

Judges — Introduction:

The book of Joshua closed with his death and offered a great compliment and tribute both to him and to Israel.

Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the Lord which He had done for Israel. Josh 24:31

The book of Judges opens with the account of the final days of the elders who outlived Joshua and what happened next. There are a few perplexing questions in the chapter that are much easier to answer when we see it in the proper context. The faithful service to God that they had given under Joshua's leadership continued as long as these elder lived. Since Joshua and Caleb were the only ones over 20 who survived the forty years of wilderness wandering, these elders were substantially younger. Probably at least 20 years. So this period was longer than we might have otherwise thought. It would have taken in those who were alive at the time of the sending in of the spies (that 20 year generation).

So the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord which He had done for Israel. ... 10 When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel. Judg 2:7, 10

This generation that did not know the Lord would have been those who were born toward the end of the wilderness wandering and/or during the time of the conquest. It was the men who had seen and knew "the work which He had done for Israel." As this generation passed from the earth, a new generation (probably who were then 20-40 years old). This 3rd and 4th generation forsook the Lord God and followed other Gods.

Obviously these transitions did not occur overnight. As the older generation faded from the leadership roles and the new generation gradually took over a wave of unfaithfulness and rebellion swept slowly across the nation. This is the general theme of the first three chapters. The first chapter revealed the gradually descent from complete faithfulness to the deserved rebuke in 2:1-4.

Chapter 1

For the faithful elders who outlived Joshua, the most important goal after the death of Joshua was to fully comply with God's commands to completely destroy the inhabitants of the land. After his death they continue to do this. They sought God's counsel and Judah was selected. Judah and Simeon began working to fulfill God's will and the Scriptures are clear "Jehovah delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand." (Judges 1:1-7).

For these first few years, even without Joshua, all continued as it had under Moses (Jdg. 1:1-25). Then in quick succession it tells of Judah's success at *Jerusalem*, then 'the Canaanites that dwell in the hill-country, and in the South, and in the lowland,' (1:8-9) and Hebron. We are also given a glimpse of Caleb again as he takes his inheritance (1:10-15). Judah also took Zephath, Gaza with the border thereof, and Ashkelon with the border thereof, and Ekron with the border thereof. (1:16-19).

Yet this section also revealed the the first break in the continuity of victory. Though it says God was with him as they took the hill country, it also revealed they could not take the valley because of the chariots of iron. One might take this at face value were it not for Joshua's words.

And Joshua spoke to the house of Joseph — to Ephraim and Manasseh — saying, "You are a great people and have great power; you shall not have only one lot, 18 but the mountain country shall be yours. Although it is wooded, you shall cut it down, and its farthest extent shall be yours; for you shall drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots and are strong." Josh 17:17-18

Obviously there was more involved than the chariots of iron. Since the next passages revealed the lack of faith of the other tribes, this may be the first problem manifested even by Judah.

The remainder of the chapter revealed the unfaithfulness as it unfolded among the tribes. It began slowly, first with a lack of zeal and intensity in keeping the positive commands they had been given.

Benjamin did not take all his inheritance	(1:20).
Manasseh did not take all his inheritance	(1:23-25)
Ephraim did not take all his inheritance	(1:29)
Zebulun did not take all his inheritance	(1:30)
Asher did not take all his inheritance	(1:31-32)
Naphtali did not take all his inheritance	(1:33)
Dan did not take his inheritance	(1:34-36)

Chapter Two

This is the hub of the book of Judges. It explains everything that follows. First, it reveals God's attitude toward the half-hearted efforts we read about in the previous chapter. The compromises and outright rebellion are dealt with first when the Angel of Jehovah appeared to Israel and brought them terrible tidings.

Then the Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: "I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you. 2 And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? 3 Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.'" 4 So it was, when the Angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept. 5 Then they called the name of that place Bochim; and they sacrificed there to the Lord. Jdg. 2:1-5

As the Angel of the LORD revealed how the efforts described in the previous chapter had been understood by God, He summed it up with: "you have not obeyed My voice." As punishment, "I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you."

Sadly, though Israel wept at the bad news there is no indication of any repentance. They did build an altar and called it "the weepers" or "weeping" which is the meaning of "Bochim." But it appears to be the sorrow of the world, and not godly sorrow as there was no sign after this event of any change of heart.

As a matter of fact it is just the opposite, a gradual decline that did not stop until they had completely left the Lord and turned to idols. gathered to their fathers, Israel no longer knew Jehovah or the work he had done for Israel.

