



DAILY
B I B L E G U I D E

The Book of Judges

Days 79-86 of a Yearly Bible Reading Program

Matthew B. Gage

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Daily Bible Reading Plan

Day	Passage	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Day 79	Judges 1-3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Day 80	Judges 4-6	<input type="checkbox"/>
Day 81	Judges 7-8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Day 82	Judges 9-10	<input type="checkbox"/>
Day 83	Judges 11-13	<input type="checkbox"/>
Day 84	Judges 14-17	<input type="checkbox"/>
Day 85	Judges 18-19	<input type="checkbox"/>
Day 86	Judges 20-21	<input type="checkbox"/>

Welcome to the Book of Judges!

The Book of Judges is the historical record of events between the settlement of the Promised Land under Joshua to the call for a monarchy to begin. It is a dark book that records time and time again a vicious cycle: Israel does good and worships God > Israel turns from God > God sends judgment > Israel repents > God sends a deliverer > Israel does good and worships God. God would raise up men (and women) to lead Israel in their times of crisis, and these are called judges.

A few quick facts about Judges:

- Was possibly written by Samuel around
- It covers from the conquest of Canaan in 1451 B.C. to the death of Samson in 1101 B.C.
- Though not abundantly clear, there is an overlap between Judges and I Samuel. Reese's Chronological Bible for example has Samson's death at roughly the same time as the Battle of Mizpeh in I Samuel 7.
- The key verses are 17:6 and 21:6.
- A simple outline:
 - Causes of decline – Chapters 1-2
 - Cycles of oppression – Chapters 3-16
 - Characteristic sins – Chapters 17-21
- Key events:
 - Gideon's 300 – Chapter 7
 - Abimelech's claim of kingship – Chapter 9
 - Samson – Chapters 13-16

Chapter 1 Notes

In this chapter we have events that occur during the conquest of Canaan under Joshua.

vs. 1-7 – Judah and the neighboring tribe of Simeon continue the work of conquering the Canaanite peoples after the death of Joshua. They defeat Adonibezek (“lord of Bezek”) at Bezek in central Canaan. There is an application of the *lex talionis* in that they cut off his thumbs and big toes just as he had done to the kings he had conquered.

vs. 8-10 – The campaign continues southward a by taking Jerusalem and Hebron.

vs. 11-15 – The story of the capture of Kirjathsepher is repeated from Joshua 15:13-19.

vs. 16 – A group of Kenites related to Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, settle in the vicinity of Jericho, see Deuteronomy 34:3.

vs. 17-20 – The continued operations of Judah and Simeone take the Philistine territory on the Mediterranean coast and more.

vs. 21 – The Benjaminite failed to drive the Jebusites from their stronghold at Jerusalem. This will finally occur when David takes the city in II Samuel 5.

vs. 22-26 – Ephraim and Manasseh capture the town of Luz (“nut”), renamed Bethel (“house of God”), with the aid of defector. That man establishes another town with the same name, in the territory controlled by the Hittites in north of Canaan.

vs. 27-35 – The failures of the tribes to completely drive out the Canaanite people. Note that in most cases they did not kill them but rather enslaved them or made them pay tribute. This is not what God had commanded, and they will suffer because of it.

Chapter 2 Notes

In this chapter we have an overview of the Judges period that begins after the Angel of the Lord rebukes their unfaithfulness.

vs. 1-5 – The Angel of the Lord, the Preincarnate Christ who appeared to Joshua in Joshua 5:13, comes again to rebuke Israel for their failure to obey the command to destroy the Canaanites and their influence. The people weep and the place is called Bochim (“weepers”). Reese’s Chronological Bible places this after Joshua 9.

vs. 6-10 – The death of Joshua is covered again from Joshua 24:29-31 with the added information that the second generation turned against the Lord.

vs. 11-15 – This is an overview of the Judges era. Israel will keep turning from God to idols. Baal and Ashtaroth are very ancient pagan deities that morph with time and location. Generally, Baal is a male storm god but also associated at times with the sun. Ashtaroth is a female fertility goddess but also associated at times with the moon.

vs. 16-23 – God would raise up judges to lead Israel back to Him and out of bondage. These revivals would not last forever and the people would turn from God again. The vicious cycle continued.

Chapter 3 Notes

In this chapter Joshua we meet the first three judges that led and delivered Israel in their time of crisis.

vs. 1-6 – The situation is described concerning the various Canaanite and pagan peoples that Israel interacted with.

vs. 7-11 – The first oppression comes from Mesopotamia (literally “land between the two rivers”) under Chushanrishathaim (“chief of two governments”). Othniel (“lion of God”), the nephew of Caleb, is the first judge God raised to deliver Israel. His work leads to 40 years of peace.

vs. 12-30 – The second oppression comes from the Moabites under the obese king Eglon (“cow-like”). God raises up Ehud (“union”) to free Israel. He assassinates Eglon, plunging an 18-inch-long dagger fully into his immense belly and piercing his digestive tract (I’ll leave it at that).

vs. 31 – The next judge to arise is Shamgar (“sword”), who personally killed 600 Philistines in combat using only an ox goad (a long pointy stick).

Devotional Thoughts for Day 79

The Book of Judges is a dark book as we see the consequences of sin and the reproofing hand of God applied to His people. But we cannot overlook that it is full of hope. Yes, Israel would turn away from God, but they would return to Him even if briefly. God would hear their cries for help and rise up a leader to bring them back to a place of blessing. Never lose sight of the light of hope that God gives even in the blackest of midnights.

Hymn for Day 79

Our hymn today is a reworking of Psalm 34 from Tate and Brady's "A New Version of the Psalms of David" published in 1754. It is sometimes titled from its first line: "Through All the Changing Scenes of Life". The themes of answered prayer and deliverance fit well with our reading. I have left the original verse marks that show which verse of Psalm 34 the lines are based on.

*1 Thro' all the changing scenes of Life,
in Trouble, and in Joy,
The Praises of my God shall still
my Heart and Tongue employ.*

*2 Of his Deliv'rance I will boast,
till all that are distrest,
From my Example Comfort take,
and charm their Grievs to Rest.*

*3 O! magnify the Lord with me,
with me exalt His Name,
4 When in Distress to Him I call'd,
He to my Rescue came.
5 Their dropping Hearts were soon refresh'd,
Who look'd to Him for Aid:
Desir'd Success in ev'ry face
a chearful Air display'd:*

6 *"Behold (say they) behold the Man
"whom Providence reliev'd;
"So dang'rously with Woes beset,
"so wond'rously retriev'd!"*

7 *The Hosts of God encamp around
The Dwellings of the Just;
Deliv'rance He affords to all
who on his Succour trust.*

8 *O! make but Trial of His Love,
Experience will decide,
How blest they are, and only they,
who in His Truth confide.*

9 *Fear Him, ye Saints, and you will then
have nothing else to fear:
Make you His Service your Delight;
He'll make your Wants his Care.*

