Samson and that they are at least a little familiar with his story. More space is allotted for his story than any of the other judges. To say the least, Samson was an unusual person and his life was a life of contrasts. Perhaps in no other Bible character do we see the struggle between good and evil that exists within man than we do in the life of Samson. At God’s instruction, his parents separated him unto God as a Nazarite from his birth. Read again the words found in Judges 13:8 and mark the phrase, “teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born.” No wiser prayer could ever be uttered by any parent than those that Samson’s father prayed on that day. From our reading we see that Samson was born, and raised, during some of Israel’s dark days when they were, because of their disobedience to God, in bondage to the Philistines. The verses we have read today regarding his childhood remind us of another man who would become great in God’s service – John the Baptist. Samson’s name literally means “little sun.” As we follow this man’s story we will see that he had many opportunities to shine brightly for God.

Prayer Emphasis: **Pray** the “Manoah Prayer” over your own children today and ask God to “teach” you how to raise your children for His glory. If you are expecting a child, then **pray** just as Manoah prayed, asking God to *now* teach you what you *should* do after your child is born. **Realize** that it is never too early to begin practicing godly parenting.

Day 26: Judges 13:15-25

“So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to move upon him...” (Judges 13:24-25)

The word that is translated “move” in verse 25 comes from a Hebrew word that literally means “to tap” or “to beat regularly.” It can also mean “to agitate.” For that reason, several versions of the Bible say that “the Spirit of the LORD began to *stir* him.” It seems that, in a time when his people were in bondage to a dreaded enemy, God began to “stir” Samson by regularly “tapping” on his heart. Because of God’s Spirit, Samson could not be content with the status quo. While others around him might have been content to grow up and old in a subservient role to the Philistines, Samson could not accept that as his fate. Something inside him said, “Life shouldn’t have to be this way and it certainly does not have to remain this way!” We all know that it was not *something* that moved Samson, but *someone*! If there is one message that I have tried to communicate to the church throughout the many years of my ministry, it is this, “In these days of empty church buildings, closed Bibles, and prayerless lives, God is not satisfied with the status quo!” God tapped a message in His own spiritual Morse Code on the heart and soul of young Samson that said, “Second best is not good enough!” I am certain that many of us have sensed that same kind of spiritual “agitation” before when others were content to do a job for God “half way” or willing to leave His work “half done.” Something just wouldn’t let you “settle” for less than the very best for God. Such was the case with Samson.

Prayer Emphasis: **Refuse** to allow “Second Rate” to be the epitaph to your life ministry! **Ask** God to “move” you to doing great things for Him. Even though there may be many dark clouds in the world around you, **choose** to be a “Samson” – a “little sun” that gives light to your world.

Day 27: Judges 14:1-20

“So Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother...to his surprise, a young lion came roaring against him. And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat, though he had nothing in his hand.” (Judges 14:5-6)

In today’s Bible reading we find Samson and his parents travelling to Timnah. Along the way they were suddenly confronted by a lion. Just before the lion could do them any harm, “the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon” Samson and he, bare-handedly, “tore the lion apart.” Years ago, I noticed that my Bible had a footnote by the words “came mightily upon him” in verse 6 that simply read “rushed.” The meaning of this word is exactly that. It gives one the idea of something that is rushing at you – much like the young lion probably rushed at Samson and his family. As a matter of fact, I know of at least four translations of the Bible that used the word “rushed” here to explain how the Holy Spirit came suddenly upon Samson. I want to provide you with just a few thoughts regarding this moment that the Holy Spirit came rushing upon Samson. First, it came at a time of *great suspense*. One can only imagine the fear that comes with being confronted by a deadly lion. Second, it came at a time of *great surprise*. It is certain that Samson expected no danger in their travels or he would not have gone without a weapon for defense. Third, it came with *great suddenness*. It is no wonder that, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the early church there was “a sound from heaven, as a *rushing* mighty wind” (Acts 2:2). Last, it came in *great strength*.

Prayer Emphasis: Remind yourself of the Lord’s promise to send the Holy Spirit to us (John 16:7). **Rejoice** in the fact that you can do all things when Christ strengthens you (Philippians 4:13). **Allow** God’s Spirit to give you the boldness to serve Him faithfully.