When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel. 11 Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals; 12 and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger. 13 They forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. Jdg 2:10-14

As this is the first time, it seems amazing how quickly this occurred. Yet after finishing Judges, we see this occurred over and over again throughout the book. One generation served God and their children did not. God never tolerated their rebellion. He quickly allowed enemies to enter the land and bring His people into difficult circumstances until they were brought to repentance. Though some only see punishment here, actually God is acting with love for them hoping to get them to return to him fully so he can bless them. There are five distinct things that occurred each time, making a cycle that continued all the way through the book.

First, as noted above, Israel became unfaithful to God.

Second, God's wrath is kindled and He delivered them into the hands of their enemies.

And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. 15 Wherever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for calamity, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed. Jdg 2:14-15

Third, when their distress and bitterness reached a certain level, the people at last were driven to repent and seek the Lord's deliverance.

Fourth. God would then raise up a judge who would save them from the enemies who had subdued them. He was moved to pity because of their groaning.

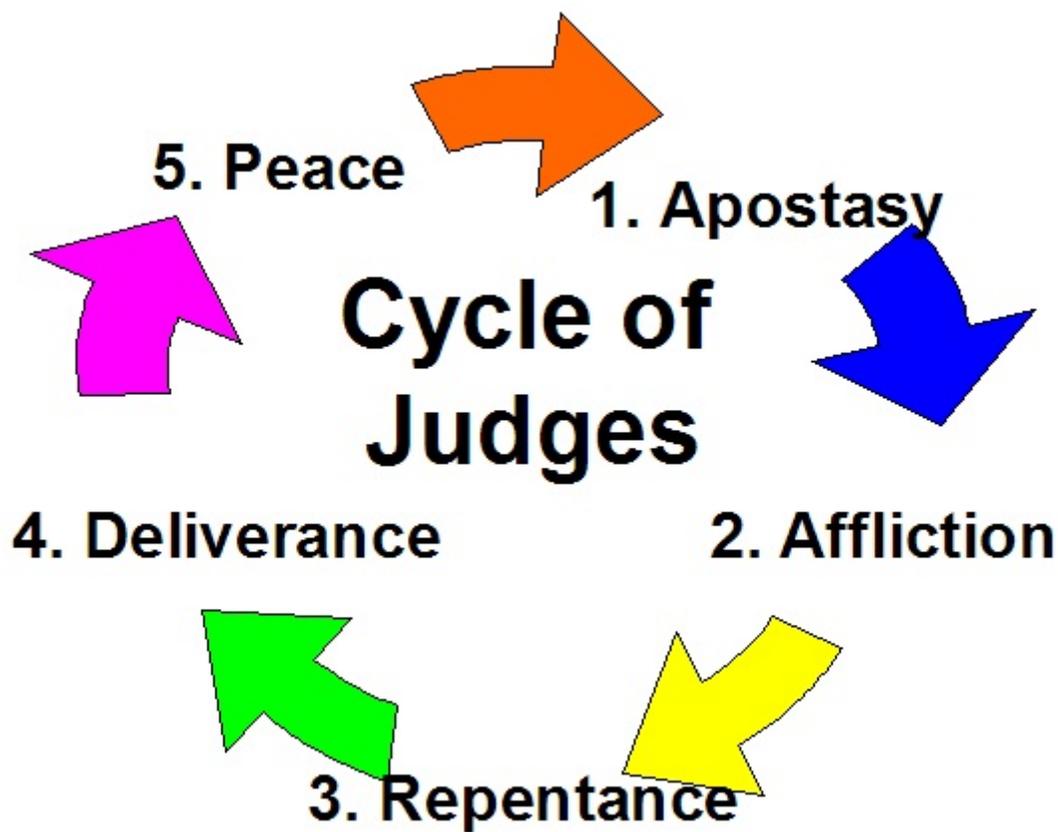
Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. 17 Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the Lord; they did not do so. 18 And when the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them. Jdg. 2:16-18

Fifth, there would be a period of peace and prosperity. But as soon as the blessings returned they stopped listening to the judges who were seeking to get them to be obedient to God. Instead they 'turned aside out of the way' and did not 'obey the commandments of Jehovah' God would repent each time they did and restore their fortunes, but as soon as the judge who delivered them was dead 'they turned back, and dealt more corruptly than their fathers,'

And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way. Judg 2:19

At a certain point in this process God was led to a decision. He would leave some of the inhabitants of the land to test Israel.