10 *While hungry Lions lack their Prey,
the Lord will Food provide
For such as put their Trust in Him,
and see their needs supplyd.*

Part II

11 *Approach, ye proudly dispos'd,
and my Instruction hear;
I'll teach you the true Discipline
of His religious Fear.*

12 *Let him who Length of life desires,
and prosp'rous Days would see,*

13 *From sland'ring Language keep his tongue,
his Lips from Falshood free:*

14 *The crooked Paths of vice decline,
and Virtue's Ways pursue;
Establish Peace where 'tis begun;
and where 'tis lost, renew.*

15 *The Lord from Heav'n beholds the Just
with favourable Eyes;
And, when distress'd, His gracious Ear
is open to their Cries.*

*16 But turns His wrathful Look on those
whom Mercy can't reclaim,
To cut them off, and from the Earth
blot out their hated Name.*

*17 Deliv'rance to His Saints he gives,
when His Relief they crave:*

*18 He's nigh to heal the broken Heart,
and contrite Spirit save.*

*19 The Wicked oft, but still in vain,
against the Just conspire;*

*20 For, under their Affliction's Weight,
He keeps their Bones intire.*

*21 The Wicked, from their wicked Arts,
their Ruin shall derive;
Whilst righteous Men, whom they detest,
shall them and theirs survive.*

*22 For God preserves the Souls of those
who on His Truth depend:*

*To them, and their Posterity,
His Blessings shall descend.*

Chapter 4 Notes

In this chapter Deborah and Barak lead Israel to victory and deliverance.

vs. 1-3 – Israel falls away from God again. They are conquered by Jabin (“discerner, wise”, likely a title), a Canaanite ruler from Hazor north of the Sea of Galilee. Joshua defeated a ruler with the same name at the same place in Joshua 11. The Jabin here and his kingdom are certainly descended from that earlier king and kingdom. The military was led by Sisera (“battle array”), who was based out of Harosheth, which was near Mt. Carmel in the Jezreel Valley. The might of this army is its corps of chariots, numbering 900.

vs. 4-5 – We meet Deborah (“a bee”), the prophetess that is the leader of Israel at this time. She was based in Mt. Ephraim between Bethel and Ramah, and there Israel would go to consult her for her judgment. We find here another mark of this period: the unwillingness or hesitancy of men to take the lead.

vs. 6-7 – Deborah gives God’s instructions to Barak (“lightning”) that he is to lead a force of 10,000 men from Naphtali and Zebulun against Sisera near Mt. Tabor in the eastern Jezreel Valley.

vs. 8-10 – Barak refuses to go without Deborah. She warns him that in doing so he would not receive any glory as the leader. The army gathers at Kedesh (probably Kedesh-Naphtali on the southwest shores of the Sea of Galilee) and marches to Mt. Tabor.

vs. 11-13 – Heber (“alliance”), a Kenite that had moved north from his people that had settled near Jericho, warns Sisera of Israel’s coming attack.

vs. 14-16 – God aids Israel in a complete rout of the enemy. The army with its chariots are destroyed and Sisera, its commander, flees for his life on foot.

vs. 17-22 – Sisera seeks refuge by hiding in the tent of Jael (“mountain goat”), the wife of the Heber the Kenite. She lulls him into a false sense of security, and after he fell asleep she drove a tent stake through his head and killed him.

vs. 23-24 – The victory leads to a further campaign against Jabin and his destruction.

Chapter 5 Notes

In this chapter is the song of praise by Deborah and Barak after their victory.

vs. 1-5 – The song opens with an outpouring of praise to the mighty God who gave the victory. In vs. 4-5 is the picture of the unstoppable God racing northward as a storm and as fire.

vs. 6-11 – The defeated condition of Israel and their deliverance is described. We have in vs. 5 a mention of a custom of the time of nobles riding white donkeys. We see something like this mentioned in 10:4 and 12:14.

vs. 12-22 – Here the victors celebrate and call out the tribes who did not participate in the battle. The tribes that participated at given as Ephraim, Benjamin, Manasseh (Machir in vs. 14 is a subgroup of this tribe), Zebulon, Issachar, and Naphtali. The tribes that did not participate and are called out for it are Reuben, Gad/Manasseh (Gilead in vs. 17 is a territory associated with Gad or Manasseh), Dan, and Asher. If Gilead refers to Gad online, and likely it does, that leaves three tribes not mentioned: Judah, Simeon, and Levi. Levi is easy to excuse in their role as priests and religious leaders. Judah and Simeon are far away to the south and perhaps not expected to take part due to the distance. We could also see here a sign of the later division in the kingdom as the northern tribes break from Judah in I Kings 12.

vs. 23 – The city of Meroz (“refuge”) is cursed for refusing to aid in the battle. It is assumed this city was near the battlefield, but its location is not known. The curse truly came to pass, and it was wiped away from history.

vs. 24-31 – The song closes with a comparison of two women. The first is Jael, who killed Sisera in her tent. The second is Sisera’s mother, who is pictured watching for her son’s return and expecting a victory that did not occur.

Chapter 6 Notes

In this chapter God calls Gideon to lead Israel to victory, if only He can convince him to do it!

vs. 1-6 – Israel again turns from God, and the Midianites are sent to conquer them. The attack comes before harvest when the coalition of Midianites, Amalekites, and Arabians sweep in from the south. The Israelites lose their crops and livestock. They resort to holding out in caves and strongholds.

vs. 7-10 – The people cry out to the Lord and He sends a prophet to them. His message is that God has been faithful while Israel had not. It is a call for repentance. The people wanted relief but were not ready to fully turn back to God.

vs. 11-16 – The Angel of the Lord (the Preincarnate Christ, see vs. 14 and 16) appears to Gideon (“he that cuts down”) at Ophrah (“a fawn”), a location in the eastern Jezreel Valley south of Mt. Tabor. Gideon is threshing wheat (throwing it in the air so that the chaff blows away from the grain) in a valley. This was normally done on a hilltop where you had more wind, which shows that he is hiding from the enemy. The Angel tells him that he will lead the people to victory against the Midianites.

vs. 17-24 – Gideon seeks his first sign of confirmation that the Messenger and His message are true. He prepares a meal for the Angel, who causes it to burn as a sacrifice on a rock. Gideon now understands Who had been talking to him. He builds an altar there and calls it Jehovahshalom (“The Lord’s peace”) because he was not killed for speaking to the Lord.

vs. 25-32 – We get a glimpse at the religious situation of the times here. Gideon’s father has shrines for Baal and Ashtaroth (she was worshipped in groves of trees). God commands him to destroy these shrines and build an altar to the true God. Gideon is too scared to do it in daylight but did so under the cover of darkness. The men of the city are enraged and seek to kill Gideon. His father forbids them, saying that if Baal wants justice, then let Baal kill Gideon. There is something of the polytheistic mindset here. Baal and Ashtaroth were exposed as weak for letting their shrines be destroyed, while God is seen as strong because His altar now stood in their place. It also shows that Israel had not fully turned back to God. Gideon gains a nickname here of Jerubbaal (“contender with Baal”).

vs. 33-35 – The Midianite coalition was gathered in the Jezreel valley. God emboldens Gideon, and he blows the trumpet to assemble an army. His family (the Abiezer clan) join first and men are roused from the northern tribes.

vs. 36-40 – Gideon seeks further affirmation that God was truly going to use him to lead Israel to a victory. The first test is that a fleece was placed on the threshing floor, and

Gideon asked that it would be wet while the ground around it was dry. God did this. Gideon seeks further affirmation. The second test is the opposite, that the fleece would be dry and the ground wet. God does this also. That is three signs miraculous signs of confirmation for the reluctant general.