Day 28: Judges 15:1-20

“Then Samson said, ‘With the jawbone of a donkey...I have slain a thousand men!’” (Judges 15:16)

Back in Judges 13:24 we read these words about Samson: “and the LORD blessed him.” We have read about times in this man’s life where “the LORD blessed him” with the supernatural strength to accomplish some amazing feats. He fought and killed a lion – bare-handed! He fought and defeated 30 men. We read about him breaking strong, new ropes that bound him and then slaying 1,000 Philistine soldiers with only the jawbone of a donkey for a weapon. However, there was one important thing that Samson failed to remember about each of these feats of strength. Just prior to each one of those amazing feats we read where “the Spirit of the LORD came upon him.” But Samson soon allowed these great victories to fill his head and heart with pride. Note carefully the last phrase from the little song that he sang to those around him, “With the jawbone of a donkey *I* have slain one thousand men!” The NIV, along with at least one other translation, has Samson using the personal pronoun, I, twice in his little song. It reads, “By using a donkey’s jawbone *I* have made donkeys of them. With a donkey’s jawbone *I* have killed a thousand men.” It is not uncommon for some of God’s choicest servants to come to a place where they are overcome by their own pride. Such was the case with Samson. He forgot what God had done by His Spirit and he (Samson) began to take the credit for it in the flesh.

Prayer Emphasis: Remember that “God has chosen the foolish things...weak things...base things of the world...that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). **Refuse** to allow pride to enter your heart and distract you from living in such a way that God is glorified!

Day 29: Judges 16:1-17

“And it came to pass, when she (Delilah) pestered him daily with her words and pressed him...he told her all his heart...” (Judges 16:16-17)

After Samson lost his battle with self-pride, we read about four more feats of strength that he performed. In 16:1-3 we see him pulling up the doors of the city, with their two gate posts, putting them on his shoulders, and carrying them to the top of a hill. In 16:8-9 we see him breaking seven bowstrings like “yarn breaks when it touches fire.” In 16:12 we see him breaking “new ropes...like a thread.” Then, in 16:14 we see Samson snatching the posts that held a weaver’s loom in place out of the ground with his hair! But, if you look closely at the verses that contain the records of these feats of strength, you will see that a very important phrase is missing. Before none of these great feats do we see the words, “the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him.” There is some strength to be found in the flesh but there is an entirely different kind of strength that is found in the Spirit – and Samson was going to soon learn that there is a great difference between the two!

Prayer Emphasis: Remember that “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). **Work** as though everything depends on you but **pray** as though everything depends on God! **Invite** the Holy Spirit to empower you as you endeavor to serve God.

Day 30: Judges 16:18-31

“And she said, ‘The Philistines are upon you, Samson!’ So he awoke from his sleep, and said, ‘I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!’ But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him.” (Judges 16:20)

Three times in Judges 14 we read where Samson went “down.” Twice we are told that he “went down to Timnah” (14:1 and 5). Then in verse 7 we are told that “he went down” once more. There is no question but that God’s man was caught in a downward spiral. And now we see him as he is “brought...down to Gaza” (v. 21). Gaza was the stronghold of the Philistine army. As sad as it is to see God’s man there, we must remember that he got there gradually. He seemed to be fascinated with the city of Timnah. It is interesting to note that Timnah was situated about half way between Samson’s homeland and Gaza. Timnah sat very close to the border that separated the Holy Land and the land of the Philistines. In other words, Timnah was just barely inside the borders of the land in which God had designated his people to live. So it seems that Samson liked living “close to the edge.” But we see now that his risky spiritual lifestyle was going to cost him plenty. The saddest part of the entire story of Samson was that he never even saw it coming. He never realized that he had moved from operating in the Spirit to operating in the flesh. In his final challenge he said, “I will go out as before.” But soon he learned that it was far from being “like before” because “he did not know that the LORD had departed from him.” I am sure that he eventually sensed the difference for we see him later praying, “O LORD God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I might with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines” (v. 28). You know how this sad story ends. God gave Samson the strength to push down the pillars of the temple of the Philistines and bring destruction to God’s enemies.

Prayer Emphasis: Whatever gift, strength, or talent you may have in your life, **give** it wholly to God. Whatever tool you may have in your possession **make sure** that it is used for God’s glory.

Day 31: Judges 17:1-13

“In those days there was no king in Israel; but everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” (Judges 17:6)

The final five chapters of the Book of Judges are unique from any of the preceding chapters in that they contain no mention of any judge and his or her exploits for God. Most scholars believe that these chapters include stories that took place sometime during the times of the first two chapters of the book. Some chronological Bible reading schedules have people read the last five chapters of Judges after chapter one so that the book ends with the story of Samson. The phrase “there was no king in Israel” is found four times in the last five chapters (watch for it as you finish reading the book) with the first of those four being here in our focus verse for today. In the first and last places where this phrase is found you will see the additional words, “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” I am convinced that the stories found in these final chapters are very indicative of that type mentality. For example, when people do “what is right in their own eyes” they might, like Micah, dishonor their own mother by stealing from her. There are at least six different men named “Micah” in the Old Testament, but the one that is mentioned in Judges 17 and 18 should not be confused with any of the others bearing that same name since these are his only mentions in the Bible.