Then the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel; and He said, "Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice, 21 I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, 22 so that through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the Lord, to walk in them as their fathers kept them, or not." 23 Therefore the Lord left those nations, without driving them out immediately; nor did He deliver them into the hand of Joshua. Judg 2:20-23



<u>Judge</u>	<u>Years of Judge or Rest</u>	<u>Life Recorded</u>	<u>NT</u>
1. Othniel	40 <u>Jdg. 3:11</u>	<u>Jdg. 3:7-11</u>	
2. Ehud	80 <u>Jdg. 3:30</u>	<u>Jdg. 3:12-30</u>	
3. Shamgar	—	<u>Jdg. 3:31, 5:6</u>	
4. Deborah / Barak	40 <u>Jdg. 5:31</u>	<u>Jdg. 4-5</u>	<u>Heb 11:32</u>
5. Gideon	40 <u>Jdg. 8:28</u>	<u>Jdg. 6-8</u>	<u>Heb 11:32</u>
6. Tola	23 <u>Jdg. 10:2</u>	<u>Jdg. 10:1-2</u>	
7. Jair	22 <u>Jdg. 10:3</u>	<u>Jdg. 10:2-5</u>	
8. Jephthah	6 <u>Jdg. 12:7</u>	<u>Jdg. 10:6-12:7</u>	<u>Heb 11:32</u>
9. Ibzan,	7 <u>Jdg. 12:10</u>	<u>Jdg. 12:8-10</u>	
10. Elon,	10 <u>Jdg. 12:12</u>	<u>Jdg. 12:11-12</u>	
11. Abdon	8 <u>Jdg. 12:15</u>	<u>Jdg. 12:13-15</u>	
12. Samson	20 <u>Jdg. 15:20</u>	<u>Jdg. 13-16</u>	<u>Heb 11:32</u>
13. Eli	40 <u>1Sam. 4:18</u>	<u>1Sam 1-4</u>	
14. Samuel	—	<u>1Sam 5-24</u>	<u>Heb 11:32</u>

As seen in the chart above, of the fourteen judges listed in Judges and 1 Samuel, five are recorded in the book of Hebrews.

*And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of **Gideon** and **Barak** and **Samson** and **Jephthah**, also of David and **Samuel** and the prophets: 33 who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. 35 Women received their dead raised to life again. Heb 11:32-35*

These men are recorded as men whose faith accomplished great things. They are a part of the great cloud of witnesses who are now testifying to us that it is worth any sacrifice to serve God. Everyone of them is stated as “*having obtained a good testimony through faith...*”

*39 And **all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith**, did not receive the promise, 40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. 12:1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, Heb 11:39-40; 12:1*

What the Spirit was affirming is that all these men listed here (Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah) who are found in the book of Judges, did obtain and continue to obtain, “*good testimony through faith.*” The entire phrase “*having obtained a good testimony*” is a single word. “*Having obtained*” is an aorist passive participle, making the action timeless and unchanged. This is what they had in the book of Judges and they continue to have it. The term good testimony is the word “*martureo*” from which we have the term martyr.

*“martureo... to be a witness, to bear witness, testify, i.e. to affirm that one has seen or heard or experienced something, ... to prove or confirm by testimony... to bear witness (of) anything... b. emphatically; to utter honorable testimony, give a good report... **passive. ... to be borne (good) witness to, to be well reported of, to have (good) testimony borne to one, accredited, attested, of good report, approved...**” (Thayer, p 390-391; 3140)*

So these men have had good testimony borne to them. They are accredited, attested and approved. This was given to them in the book of Judges and reaffirmed of them by the same Holy Spirit in the book of Hebrews.

What I have always found fascinating about the men listed here is that what was actually revealed about them in Judges was not always to their credit, yet they still have their names listed. This gives the real power and substance of why the Spirit revealed we read the OT Scriptures today:

For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Rom 15:4

After reading what was recorded about them, we find ourselves with greater hope, because these men were not perfect in their faith. They struggled with it and did their best, but did not find perfection. What gives us hope is that since God has already done that with them, He will also do

it with us.

Barak

The story of Barak is linked with four other main characters in the fourth chapter. First there were two adversaries: **Jabin** the king of the Canaanites and **Sisera**, his powerful captain who had 'nine hundred chariots of iron;' and 'mightily oppressed the children of Israel for twenty years.'