Devotional Thoughts for Day 80

One of God's greatest expressions of love towards us is His patience with us. He chose Gideon to be the leader in one of Israel's darkest hours, but He also had to convince him to do it. Gideon questioned the Angel, and God obliged him to prove He and His message were real. Gideon asked for not one test, but two. God kindly obliged again. It should be an encouragement to us that we are not bothering God with our problems or even our faltering faith. He bids us still, "Come unto Me."

Hymn for Day 80

We are going to go with another spiritual today, "Joshua Fought The Battle of Jericho". It is believed to have been written before the Civil War and was first published in 1882.

Our hymn today is "The Song of Deborah", or at least a reworking of it to fit into English poetry. This technique has been especially popular with the Psalms, so much so that we call collections of them Psalters. Our song today was written by Congregationalist pastor John Barnard and published in his "A New Version of the Psalms of David". This took place in 1752 in Boston.

*1. Praise ye the Lord, who hath avenged
His Israel, on their haughty foes;
When the brave people freely did
Their lives, for liberty, expose.*

*3. Hear, O ye kings, princes give ear,
Whilst I to great Jehovah sing;
In sacred numbers shout the praise
Of Israel's God, the almighty King.*

*4. When God from Mount Seir marched in state,
And turned from Edom's lofty towers,
The earth shook, the heavens in thunders dropped,
The clouds poured down their rapid showers.*

*5. The mountains flamed, and melting flowed,
Nor could Jehovah's presence bear;
So Sinai unknown terrors felt,
When Israel's God was present there.*

6. In Shangar's Anath's valiant son,
And famous Jael's former days,
The roads, by travelers were untrod;
Who fearful, walked through secret ways.

7. The villages were broken up,
Their lands uncultivate were laid;
Until I Deborah was raised
And mother in God's Israel made.

8. New gods their sickly fancies chose,
Fierce wars their gates invaded then;
Was shield, or spear, in Israel's tents
Seen among forty thousand men?

9. My heart is set on Israel's chiefs,
Who offered of their own accord,
Bravely to join, and head the troops
In battle: blessed be the Lord.

10. Sing ye that on white asses ride.
And now secure in judgment sit.
Ye travelers join the sacred song,
Who safely go where ye think fit.

11. Ye that from the archer's noise are freed,
Lurking at every watering place,
Jehovah's righteous doings, now
May there rehearse, in songs of praise:

The truly gracious actions he
To Israels villages hath shown;
That now the people of the Lord,
Safe to their borders, may go down.

12. Wake Deborah, wake, excite thy powers,
His fame, in sacred hymns, to spread;
Rise, Barak, thou Abinoam's son,
Thy captive foes, in triumph, lead.

13. Thus Carman's nobles he reduced,
And put beneath his remnant's feet;
The Lord, to my dominion, forced
Their mighty captains to submit.

14. From Ephraim's mount there came a root,
Which with fierce Amalek engaged.
Benjamin followed close, and joined
His forces, where the battle raged.

*From Machir's stock, renowned of old,
There come great captains, famous men;
And Zebulun sent such as knew
To wield the sword, and use the pen.
15. The noble lords of Isachar
To Deborah their forces led;
On foot they marched down to the vale,
With gallant Barak at their head.*

*But Reuben separate remained,
Distant in mind, much more than parts;
The conduct of which potent tribe
Made great impressions on our hearts.
16. Didst fear the losing of thy sheep,
That thou among the sheepfolds stayed?
Thee, has the bleating of thy flocks,
To base neutrality betrayed?*

*Truly thy conduct, Reuben, who
So wholly separate remained;
And would not join so good a cause,
Our hearts has grieved, thy glory stained.
17. So beyond Jordan, Gilead stayed:
And why did Dan in ships abide?
While Ashur clung to his sea shore,
To hide in creeks, or curb the tide.*

*18. But Zebulun, and Naphtali,
Were ready, for the public good,
In the high places of the field,
To risk their lives, and spend their blood.
19. Confederate kings of Canaan came,
With Jabin joined, and for him sought,
In Tannach, by Megiddo's stream;
But lost the booty which they fought.*

20. They fought from heaven, the marshaled stars,
Each active in their stated course,
Exert their influence, and fought;
Against proud Sisera bent their force.

21. The River Kishon swept them off;
That ancient river, here well known
A brook, now to a river swollen:
Thou, O my soul, hast strength trod down?

22. The fierce encounters of their horse,
In hasty flight, each other wound;
Their speed is stopped, they tumbling cast
Their mighty riders to the ground.

23. Curse Meroz, said God's angel, Curse
All bitterly to her belong;
For they refused to help the Lord,
To aid his arms against the strong.

24. Blessed Jael Kenite Heber's wife,
Shall be above all women-kind;
Her fame, beyond her sex, shall spread,
In every tent, to every wind.

25. He water asked; to quench his thirst,
She gave him milk, beyond his wish:
She brought forth butter to regale,
And served him in a lordly dish.

26. She took the tent nail in her hand,
Her right hand seized the hammer fast;
Through Sisera's temples drove the spike,
And then cut off his head at last.

27. He started, staggered, in a maze,
He fell, down at her feet lay spread;
Close at her feet he bowed, he fell,
There where he bowed, he fell down dead.

28. His mother through the window looked,
And cried, impatient for her son,
Why does his chariot stay so long?
Why do the wheels so slowly run?