Prayer Emphasis: **Acknowledge** your own need for a “King” but accept no King but Jesus! **Refuse** to justify sin or to rationalize your unrighteous thoughts or deeds. **Honor** Him by honoring those He has commanded you to honor today.

Day 32: Judges 18:1-13

“...They said to him, ‘Please inquire of God that we may know whether the journey on which we go will be prosperous.’ And the priest said to them, ‘Go in peace. The presence of the LORD be with you on your way.’” (Judges 18:5-6)

What we have read today is indicative of lives that have no “King” and are, therefore, led by “what is right in their own eyes.” Yesterday we saw Micah stealing from his own mother and then we saw his mother rewarding him for returning her money by presenting him with a “carved image” (an idol) for his house. We were then introduced to a young “Levite” that Micah hired to serve as his priest (17:10-11). Look back at that chapter and underscore the phrase “So Micah consecrated the Levite” in verse 12. In today’s focus verse we find that “priest for hire” being asked to inquire of God concerning the plans of the five representatives from the tribe of Dan who were sent to “spy out...the mountains of Ephraim.” There are two indicators of life lived without a “King” and within the expansive boundaries of man’s own conscience in this story. First, we find that these men already had a plan that they were simply asking God to endorse. They simply wanted God to make “prosperous” the way that they had already chosen. It would do us all well to ask ourselves how many times we have come to God asking the same thing from Him. Then we find a priest who, when asked to “inquire of God,” provides an immediate and expected answer without any record of his ever taking the matter before God. When the Lord is not “King” in our own hearts we simply do what we want to do while the preachers are busy telling us what we want to hear!

Prayer Emphasis: **Desire** to be different than the world around you! **Discipline** yourself to swim against the current and to follow the orders of your own King Jesus. **Seek** to do what is right in His eyes rather than your own – or especially the eyes of this world.

Day 33: Judges 18:14-31

“So they set up for themselves Micah’s carved image which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.” (Judges 18:31)

It might be that you sensed some hope that men might do the right thing when you read about “the six hundred men armed with their weapons of war, who were of the children of Dan” who “went into Micah’s house and took the carved image” that he had there. If you look back at Judges 17:3 you will see that Micah’s mother presented him with “a carved image” after he returned the money that he had stolen from her. Now, look again at the inventory of that which the soldiers of the tribe of Dan removed from his house and you will see that it included “the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image” (18:18). Micah’s idolatry, like all other sin, had grown and multiplied over time. At first, I had some hope for at least the young “rent-a-priest” whose “heart was glad” when the army from Dan demanded that he remove the idols from Micah’s home. But the story soon turned into just another “same old story” when I read about the people from Dan offering the priest a bigger and better job (18:19) and allowing him to then “set up for themselves Micah’s carved image” in “the house of God that was in Shiloh” (18:31).

Prayer Emphasis: Realize that when “there is no King” on the thrones of the hearts of God’s people, all people are subject to doing that which could be considered unthinkable! **Refuse** to be shocked at what you see others do and, furthermore, **refuse** to become involved in such practices yourself.

Day 34: Judges 19:1-15

“And they passed by and went their way...” (Judges 19:14)

Every time that I read the last few chapters of the Book of Judges, and some of the other stories contained in the Bible, I have to remind myself that God declared “All Scripture” to be “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction (and) for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). We might hope that there would be few among us who could possibly relate to the story of the Levite and his concubine. However, we might all relate somehow to a central truth that brought them to such a desperate situation. Again, we must remind ourselves that this story falls during a time when “there was no king in Israel” and when “every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” Sometime after a man had taken a concubine into his home she “played the harlot against him” and then sought refuge in “her father’s house at Bethlehem in Judah.” After the woman had been away for “four months” her “husband arose and went after her.” How interesting it is to see the young woman’s father delay the young man’s departure simply by continually urging him to do it “tomorrow” (v. 9). Eventually the man, his concubine, and his servant set out for home. The “servant” urged him to seek refuge for the night in a certain place. However, because of the headstrong master, they “went their way.” We will soon see that this would prove to be one of the worst decisions ever recorded in the Bible and that it led to the telling of one of the saddest stories that you will ever read.