So the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth Hagoyim. 3 And the children of Israel cried out to the Lord; for Jabin had nine hundred chariots of iron, and for twenty years he had harshly oppressed the children of Israel. Judg 4:2-3

Deborah is introduced not as a judge, but as a prophetess who was also judging Israel at that time(4:4). There are several examples of this (Huldah 2K 22:14; Noadiah Neh 6:14; Isaiah's wife Isa 8:3; Anna Lk 2:36) as well as Joel's prophesy (Joel 2:28-29). In this situation God found a woman who had the faith and the devotion necessary for inspiration. As a prophetess, her words to Barak and the Song of Deborah are therefore inspired.

By inspiration she chose **Barak** and gave him God's commands regarding the battle and deliverance of Israel. She revealed to Barak that God had given a command to him to gather 10,000 men from Naphtali and Zebulun and a promise "I will deliver them into your hand."

Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. 5 And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. 6 Then she sent and called for Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, "Has not the Lord God of Israel commanded, 'Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun; 7 and against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hand?'" Judg 4:4-7

Barak had a solid faith enough faith to do what was commanded, but not quite strong enough to act alone. He affirms he will go, but only if Deborah goes with him as a guarantee that these words are true. His obedience is therefore not absolute, but conditional. The fact that this was not the quality of faith God demanded is seen in the words "there will be no glory for you." and that God would therefore deliver the enemy into the hand of a woman, **Jael**.

And Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!" 9 So she said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Judg 4:8-9

Yet in spite of his weakened faith, with Deborah's presence he found the courage necessary to fulfill God's will and find a place in Hebrews 11:32

Gideon

With no warning, the Angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon to appoint him as the next judge. Since God only chooses prepared vessels(2Tim 2:20-21), it is evident that Gideon was prepared and would be his chosen vessel to remove the Midianites and judge Israel.

But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. 21 Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. 2Tim 2:20-22

From Gideon's conversation with the LORD, and the events that follow we can gain a good insight into his character and God's guidance to help him grow. Like Moses, Peter and many other servants of God, he is judged by the potential of what he could become. At the time of his call, he was as weak as most new converts to the Lord. After reading 6:12-17, the following observations can be made.

1. Gideon is **a man of might and valor**, and **the Lord is with him**. 6:11
2. His question reveals both his ignorance and his faith. He knows of God's power in earlier times, and hopes for it again, but doesn't know about the wickedness of the people.
3. Gideon is told that he will be the one to bring this power back. Just like Moses, the assurance the angel gave can only come through faith. 6:14
4. Again, like Moses, Gideon's **humility** and/or lack of faith is seen in his answer that his family

- is the poorest in Manasseh, and he is the least in his father's house. 6:15
5. The LORD promised to be with him and that he would be victorious. 6:16
 6. Gideon's **faith needed strengthening**. He pleaded with God to show him a sign. 6:17-20
 7. When all is prepared the angel of the LORD gave a powerful sign. 6:21
 8. Once again **his humility and awe** are revealed in his fear that he had seen the LORD, but the LORD assured him he would be safe 6:22-23

That same evening God asked him to tear down the altar of Baal, which he fulfilled to the letter though the Scriptures reveal his fear in the manner it was done.

But because he feared his father's household and the men of the city too much to do it by day, he did it by night. Judg 6:27

A short time later, Midianites and Amalekites appeared as they had done in the past. The Spirit of the Lord moved him to blow the trumpet and he calls Israel to prepare for battle. 6:33-35

Then all the Midianites and Amalekites, the people of the East, gathered together; and they crossed over and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. 34 But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon; then he blew the trumpet, Judg 6:33-34

After the arrival of the neighboring tribes of Israel, he is still wavering and seeks more signs(6:36-40). First the fleece will be wet and the ground dry and then later that the ground will be wet but the fleece dry. (6:36-40).

God Tests Gideon's Faith

It was a powerful test of faith to expect Gideon with 32,000 to fight against 135,000 enemies. They were outnumbered 4-1. But God stretched that faith further by proclaiming that these odds were too high and the people might think they had won without God's help. So God commanded that all who are afraid should leave and 22,000 returned and only 10,000 remained(Odds are now 13.5-1). (7:1-3)

Yet God is still not satisfied, so God devised a final means concerning they way they drink water. Those who put their lips in the water and those who used their hands. This decreased the number to 300(Now it is 450 - 1).

With these 300, God promised to deliver the 135,000. Gideon's faith was growing and he did not ask for a sign, but God felt the need to encourage him by allowing him to hear a dream and its interpretation.