29. Her prudent ladies answered her;
Yea, eager, she herself replied,

30. Have they not sped? and now a prey,
To each a maid or two, divide?

*Isn't Sisera choosing, from the spoils,
Rich robes, which beauteous colors deck,
Of needlework, on either side,
Fit to adorn the conqueror's neck?
31. So, Lord, may all thine enemies
In ruin sink, and perish quite:
But those that love thee, like the sun
Be when he marcheth in his might.*

Chapter 7 Notes

In this chapter God uses 300 men to bring a great victory.

vs. 1-8 – Gideon begins with 32,000 men, and God says it is too many. He tells them that if they are afraid they can go home (see Deuteronomy 20:8) and 22,000 depart. Another test is given, which I will allow B.H. Carroll, who had served as a Texas Ranger and a private in the Confederate army, to explain:

“God looked at the 10,000 and said, ‘There are still too many. Now bring the 10,000 down to the creek and let me see them drink water,’ and every one but 300 when they got there laid down their equipments and knelt down and deliberately took a drink. But the 300 waded in and lapped up the water as they marched through, and never stopped walking. God said that the 300 that lapped the water like a dog were his crowd. Why? They had before them, after the battle, a march that would try the souls of men. Gideon will never let up pursuing them, across the Jordan and way out into Midian, and soldiers that have to lay aside their equipments and lie down and grunt, they never will overtake a fleeing enemy, and he needed people that wouldn’t lose time. I once heard an infidel say that that was the sorriest test he ever heard of. I always thought it a remarkable test. It was precisely the kind of a test that was made by an old Indian fighter. He said, ‘I am going to pursue the Indians into the mountains; whoever cannot load your gun as you go must drop out; you must be able to load your gun as you go.’”

vs. 9-15 – God gives Gideon yet another confirmation of the coming victory. He and his servant Phurah (“bough”) sneak into the Midianite camp and overhear a discussion about a dream. In this conversation they see the fear the Midianites have of an attack by Gideon.

vs. 16-25 – The plan is set and executed. The 300 men with Gideon surround the Midianite camp. They have with them a trumpet (shofar, made from animal horn) and a pitcher containing an oil lamp. At around midnight when the guard changed (custom at this time divided the night into three watches), Gideon gives the signal. The men shatter their pitchers to reveal the light of the lamps and blow their trumpets. A shout is lifted up. The confused enemy believe they are surrounded by a superior force and panic. In the darkness they attack each other and begin a retreat southward. The men of Israel see the rout and join in the pursuit of the retreating enemy. Gideon rouses the men of Ephraim to block their retreat and force them to cross the Jordan. Two of the Midianite leaders are captured and executed in this attack.

Chapter 8 Notes

In this chapter Gideon completes the rout of the Midianites.

vs. 1-3 – The men of Ephraim are jealous that they had not been asked to join the battle earlier. Gideon has to placate them by reminding them of their strength and success.

vs. 4-9 – The cities of Succoth and Penuel refuse to aid Gideon because the Midianite leaders had not been captured. They feared that Gideon would be defeated and that they would face repercussions for aiding him.

vs. 10-12 – The Midianite forces had been devastated, leaving only 15,000 men from 120,000. Gideon attacks, capturing their leaders Zebah (“sacrifice”) and Zalmunna (“denied of shade”).

vs. 13-17 – Gideon on his return from his victory stops to deal punishment to Succoth and Penuel for refusing to aid him. He scourges the 77 leaders of Succoth with briers and thorns, humiliating them and possibly killing them. He kills the men of Penuel and destroyed their fortress. In both cases it appears that he was removing wicked leadership and did not destroy the cities or their populations.

vs. 18-21 – Now returned home, Gideon interrogates the captured kings about an earlier event that is not recorded in Scripture. It seems that these men had some role in killing members of Gideon’s family. This could not be from the battle or the flight and pursuit. Gideon commands his eldest son Jether (“his excellence”) to kill them, but he refused. The kings mock him and Gideon strikes them down.

vs. 22-32 – Gideon wisely refuses the offer to become king over Israel. Gideon does request a portion of the spoils, specifically the gold earrings worn by the Arabians. 1,700 shekels of gold would be valued at around \$3 million today. From these treasures Gideon makes himself an ephod, a word used on purpose as it relates to the uniform of the High Priest (Exodus 28:6-12). By implication it seems that Gideon is establishing himself a priest. The victory has inflated his ego. Though he is not a king in title he lives in the opulent style of Oriental rulers. He has many wives and concubines and 70 sons. We meet his son Abimelech (“my father the king”) in vs. 31, who will be the focus of the next chapter.

vs. 33-35 – After Gideon’s death, Israel again turns from God and worships Baal-berith (“lord of the covenant”).

Devotional Thoughts for Day 81

Gideon is such an interesting character in Scripture. He starts in timidity and fear and has to be constantly reassured that God would bring the victory. Once that victory is accomplished his personality changes, which we rarely talk about. He demands a personal portion of the spoils of victory and exalts himself like a king though not in name. He and King Saul are two examples of men that let victories change them in awful ways. We must be careful to not lift ourselves up in the day of God's victories. Rare is the man who can stay humble when he is exalted on earth.

Hymn for Day 81

Our hymn today appeared in the 1847 hymnal Church Psalmist under the heading, "The Lord our Leader". Its author is John Nelson Darby, who is best known as a leader of the Plymouth Brethren movement and strong stand for Premillennial eschatology. The song is based on Judges 8:4, and encourages the Christian to keep moving forward no matter the fatigue or fears.

*Though faint, yet pursuing, we go on our way;
The Lord is our Leader, his word is our stay;
Tho' suffering, and sorrow, and trial be near,
The Lord is our Refuge, and whom can we fear?*

*He raiseth the fallen, he cheereth the faint;
The weak and oppressed--he will hear their complaint;
The way may be weary, and thorny the road,
But how can we falter?--our help is in God!*

*And to his green pastures our footsteps he leads;
His flock in the desert how kindly he feeds!
The lambs in his bosom he tenderly bears,
And brings back the wanderers all safe from the snares.*

*Though clouds may surround us, our God is our light;
Though storms rage around us, our God is our might;
So, faint yet pursuing, still onward we come;
The Lord is our Leader, and heaven is our home!*

Chapter 9 Notes

In this chapter we have the fate of the first man to claim kingship in Israel, Abimelech.

vs. 1-6 – Abimelech, the son of Gideon through a concubine that we met briefly in 8:31, persuades the people of Shechem to back him as leader. They financed his rebellion with money from the local shrine to Baal. Abimelech murders the 70 legitimate sons of Gideon, except for Jotham (“Jehovah is perfect”) the youngest.

vs. 7-21 – Jotham calls out the sin of Abimelech and Shechem by addressing a fable to them. In this fable, the trees seek a king, but no tree or plant will take the crown, that is until the lowly bramble. The lesson is that men like Abimelech that seek greatness without God raising them up are doomed for destruction. In vs. 20 Jotham pronounces a curse that would mean mutual destruction of Shechem, their acropolis (Millo means “mound or rampart”), and Abimelech. Jotham then flees a few miles south to a town called Beer (“well”).

vs. 22-49 – After three years, the relationship between Abimelech and Shechem has soured. In vs. 25 we see that the town made plans to attack him on his return. In vs. 26 we see the town enlist a man named Gaal (“contempt”) to help rid them of their king. Zebul (“habitation”), who is Abimelech’s puppet in Shechem, warns him of the danger and advises swift action. Abimelech surrounds the city at night and begins approaching at daylight. Gaal sees this but Zebul delays him in responding. Finally, Gaal leads a force against Abimelech but is defeated and driven from Shechem. Abimelech then turns his attention to the city, killing its people and destroying the town. Some men hold out in the fortified acropolis; Abimelech burns them alive.

vs. 50-57 – Abimelech turns his attention to Thebez (“brightness”), another town which appears to have rebelled against him. The people holed up in the city’s fortress, and Abimelech sought to repeat his tactic of burning them alive. In the desperate defense, a unnamed woman threw down a piece of a millstone that hit Abimelech’s head and wounded him. In his pride, he refused to have it said that woman killed him and his armorbearer finished him. The followers of Abimelech disperse and this tragic period in Israel’s history ends.