Prayer Emphasis: Tomorrow you may have to “wine” your way through this tragic story that God has included in His Word for us. **Ask** God to make this story “profitable” to you by speaking to your heart in some personal way as you read it. **Believe** that God has included it for some specific purpose and seek to **discover** that purpose in your own heart and life.

Day 35: Judges 19:16-30

“When her master arose in the morning, and opened the doors of the house and went out to go his way, there was his concubine, fallen at the door of the house with her hands on the threshold.” (Judges 19:27)

It might be good for us to gain some perspective into exactly what a “concubine” was in Hebrew society. We find concubines mentioned as early as in the first book of the Bible (Genesis 22). The plan that Abraham and Sarah put in place with Hagar caused her to become a “sort of” wife for the purpose of having a son that Sarah could consider as her own. Many Bible heroes had concubines. You read about them in the stories of such well-known Bible characters as Jacob, Gideon, David, Solomon, and others. The Bible clearly teaches that a man could expect his concubine to remain faithful to him (2 Samuel 3:7-8). If they were not, they, and their cheating partner could be severely punished (Leviticus 19:20). In the first part of this story, we read where the man who pursued his runaway concubine was referred to as “her husband” (19:3) and where the concubine’s father was referred to as the man’s “father-in-law” (19:4). The man was considered to be the “son-in-law” of his concubine’s father (19:5). It appears that the man’s host may have offered the concubine to the evil men who demanded sex without the approval of his guest. In either case, it must have been a horrible night for that poor woman and a shocking experience for her husband when he found her “at the door of the house” the next morning.

Prayer Emphasis: Even though God permitted men to have concubines in Old Testament times, the act seems to have been prohibited as we enter into the New Testament era where every indication is given that marriage should be between one woman and one man (Matthew 19:5 and 1 Corinthians 7:2).

Day 36: Judges 20:1-17

“So all the children of Israel came out, from Dan to Beersheba, as well as from the land of Gilead, and the congregation gathered together as one man before the LORD at Mizpah.” (Judges 20:1)

Yesterday we read how the man whose concubine had been raped and murdered took her body home, cut it up “into twelve pieces...and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel” (19:29). However awful it might have appeared to those who viewed those body parts, it paled at how repugnant this entire situation, and the spiritual lethargy that had caused it, appeared to God. Imagine the sight that these body parts must have been and remind yourself that these are the kinds of things that can happen when men “do what is right in their own eyes.” Never forget that the last five chapters of Judges were probably included just to help us see how evil people can be when they have no “king,” especially the spiritual King, Jesus! It was good to read that the people of Israel came together “as one man” (20:1) to deal with this evil that had been done to the poor concubine. Perhaps the delivering of the body parts to all of the twelve tribes was meant to say that the responsibility for the actions of a nation that “does what is right in their own eyes” over what is right in God’s eyes falls at the feet of every individual citizen of that country. It is interesting to note that the Hebrew word, “Mizpah” means “watchtower.” At least in this story, it became a place where God’s people decided to set a watch against certain evil actions in their midst.

Prayer Emphasis: Choose to *stand with* those who are honoring God’s Word and **be faithful** to *stand against* those who disrespect God and His commandments. **Set** your own “watchtower” over your home and family and take quick and direct action against the temptation to do what is right in your “own eyes.”

Day 37: Judges 20:18-34

“Then the children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until evening, and asked counsel of the LORD...” (Judges 20:23)

Today’s Scripture verses contain some very interesting things regarding Israel and their conflict with the tribe of Benjamin. First we find them going “up to the house of God” to seek His advice about who should lead them in battle. Just as it was when God led His people out of Egypt, God now chose Judah to lead the people into battle. With that information in hand, “the children of Israel rose in the morning and encamped against Gibeah” (v. 19). But when “the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin” the Benjamite army “cut down...twenty-two thousand men of the Israelites” (v. 21). After this first defeat, “the children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until evening, and asked counsel of the LORD” as to whether or not they should continue in battle. The Lord’s response to the people was that they should, “Go up against him” (v. 23). On that second day of battle Israel lost an additional “eighteen thousand” men (v. 25). It was after that second day of defeat and great loss that “all of the children of Israel,” that is, all the people, went up and came to the house of God and wept. They sat there before the LORD *and fasted* that day until evening; and they offered burnt offering and peace offerings before the LORD” (v. 26). We read earlier that they prayed but no mention was made of their fasting. Perhaps the tribe of Benjamin was much like the problems that beset the poor, epileptic boy of Matthew 17. It was after the apostles were not able to help that boy that Jesus told them that, “this kind does not go out except by prayer *and fasting*.”