It happened on the same night that the Lord said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have delivered it into your hand. But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant. 11 And you shall hear what they say, and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp Judg 7:9-11

And when Gideon had come, there was a man telling a dream to his companion. He said, "I have had a dream: To my surprise, a loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian; it came to a tent and struck it so that it fell and overturned, and the tent collapsed." 14 Then his companion answered and said, "This is nothing else but the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel! Into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp." 15 And so it was, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, that he worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel, and said, "Arise, for the Lord has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand." Judg 7:13-15

Gideon instructs the 300 to take a torch inside a pitcher and a trumpet. He divides them into three companies and instructs them to surround the camp, then blow the trumpet with one hand, break the pitcher and hold up the torch. Then they simply watched while 120,000 men fought against each other and were destroyed(judg 7:16-22)

Now Zebah and Zalmunna were at Karkor, and their armies with them, about fifteen thousand, all who were left of all the army of the people of the East; for one hundred and twenty thousand men who drew the sword had fallen. Judg 8:10-11

After these events, he judged Israel, forty years. We see with Gideon that though the ultimate end is that he obtained good testimony, God held his hand and encouraged him every step of the way.

Jephthah

Though born an illegitimate child, he is chosen to be a judge of Israel. Unlike Barak and Gideon, the

role of God in these events is not revealed until just before the battle, but it is inferred.

*11 Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them; and Jephthah **spoke all his words before the Lord in Mizpah.** ... 29 Then **the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah,** and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, and passed through Mizpah of Gilead; and from Mizpah of Gilead he advanced toward the people of Ammon. ... 32 So Jephthah advanced toward the people of Ammon to fight against them, and **the Lord delivered them into his hands.** Judg 11:11, 29, 32*

The real role the Lord took is not revealed. Jephthah is the main character in all the events and only the passages above speak of the Lord's involvement.

He began by trying to reason and negotiate with the king of Ammon who was ignorant of the truth. He believes Israel has taken his land, but they never did. Jephthah reminded him of the actual facts by quoting much of what we can read in Numbers 20:1, 14-21; 22:21-26 The Lord had forbidden taking any of the land of Ammon.

'This day you are to cross over at Ar, the boundary of Moab. 19 And when you come near the people of Ammon, do not harass them or meddle with them, for I will not give you any of the land of the people of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the descendants of Lot as a possession.' Deut 2:18-19

Ammon and Israel were related through Lot. Even at that time there was hope that there would be no battle. He concluded that Israel has done nothing wrong. Sadly these words do no good.

Therefore I have not sinned against you, but you wronged me by fighting against me. May the Lord, the Judge, render judgment this day between the children of Israel and the people of Ammon.'" 28 However, the king of the people of Ammon did not heed the words which Jephthah sent him. 11:27-28

Jephthah's Vow

But with everything prepared and a clear knowledge that God was behind the effort, Jephthah chose to do something that has created one of the most interesting questions and dilemmas in the Scriptures and completely changed the focus of the account. Instead of discussing the great victory God gave through Jephthah, most people only want to talk about Jephthah's vow.

And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, and said, "If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, 31 then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering." 32 So Jephthah advanced toward the people of Ammon to fight against them, and the Lord delivered them into his hands. 11:30-32

A vow was a solemn promise to God that if a certain outcome occurred a special sacrifice would be made. This is not the first vow in Scripture.

When Jacob left home he vowed that if God would bring him back safely he would give 10% of all his increase(Gen 28:20; 31:13).

Moses wrote a great deal in the Law about the importance of vow in the eyes of God(Lev 27; Num 30; Deut 23:21-23).

The nation of Israel had made a vow just before the battle with the Canaanites not far from where Jephthah was about to fight.

So Israel made a vow to the Lord, and said, "If You will indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities." 3 And the Lord listened to the voice of Israel and delivered up the Canaanites, and they utterly destroyed them and their cities. So the name of that place was called Hormah. Num 21:2-3

Actually, this vow was part of the history Jephthah had recounted to the king of Ammon when he proved Israel had not taken any land from Ammon. Jephthah may have gotten the idea for his vow from there. If we compare the wording it is nearly identical in the first part of the vow.