Chapter 10 Notes

In this chapter we have two more judges and another call to rally against oppressors.

vs. 1-2 – The judgeship of Tola (“scarlet worm”) of Issachar.

vs. 3-5 – The judgeship of Jair (“enlightener”) of Manasseh.

vs. 6-9 – Another round of oppression under the Philistines and Ammonites come after Israel turns from God again.

vs. 10-14 – Israel attempts a half-hearted repentance, and God tells them to go trust in the idols that they worship.

vs. 15-18 – Israel truly repents and rids themselves of their idols. The Israelites assemble to face the Ammonite army but lack a leader. This sets up the next chapter which we will read tomorrow.

Devotional Thoughts for Day 82

Who was the first king over Israel? David? Saul? Actually it was the brief reign over a few cities by Abimelech. His reign was rooted in sinful ambition and was not sanctioned by God. We saw in Deuteronomy 17 that God had prepared for there to be kings in Israel, but Abimelech was not God's choice. He is a warning to trust in God's timing and will. Human endeavor is fruitless without the hand of God blessing it.

Hymn for Day 82

Our hymn today, John Newton's "See How The Worthless Bramble Stands", is only tangentially related to our text. Alas, there is a dearth of hymns based on today's reading. But it does mention a bramble, like Jotham compared Abimelech to. Here the sinner is likened to a bramble in the desert to illustrate the need for a Savior. Do not be like Abimelech and reject God!

*See how the worthless bramble stands
Beneath a burning sky;
Wither'd and parch'd in barren sands,
And only grows to die.*

*Such is the sinner's awful case,
Who makes the world his trust;
And dares his confidence to place
In vanity and dust.*

*A secret curse destroys his root,
And dries his moisture up;
He lives a while, but bears no fruit,
Then dies without a hope.*

*But happy he whose hopes depend
Upon the Lord alone;
The soul that trusts in such a friend
Can ne'er be overthrown.*

Chapter 11 Notes

In this chapter Jephthah delivers Israel from the Ammonites and makes a regrettable vow to God.

vs. 1-11 – Jephthah (“whom God sets free”) of Gilead (making him either from Gad or Manasseh) was cast out from his family for being born through a harlot and not a wife. In the nearby land of Tob (“goodness”), he becomes a captain over other outcasts. When the Ammonites invaded his old home called for his aid. The pledge that if he delivers them from the enemy he will return as their leader.

vs. 12-28 – Jephthah sends messengers to the Ammonites, who say they only wish to reclaim their ancestral lands from the Israelites who had taken in in Numbers 21:24-26 around 280 years prior. The area described is far greater than that, including territory that had been home to the Amorites and Moabites. He reminds them that they would have been spared if they had only allowed Israel passage, but in opposing Israel they had incurred the wrath of God.

vs. 29-31 – Jephthah leads his army to face the Ammonites. Before the battle, he vows that whatever he saw first when he returned home would be offered to God. There is much debate on the particulars of this vow and how it was to be carried out. The description seems to imply that it would be a human, whether family member or slave. Does this imply human sacrifice? While forbidden in the Law, it was practiced in the heathen cultures of the era. Some make it mean that if it were something proper to sacrifice it would be, and if not, it would be dedicated to God. The interpretation depends on how you understand Jephthah and how much the Jewish religion impacted his thought. If he is indicative of this era and tainted by paganism, it is possible it he could mean human sacrifice. If the Law has made any impact on him, he certainly would not suggest it. Either case can be read into the text. The most curious omission in my mind is that the regulations of Leviticus 27:1-8 are never appealed to, which allow for the redemption of a person dedicated in a vow by paying silver to the priests. The only reasons for this are ignorance or if Deuteronomy 23:2 somehow applied to the situation and prevented it.

vs. 32-33 – Jephthah leads a rout of the Ammonites, driving them southward through Reuben’s territory east of the Dead Sea.

vs. 34-40 – Jephthah’s vow comes due. The first thing that greets him on his return home is his only daughter, who dances and sings of the great victory. The celebration is short lived. She submits to the vow, but requests that she be given two months before it is made effect. This time she spends with other young women mourning the fact that she will not have

marry and have children. The highest aspirations for a young woman of this day were to bear many children and that through them the Messiah may come. My opinion is that she was a perpetual virgin and was not killed as a sacrifice, but good arguments can be made for both positions.

Chapter 12 Notes

In this chapter we see civil war and quick references to three more judges.

vs. 1-6 – The fight in the previous chapter against Ammon had taken Jephthah’s forces into the territory of Ephraim. The Ephraimites take offense that the battle was waged on their land without being called to aid. Jephthah replies in a very haughtier manner (note the many “l”s) and claims they had not answered an earlier call. This leads to civil war between the men of Gilead and Ephraim. The men of Gilead under Jephthah exploit a difference in the regional dialects of the tribes, using the Hebrew word Shibboleth. The Ephraimites pronounce the “sh” as “s”. When an Ephraimite was thus identified they would be killed. 42,000 men of Ephraim fall in this conflict.

vs. 7 – A description of the judgeship of Jephthah and his death.

vs. 8-10 - A description of the judgeship of Ibzan and his death. He uses his vast number of offspring to forge alliances.

vs. 11-12 - A description of the judgeship of Elon and his death.

vs. 13-15 - A description of the judgeship of Abdon and his death. He uses his vast number of sons and nephews to solidify his rule.