Prayer Emphasis: Believe that serious prayers get serious answers. **Exhibit** your personal earnestness in prayer by occasionally adding some type of fasting with it. **Read** Job 23:12 and note where Job said, “I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.”

Day 38: Judges 20:35-48

“The LORD defeated Benjamin before Israel. And the children of Israel destroyed that day twenty-five thousand one hundred Benjamites...” (Judges 20:35)

What a difference a time of prayer and fasting made in Israel’s next battle with the tribe of Benjamin! But, as important as prayer and fasting may be, there is another factor that led to the changing of the tide in this conflict. When you read about the strategy that the children of Israel used to draw the Benjamites outside the city and then ambush them (20:29-37) and compare it to the strategy that Joshua and Israel used to defeat the city of Ai (Joshua 8) after losing their first battle with them, you will see that it is very similar. This causes us to wonder if a time of prayer and fasting had motivated the people to read the accounts of Moses and Joshua and see how God had directed their forefathers in battle. It may very well have been that prayer and fasting led to a renewed interest in the Word of God. After the children of Israel returned to doing things God’s way, we are told that, “The LORD defeated Benjamin before Israel” (v. 35) and “eighteen thousand men of Benjamin fell” (v. 44).

Prayer Emphasis: It is impossible to separate God’s Will from God’s Word. **Read** and **follow** the teachings of the Bible and you will soon see more and greater spiritual victories in your own life. **Expect** God to do wonderful things when you pray, fast, and walk in obedience to His Word! **Share** something that God has shown you from His Word with someone that you encounter today.

Day 39: Judges 21:1-12

“Then the people came to the house of God, and remained there before God till evening. They lifted up their voices and wept bitterly.” (Judges 21:2)

One might wonder why we find the children of Israel spending an entire day before God, lifting up their voices and weeping bitterly immediately after they had just won a great victory in their final battle with the tribe of Benjamin. The answer to that “wonder” is found in the first verse that we read today. We were told that the “men of Israel had sworn an oath at Mizpah, saying, ‘None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin as a wife’” (21:1). You will find no record of God commanding the men of Israel to take such an oath. God had prohibited his people from inter-marrying with the peoples of Canaan, but Benjamin was one of their own tribes. This “oath” serves as evidence that the remaining eleven tribes now saw the descendants of Benjamin as enemies and had fully broken fellowship with them. When they realized that their fierce battles with Benjamin and their vow to disallow intermarriage between their families were going to bring the tribe of Benjamin to the point of extinction, they regretted the oath that they had taken. This put them in a very bad spot. They had “sworn an oath” while their anger was hot against Benjamin and now they regretted it so they took matters into their own hands and sought to remedy the situation by giving the Benjamites some young women from Jabesh Gilead.

Prayer Emphasis: Avoid allowing anger or revenge to cause you to make “oaths” that you might later regret. **Seek** to be at peace with all of your Christian family. **Practice** forgiveness at every possible opportunity.

Day 40: Judges 21:13-25

“And the people grieved for Benjamin, because the LORD had made a void in the tribes of Israel.” (Judges 21:15)

As you finished reading these last few chapters of Judges, I hope you were constantly reminding yourself that these were times when “there was no king in Israel” and “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” We have seen someone who thought it was “right” to steal from his own mother. We have read about a man who thought it was “right” to turn a young woman over to a pack of evil men who sexually assaulted her and left her for dead. We have read about the tribes of Israel – all descendants of the sons of Jacob and brothers in the truest sense of the word – going to war and killing each other. We have read about people who, out of anger, took an oath to allow a part of their own family to die out by not allowing them to inter-marry with them. One thing is for certain, there were many very wrong things being done because people chose to do what was “right in their own eyes.” It is in such times that schemes such as the one mentioned in these final verses of Judges are developed. The rationalization was simple. Since we have made an oath not to *give* any of our young women to the Benjamites for wives, they can hide out on the road that leads out of the city and *capture* some of our young women to be their wives. By doing so, it can be said that we did not violate our oath and they can have their wives. Things are not very different today. If we want to, we can make almost anything seem “right in our own eyes.”

Prayer Emphasis: Thank God for sending leaders to provide **Kingdom Perpetuity!** May our efforts for God be ever inspired by the Spirit of God that lives within us! **Contact us** at 850-562-8069 or seminolebc@centurylink.net if we can pray for you or minister to you and your family in any way.