Israel	vowed a vow unto the Lord, and said, into my hand, then...	If You wilt indeed deliver this people
Jephthah	vowed a vow unto the Lord and said, into my hand, then...	If You wilt indeed deliver the children of Ammon

But though the first part of the vow is identical, the latter part of the vow was not. In Jephthah's vow, the special sacrifice was first thing that came forth from the doors of his house would be offered

as a burnt offering.

It is difficult to know what he was thinking this might be when he made the vow. As one wisely noted, it would be an uncommon thing to expect a barnyard animal to come out of the doors of your house. A concordance makes it very clear that the term 'house' referred to servants and family, and not to animals. The vow was made contingent on a victory over the Ammonites and God gave him that victory.

As God had worked for Moses, Joshua and all the previous judges so now God worked for Jephthah. '*Jehovah delivered them into his hand; there was a very great slaughter; and the children of Ammon were subdued.*' (11:33). God gave Jephthah everything he had hoped for. Hence everything necessary for Jephthah to be obligated to fulfill his vow had been accomplished. Jephthah now had to do what he had vowed.

One has to wonder what was in his heart as he neared home. Excitement over the victory had to be mixed with concern over what the first thing might be that he would see. If he had any hope that God would intervene and make certain the first thing he saw would not be too painful, his hopes were dashed as he neared his house.

And Jephthah came to Mizpah unto his house; and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter.
11:34

At this point everything in the account shifts from the victory to the vow. As a matter of fact, nearly all comments made about Jephthah center more on the vow than on his victory. There is a huge moral dilemma here that will not be fully resolved until God reveals more details to us. The account is simple enough:

And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he tore his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! You are among those who trouble me! For I have given my word to the Lord, and I cannot go back on it." 36 So she said to him, "My father, if you have given your word to the Lord, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, because the Lord has avenged you of your enemies, the people of Ammon." 37 Then she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me: let me alone for two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains and bewail my virginity, my friends and I." 38 So he said, "Go." And he sent her away for two months; and she went with her friends, and bewailed her virginity on the mountains. 39 And it was so at the end of two months that she returned to her father, and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. She knew no man. 11:35-39

Here are the simple facts:

1. Jephthah vowed to offer the first thing that came from his house as a burnt offering.
2. His daughter was the first thing that came from his house and he was deeply troubled by it.
3. He said I have opened my mouth to Jehovah and I cannot go back.
4. She said do unto me according to that which proceeded from your mouth.
5. Her father did with her according to his vow which he had vowed.

From these facts, we ought to be able to draw a simple conclusion that everyone would agree with, but such is not the case. Even with no one disputing these facts, there are still two positions on what really happened.

Some believe that Jephthah killed his daughter exactly as prescribed for a burnt offering. Like Abraham in Gen 22, he tied her, used a knife to kill her and then burned her on the altar. Though this is the fair interpretation of the words of the passage above, it creates a grave moral dilemma so grave that many simply cannot accept it. Though this is the time of the Judges and the moral climate of the nation was at its one of its lowest, it is difficult to imagine that the two great moral dilemma's created by this vow would be solved by the death of Jephthah's daughter.

Murder is one of the highest moral wrongs revealed in Scripture. God makes it very clear that because man is made in the image of God, it is a great evil for one man to take the life of another.

Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. 6 "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man. Gen 9:5-6

This principle was enshrined in the law of Moses as one of the ten commandments, and it always brought the death penalty. The second great moral principle is that of giving our word to God in the solemn and sacred way that a vow operates.

Then Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes concerning the children of Israel, saying, "This is the thing which the Lord has commanded: 2 If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth. Num 30:1-2

"When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. 22 But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you. 23 That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth. Deut 23:21-23

We now have two great moral imperatives placed side by side. The first, all vows that are made to God must be paid and the second, no one can shed the blood of another human being. When these two come into direct conflict with each other as they do here which is the greater evil? After one makes a vow that leads to the need to kill, is it more right to kill or to modify the vow?

If we could boil down all the arguments pro and con, I think it all really comes down to this. Those who believe that God could not be pleased with any vow that requires a sinful act to accomplish it will interpret it differently than those who believe that no matter what the consequences all vows must be paid. Put another way, if a rash vow is uttered that is impossible to fulfill without grave harm following, which is the better course? To fulfill the vow and sin, or to not fulfill the vow and sin? Listen to God:

'Or if a person swears, speaking thoughtlessly with his lips to do evil or to do good, whatever it is that a man may pronounce by an oath, and he is unaware of it — when he realizes it, then he shall be guilty in any of these matters. 5 'And it shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing; 6 and he shall bring his trespass offering to the Lord for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats as a sin offering. 10 So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin. ... So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin which he has committed, and it shall be forgiven him. Lev 5:4-5; 10

This has led some to believe that Jephthah did not actually kill his daughter, but instead that she was so wholly dedicated to the Lord that she could not marry or have any of the things that a person would normally have. The argument would go like this. If an unclean beast were offered as a vow, it was not sacrificed so neither could the daughter be.

Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When a man consecrates by a vow certain persons to the Lord, according to your valuation, ... 11 If it is an unclean animal which they do not offer as a sacrifice to the Lord, then he shall present the animal before the priest; 12 and the priest shall set a value for it, whether it is good or bad; as you, the priest, value it, so it shall be. 13 But if he wants at all to redeem it, then he must add one-fifth to your valuation. 14 'And when a man dedicates his house to be holy to the Lord, then the priest shall set a value for it, whether it is good or bad; as the priest values it, so it shall stand. 15 If he who dedicated it wants to redeem his house, then he must add one-fifth of the money of your valuation to it, and it shall be his. Lev 27:1-3; 11-15

Perhaps the writer of Ecclesiastes had Jephthah in mind when he gave his strong warning about vows:

Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few. . . 4 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou vowest. 5 Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. Eccl 5:2-5

There is no definitive answer to this debate. Because of the times in which Jephthah lived, he could very easily have decided to offer her as a burnt offering and God simply overlooked and forgave it as he did Rahab's harlotry. It may equally be that he did not actually offer her as a sacrifice, but simply removed her from the land of the living by some type of sequestering. At the judgment day all will be revealed.

Samson

Introduction:

Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. 35 But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. Acts 10:34-35

First, God is no respecter of persons! There is no favoritism or partiality with God. From the beginning to the end, God assesses the character of each man and woman with the same yardstick. Only those who fear and respect Him and works righteousness are acceptable.

Put another way, God's attitude toward each individual is based on looking into each heart making an assessment about their character based on their faith (Heb 11; especially 11:7). While we can only look at the outward appearance, God looks upon the heart:

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." 1 Sam 16:7

As Paul noted we often see the goodness and severity of God in the Scriptures, but it was never arbitrary. Branches were broken off or grafted back in based on the character of each person. So when we see something unusual or difficult in the Scriptures, it is important that we remember that His severity is always to those who fell and His goodness only to those who continued in His goodness by "standing by their faith."

You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." 20 Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. 22 Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? Rom 11:19-23

Hence only God and His Christ could know the Publican went home justified because of his contrition and repentance while the Pharisee stood condemned. (2) Only God could see into the heart of young David and know that his heart was far superior to those of his older brothers, and also know that with the coming of Nathan, David would truly repent and confess his sins. Hence when reading the lives of Bible characters we have to factor in these intangibles that God could see and we cannot.

Second, at birth, God gives each one a unique set of talents, gifts and abilities that differ from others. Then by our own decisions we create our own weaknesses and worldly lusts. These things will all be taken into consideration by God at the day of judgment, but can not be understood or factored in by any human judge.

*Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. 3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4 For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. 5 Therefore **judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.** 1 Cor 4:1-5*

*And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, **to each according to his own ability;** and immediately he went on a journey. Matt 25:15-16*

*For if there is first a willing mind, **it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.** 2 Cor 8:12*

*For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, **not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.** 4 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. 6 **Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; 7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; 8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.** Rom 12:3-8*

Finally, God records the lives of the characters in Scripture as they occurred. The fact that He lists both the good and evil as it occurred does not mean endorsement. While those in Hebrews eleven were made righteous by faith, they were not sinless!

*What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? **"Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."** 4 Now*

to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. 5 But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, Rom 4:1-5

Each was held to the same standard. Whether recorded or not, confession and repentance are required for each sin. It is not the self-righteous, but the penitent who receive grace and mercy from God. Faith must be maintained until the end for if they shrink back His soul will have not pleasure, and He will cast off forever.

*"For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. 38 Now **the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.**" 39 But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul. Heb 10:37-39*

"As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever. 1Chron 28:9-10

These principles must be understood before we can successfully evaluate and draw the right conclusions/inferences. This is especially true in the study of the life of Samson. The gift God gave to Samson had great potential for good. His name in Heb 11 tells us that his character was richer and fuller than the deeds we read about in Judges revealed. Like David, Saul of Tarsus, Matthew the tax collector and the penitent publican there was more to the man than the deeds themselves indicated. But in spite of God's grace and mercy,

Obviously, God is not mocked and Samson still reaped exactly as he sowed(Gal 6:7-8). One has to wonder what kind of different story might have been written if his moral character matched his physical strength. But then we all might wonder the same thing about our own lives.