Chapter 13 Notes

In this chapter we meet the parents of Samson and see the special restrictions placed upon him from birth.

vs. 1 – The vicious cycle continues as Israel turns from God and the Philistines are sent to oppress them. We have seen the Philistines in passing, but they are too fascinating and important of a people to not spend a moment on. History suggests that they were a part of a vast migration of the “Sea Peoples” around 1200 B.C. and that people related to the Greeks arrived in southern Canaan and intermarried with local tribes. The resulting people and culture are a mix of the two heritages.

vs. 2-17 – We meet Manoah (“rest”), a Danite from Zorah (“hornet”), a town roughly 20 miles west of Jerusalem. He and his wife have no children. The “Angel of the Lord”, the Preincarnate Christ, appears to Manoah’s wife. Her name is not given but Jewish tradition says she is Hazelelponi (“facing the shade”) of I Chronicles 4:3. She is told that she will have a son and that from the womb he is to be treated as under a Nazarite vow (see Numbers 6). The three main stipulations are (1) not cutting his hair, (2) not touching unclean things such as a dead body, and (3) not consuming intoxicating wine. Manoah prays that the Angel would return, which it did. The Angel repeats and confirms the message given before.

vs. 18-23 – The further interactions between Manoah and the Angel are noteworthy. The Angel will not give His name, saying it is hidden because of its wonder (Isaiah 9:6). Now that he has a better understanding of Who he is dealing with, Manoah prepares a sacrifice. The Angel ascended from the flames into Heaven. Manoah fears for his life because in vs. 22 he admits that “we have seen God”. But God was gracious to them, and all came to pass as He had said.

vs. 24-25 – Samson (“like the sun”) is born and raised according to the Angel’s commands. He begins to be used by the Spirit at an early age. It is an interesting study of how the Holy Spirit moved in the Old Testament times. He would briefly empower people for special purposes, and He did so with Samson more than any other we have record of.

Devotional Thoughts for Day 83

It is easy to get caught up in the narratives here and miss what is going on in the Israelite nation. We see them of course repeatedly turning from God. We also see divisions among the tribes and a breakdown of the central religious system. It is a miracle that Israel survived as a nation during this time, and likewise the Jewish religion itself. God was exceptionally patient and good to them during these dark times. He is so with us in our lowest moments.

Hymn for Day 83

Our hymn today, “Teach Me To Do The Things That Pleaseth Thee”, was written by John S.B. Monsell (1811-1875) and first published in 1863. It echoes the words of Manoah in 13:8, that the Lord “teach us what we shall do”.

*Teach me to do the thing that pleaseth thee;
Thou art my God, in thee I live and move;
Oh, let thy loving Spirit lead me forth
Into the land of righteousness and love.*

*Thy love the law and impulse of my soul,
Thy righteousness its fitness and its plea,
Thy loving Spirit mercy's sweet control
To make me liker, draw me nearer thee.*

*My highest hope to be where, Lord, thou art,
To lose myself in thee my richest gain,
To do thy will the habit of my heart,
To grieve the Spirit my severest pain.*

*Thy smile my sunshine, all my peace from thence,
From self alone what could that peace destroy?
Thy joy my sorrow at the least offence,
My sorrow that I am not more thy joy.*

Chapter 14 Notes

In this chapter we have Samson's failed wedding and riddle.

vs. 1-4 – Timnath was a city of Judah that was held at this time by the Philistines. Here Samson find a woman he wishes to have as wife. In vs. 4 we see that God was moving through this entire episode in order to cause Samson to turn against the Philistines.

vs. 5-9 – Samson breaks the first of the three major restrictions he was under by touching a dead body (13:14). He had killed a lion with his bare hands and later returns to see that bees have made a hive in its carcass. Not only does he eat the honey, but he also gives it to his parents.

vs. 10-11 – This is the wedding feast of ancient times. An agreement has been made between the parents for the marriage and payment made for the bride. The groom comes to claim his bride and a celebration ensues, here for 7 days. The Philistines supply 30 attendants, a rather large number that may signal the wealth or status of Manoah and his family. I think this could be an instance where Samson breaks the second major restriction and consumes alcohol. Such an occasion among pagan peoples would be filled with drunken debauchery.

vs. 12-18 – Samson poses a riddle to the attendants amidst the revelry, promising a handsome prize of 30 shirts and 30 robes. The numbers here matching the number of attendants is no accident. Samson thinks himself clever by asking a riddle only he would know, referring to the honey in the lion carcass. The greedy attendants pressure the bride to get the answer from her husband and threaten her family if she does not comply. On the seventh day of the feast, he divulges his secret to her and she tells her people. Samson is enraged at her unfaithfulness.

vs. 19-20 – Samson goes to one of the chief Philistine cities, Askelon, kills 30 men and uses their cloths to pay the debt from the answered riddle. His wife is given in marriage to one of the wedding attendants.

Chapter 15 Notes

In this chapter we have beginnings of Samson's judgeship with his victory using a donkey's jawbone.

vs. 1-8 – Samson seeks to reunite with his wife, even bringing the gift of a goat. The father reveals that she has been given to another, offering her younger sister instead. Samson gets his revenge for the slight against him by burning the fields of the Philistines that were ready for harvest, using foxes with burning sticks tied to their tails. When the Philistines realize who had done this and why, they execute Samson's former bride and her father. Samson is further enraged, attacking and killing many Philistines before retreating a mountaintop called Etam ("lair of wild beasts").

vs. 9-13 – The Philistines raise their army to seek out and capture Samson. A force of men from Judah confronts Samson and he agrees to be taken the Philistines.

vs. 14-17 – When the Philistines see Samson they begin to shout and Samson bursts from his bonds. He again breaks the first restriction against him by touching a dead thing by taking up as a weapon the jawbone of a donkey. With this strange weapon he slays 1,000 Philistines. The place is called Lehi ("jawbone") or Ramothlehi ("hill of the jawbone").

vs. 18-20 – After the battle Samson prays one of two recorded prayers by him. He believes himself on the brink of death after his exertion and practically demands God supply him with water. God miraculously supplies for His weary warrior. There is some confusion about how this happens. The classic interpretation is that the water came from the jawbone, but more modern interpretations say that is from a spring at Lehi, which of course means "jawbone". The problem with that modern interpretation is that it assumes the place was called Lehi before this event. If that is the case, then Samson killed used a jawbone in Jawbone, which seems a little too on the nose. The Bible often calls places by names years ahead of when they are named such. I think that is what is happening here. The writer is saying, "at Lehi, Samson killed 1,000 men," not because it was called Lehi when Samson did so, but because that is what it was called as he was writing it. The place this occurs is named by Samson Enhakkore ("the fountain of him that was calling").

Chapter 16 Notes

In this chapter we see Samson's fall to Delilah's wiles and his dramatic death. The timing of these events is probably around the same time as the Battle of Mizpeh in I Samuel 7 in 1101 B.C., roughly six years before Saul is crowned king.

vs. 1-3 – Once again Samson's attraction to Philistine women causes problems. Here he is caught in Gaza, another of their capital cities. He carries the gates of the city twenty miles to Hebron.

vs. 4-22 – We finally come to the infamous Delilah ("languishing"). The Philistine leaders exploit Samson's attraction to her to set traps for his capture. They press her to learn how to weaken Samson. Three times she pressed him, and he lied three times about things that would weaken him. Green cords, new ropes, and weaving his hair are all tried and each fail. Finally, he gives away the secret, that third and final unbroken requirement of the Nazarite vow: cutting his hair. After his head is shaved his downfall is completed and God's supernatural strength leaves him. He is taken prisoner to Gaza, where his eyes are put out and he is made to work a mill like an ox.

vs. 23-31 – The Philistines bring Samson into the temple of Dagon, the half-fish half-man god. There God strengthens him one last time and he pushed the central support columns away and caused the temple to collapse. He dies in the act and thousands of Philistines perish. A different Philistine temple was unearthed in the 1970's north of Tel Aviv that featured two central pillars, proving the Bible's description as true - <https://biblearchaeology.org/research/judges-united-monarchy/3800-between-the-pillars-revisiting-samson-and-the-house-of-dagon>

Chapter 17 Notes

In this chapter we have the story of Micah and the Levite. This exemplifies the self-willed worship of the era. This event and the chapters that follow are not chronologically after Samson but rather are exemplary or important events from the Judges era. Reese's Chronological Bible puts this chapter 1420 B.C., shortly after the death of Joshua.

vs. 1-5 – We meet Micah (“who is like Jehovah?”), who lived in Mount Ephraim, a place that will later become Samaria. It is a bizarre tale. Someone stole 1,100 shekels of silver (~\$31,000) from his mother, a considerable sum. He confesses to the crime (the Fifth and Eighth Commandments), and the mother blesses her thieving son! After he returns the money, she tells him she has dedicated it to the Lord to make idols (the Second Commandment). An artisan is paid 200 shekels to make two idols from the remaining 900 shekels, making the two roughly 11 pounds each in weight. With this beginning, they establish their own sanctuary for their idols. You will note the blending of the true God Jehovah and pagan worship. This is called syncretism. It does not seem that they are attempting to worship Baal, Ashtaroth, or any other false god, but they are worshipping the true god through pagan means.

vs. 6 – This is the key statement of the book. Israel is in confusion spiritually and politically.

vs. 7-13 – Micah meets a Levite that had been dwelling in Bethlehem (“house of bread”) but seeking a new home and employment. Micah hires him to be their personal priest in their shrine. The Levite should have known better than to do this and also should have admitted that he was not qualified for the priesthood to begin with. Money changes minds, especially those not firmly settled in truth. The chapter closes with Micah assuming that he is really doing something great and that God is with him in these actions. How said to see the truth so lost and compromised!

Devotional Thoughts for Day 84

Samson's life intrigues me. He is mentioned in the great listing of heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. He accomplished a few remarkable deeds and victories. There must be more to his story that we do not know, because we know remarkably little for a judgeship of 20 years. My main source of astonishment is that God used such a man who proved unfaithful to he call on his life and continually flirted with the enemy. Of course, we should also apply the same question to us. How often do we fail the Lord? We must remember that it is not about us. Personally, I do not think Samson looked like a bodybuilder. I think God supernaturally provided his strength. So it is with us. We are nothing without Him. We ought to take courage in that God is gracious and uses we faulty humans in His work!

Hymn for Day 84

Our hymn today is "A Present God is All Our Strength" by Phillip Doddridge. It warns us to not be like Samson and take God's blessing and empowerment for granted.

*A present God is all our strength,
And all our joy and hope;
When he withdraws, our comforts die,
And every grace must droop.*

*But flattering trifles charm our hearts
To court their false embrace,
Till justly this neglected friend
Averts his angry face.*

*He leaves us and we miss him not;
But go presumptuous on,
Till baffled, wounded, and enslav'd,
We learn that God is gone.*

*And what, my soul, can then remain
One ray of light to give?
Sever'd from him, their better life,
How can his children live?*

*Hence, all ye painted forms of joy,
And leave my heart to mourn:
I would devote these eyes to tears,
Till cheer'd by his return.*

*Look back, my Lord, and own the place,
Where once thy temple stood;
For lo, its ruins bear the mark
Of rich atoning blood.*

Chapter 18 Notes

In this chapter the tribe of Dan seeks a new territory and falls to idolatry.

Reese's Chronological Bible puts this at 1420 B.C., making it occur in the middle of chapter 2.

vs. 1-12 – The tribe of Dan failed to conquer their allotted land (Joshua 19:40-46, Judges 1:34). Instead of fighting for their inheritance, they send scouts to locate a place that would be more easily conquered. These men encounter the Levite employed by Micah from the previous chapter, who tells them God is behind their quest. The scouts locate an area north of the Sea of Galilee bordering the Phoenician territory controlled by Zidon. 600 men prepare for battle to take the new land.

vs. 13-26 – On the way north to take their new territory, the army marches through Mt. Ephraim where Micah and his Levite lived. They convince the Levite that it would be better to serve their tribe than just one man and took all the idols and implements of his work. Micah catches up with them, but they are too strong to be forced to return the Levite and his things.

vs. 27-31 – Laish (“lion”) is conquered and a new city established named Dan for their tribe. This fulfilled Moses' prophetic words of Deuteronomy 33:22, “Dan is a lion's whelp: he shall leap from Bashan.” Bashan is the territory north and east of the Sea of Galilee. It seems this move may have divided the tribe between those who kept their original territory and those who sought the new lands. There they set up their own shrine with its idol. This corrupt worship continued until the Assyrians and Babylonians captured the land. Some think this idolatry is why Dan is not listed in the tribes in Revelation 7:4-8, but they are in Ezekiel 48 in the Millennial Kingdom.

Chapter 19 Notes

In this chapter we have the unspeakable crime perpetrated by the Benjaminites at Gibeah.

vs. 1-21 – The setting of the story before the crime unfolds. An unnamed Levite, who must have been of some eminence to have a servant and have a concubine. Webster's 1828 dictionary defines a concubine as "a wife of inferior condition; a lawful wife, but not united to the man by the usual ceremonies, and of inferior condition." A sad practice of ancient times when polygamy was common (and is never commanded or endorsed by the Bible I might add). The concubine is unfaithful and flees back to her family. The Levite and his servant go to reconcile with her and bring her back. They are welcomed warmly by the father and stay beyond their intention. They finally leave and not wanting to stay among Canaanites at Jebus (Jerusalem), they make it to Gibeah. At Gibeah the local Benjaminites fail to offer hospitality to the travelers. An old Ephraimite that lived there takes them in with all due courtesy.

vs. 22-30 - We have here a sad parallel to the wickedness of Sodom in Genesis 19:1-8. The wicked idolators attempted to force the aged host to deliver his guest so they could abuse him. The man offers his own daughter and the concubine instead. The Levite ends up forcing his concubine out to be victim to the debauchery of the wicked men. In an age where wickedness was common, the violation of this poor woman is rock bottom. She makes it back to the house of the old man at dawn but dies at the door before she can knock or cry for admittance. The text reads that she fell, but with what follows it seems she was dead. The Levite flees home to safety. Once there, he takes the body of his concubine, divides it into twelve pieces, and sends the pieces to the tribes of Israel. It was a call to arms to avenge the inhumanity that occurred. We shall see its conclusion in the next chapter.

Devotional Thoughts for Day 85

The final chapters of Judges are perhaps the darkest in the Bible. It is one thing to read of such crimes in the annals of pagan history, but to read them about a people that God had so wonderfully chosen and redeemed is another thing indeed. Sadly, the worst sinners are often those who rejected the clear light they had and embraced darkness full on. It is the “Descent of Man” that Paul describes in Romans 1:18-32. Never underestimate the power of sin.

Hymn for Day 85

As you can readily imagine, there are no hymns written based directly on these chapters. Here is a case where that is not a bad thing to say. So for today I have chosen a text by Isaac Watts titled “The Prosperity of Sinners Cursed”. Even though sin and darkness may abound, we must remind ourselves that God is in control and justice will be served.

*Lord, what a thoughtless Wretch was I,
To mourn, and murmur, and repine,
To see the Wicked plac'd on high,
In Pride and Robes of Honour shine!*

*But, O their End, their dreadful End!
Thy Sanctuary taught me so;
O slipp'ry Rocks I see them stand,
And fi'ry Billows roll below.*

*Now let 'em boast how tall they rise,
I'll never envy them again;
There they may stand with haughty Eyes,
Till they plunge deep in endless Pain.*

*Their fancy'd Joys, how fast they flee!
Just like a Dream when Man awakes;
Their Songs of softest Harmony
Are but a Preface to their Plagues.*

*Now I esteem their Mirth and Wine
Too dear to Purchase with my Blood;
Lord, 'tis enough that thou art mine,
My Life, my Portion, and my GOD.*

Chapter 20 Notes

In this chapter the campaign against the Benjaminites.

vs. 1-7 – The tribes of Israel assemble at Mizpeh (“watchtower”), a site about five miles from Gibeah where the atrocity was committed. The gathered leaders hear the charges made by the Levite against the Benjaminites.

vs. 8-11 – 1 out of 10 soldiers was sent to gather rations for the army so that it could focus on the attack ahead. In vs. 17 we see that there are 400,000 gathered, so 40,000 were thus assigned.

vs. 12-17 – The Benjaminites refuse to surrender the perpetrators to the assembled army to face justice. They instead gather their army to defend their tribe.

vs. 18-21 The assembled tribes send to the Tabernacle at Shiloh and are told that Judah is to lead the attack. The first day of battle does not go well for the assembled tribes, and they saw 22,000 fall in the day’s fighting.

vs. 22- 25 - The second day saw another 18,000 fall.

vs. 26-48 – The attack is renewed the third day. A new strategy is employed. The assembled tribes draw out the Benjaminites and then attack from the rear with 10,000 hidden troops. 25,000 Benjaminites total fall this day in the battle: 18,000 in the initial battle, 5,000 in the pursuit, and 2,000 at Gidom (“desolation”). 600 men of Benjamin survive by hiding in the rocky hill at Rimmon (“pomegranate”). The people and cities of Benjamin are destroyed.

Chapter 21 Notes

In this chapter we read of the curious means by which the surviving Benjaminites found new wives to rebuild their tribe.

vs. 1-15 – While mourning the near destruction of the tribe of Benjamin, the other tribes turn on the city of Jabesh-Gilead for not joining the campaign. They slaughter the men and women, saving only 400 virgins that they gave to the surviving Benjaminite men. That left 200 men without wives. The other tribes had sworn to not marry their daughters to them and would not budge – a strange place to insist on honor in this entire affair.

vs. 16-24 – The solution for finding brides for the remaining Benjaminites was to allow them kidnap women during a feast at Shiloh. Everyone goes home and the remnant of Benjamin sets out to rebuild their tribe.

vs. 25 – We close the book with the reminder of the political, moral, and spiritual situation of the Judges era.

Devotional Thoughts for Day 86

We bid farewell the Book of Judges but not to its era. We will read the Book of Ruth tomorrow, which belongs to this time period. Also the opening chapters of I Samuel are part of this time. The official ending would be the anointing of Saul in I Samuel chapter 10. The impact of these tumultuous times will linger long after that. Sin's deadly effects linger long.

Hymn for Day 86

Our hymn today is part of a setting of Psalm 68 that dates back to at least 1865 in "The Psalms of David" published in Philadelphia by the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America. No author is given. Why choose this text? Because it mentions "little Benjamin". The tribe of Benjamin remained much smaller than the other tribes after the civil war in the closing chapters of Judges. That is about the best I can do to find a hymn that is even tangentially based on our reading today.

*17 God's chariots twenty thousand are,
thousands on thousands strong;
Sinai is in the holy place,
the Lord is them among.*

*18 Thou hast, O Lord, most glorious,
ascended up on high;
and in triumph victorious led
captive captivity:
thou hast received gifts for men,
for such as did rebel;
yea, even for them, that God the Lord
in midst of them might dwell.*

*19 Blessed be the Lord, who is to us
of our salvation God;
who daily with his benefits
us plenteously doth load.*

*20 He of salvation is the God,
who is our God most strong;
and unto God the Lord from death
the issues do belong.*

*21 But surely God shall wound the head
of those that are his foes;
the hairy scalp of him that still
on in his trespass goes.*

*22 The Lord hath said, I will bring back
again from Bashan hill;
yea, from the dark depths of the sea
bring back again I will.*

*23 That in the blood of enemies
thy foot imbrued may be,
and of thy dogs dipped in the same
the tongues thou mayest see.*

*24 Thy goings they have seen, O God;
the steps of majesty
of my God, and my mighty King,
within the sanctuary.*

*25 Before went singers, after them
the players took their way;
in midst of damsels that with skill
did on the timbrels play.*

*26 Within the congregations great
bless God with one accord;
ye who from Israel's fountain are,
bless ye the mighty Lord.*

*27 Their ruler, little Benjamin,
and Judah's princes high,
the chiefs of Zabulon, are there,
and chiefs of Naphtali.*

*28 Thy God commands thy strength; make strong
what thou wrought'st for us, Lord.*

*29 For thy house at Jerusalem
kings shall thee gifts afford.*

*30 The beast that dwelleth in the reeds,
the bulls that fiercely look,
with herd of calves, the people all,
do thou, O Lord, rebuke,
till every one submit himself,
and silver pieces bring:
the people that delight in war
disperse, O God and King.*

*31 Those that be princes great shall then
come from Egypt lands;
and Ethiopia to God
shall soon stretch out her hands.*

*32 O all ye kingdoms of the earth,
sing praises to this King;
for he is Lord that ruleth all,
unto him praises sing.*

*33 To him that rides on heavens of heavens,
which he of old did found;
lo, he sends out his voice, a voice
in might that doth abound.*

*34 Strength unto God do ye ascribe,
because his majesty
is over Israel, his strength
is in the clouds most high.*

*35 Dread art thou from thy temple, Lord;
Israel's own God is he,
who gives his people strength and pow'r:
O let God blessed be.*