Important Events Before Samson's Birth

After forty years of oppression under the Philistines, Israel finally reached a condition of heart where God was willing to act and bring a deliverer(13:1). Like Jeremiah(Jer 1:4-5), John the Baptist(Lk 1:6-17) and Saul of Tarsus(Gal 1:15), Samson was chosen before he was born. God looked through all Israel and chose a barren couple from the tribe of Dan and began making preparations for the yoke of the Philistines to be broken.

The account begins with a visit from the angel of Jehovah who reveals himself to the wife of Manoah of the tribe of Dan. For whatever reason she is never named in the entire account, but is only referred to as his wife(13:2), the woman(13:3), she(13:3)and his mother (14:3). The angel of Jehovah begins with a promise and then gives the conditions that must be fulfilled.

Now there was a certain man from Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had no children. 3 And the Angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. 4 Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean. 5 For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." Judg 13:2-5

The first condition is placed upon the woman. She is not to drink wine, strong drink or anything unclean for the entire time of her pregnancy. The reason for this is given in verse five with the term "for behold" or "for this reason, behold." She is not to do any of these things because the child is to be a Nazirite from the womb, so he cannot have any thing of the grape for the entire pregnancy. This is a very special application of the Nazirite vow specified in Numbers 6. The term Nazirite comes from the Hebrew word *Nazir* which is defined:

nazir 5139, "one who is separated; Nazirite." There are 16 occurrences of the word in the Old Testament. ... Most frequently in Old Testament usage, *nazir* is an appellation for one who vowed to refrain from certain things for a period of time: "And this is the law of the Nazirite, when the days of his separation are fulfilled: he shall be brought unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation" Num. 6:13. According to Num. 6, a lay person of either sex could take a special vow of consecration to God's service for a certain period of time. . . . Num. 6:1- 23 laid down regulatory laws pertaining to Naziritism. There were two kinds of "Nazirites": the temporary and the perpetual. The first class was much more common than the latter kind. From the Bible we have knowledge only of Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist as persons who were lifelong "Nazirites." According to the Mishna, the normal time for keeping a Nazirite vow was thirty days; but sometimes a double vow was taken, lasting sixty days. In fact, a vow was sometimes undertaken for a hundred days. (Vines Expository Dictionary)

Hence God expected this child to begin this separation even from his mother's womb so the woman must obey this command. From the moment of her conception until birth she must keep from these things so that the child would also be kept from them. The manner in which the angel of Jehovah spoke to her required her faith to begin at that moment though the child would not be born for some time.

She finds her husband and relates the conversation nearly exactly as found above(13:6-7). She is unsure of the exact nature of the visitor. She first calls him a man of God(prophet), but then describes his countenance as very terrible (lit. - to create fear and trembling, to create awe and

reverence - awesome). She then recounts the conversation only adding that he would be a Nazirite until the day of his death.

Manoah then entreats Jehovah to send the angel again so that they might have better understanding of what they should do when the child is born(13:8-9). The text reveals that God heard and answered the prayer by again sending the angel of Jehovah, although the angel again appeared to the woman while she is alone. As soon as she saw him she ran to her husband Manoah who then returned with her to speak to the angel of Jehovah(13:10-11).

Manoah said, "Now let Your words come to pass! What will be the boy's rule of life, and his work?" 13 So the Angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful. 14 She may not eat anything that comes from the vine, nor may she drink wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean. All that I commanded her let her observe." 13:12-14

Although Manoah had hoped the angel might give him further insight, Manoah gained no more information than the angel of Jehovah gave to the woman. He simply repeated verbatim what He had told her and then warned that it was up to her to do all that he had said. One gets the impression that though Manoah had hoped to place himself somehow into this relationship between God, the angel of Jehovah and the child, the angel continued to use the pronouns 'she' and 'her.' Manoah was not invited into it.

Then Manoah said to the Angel of the Lord, "Please let us detain You, and we will prepare a young goat for You." 16 And the Angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "Though you detain Me, I will not eat your food. But if you offer a burnt offering, you must offer it to the Lord." (For Manoah did not know He was the Angel of the Lord.) 17 Then Manoah said to the Angel of the Lord, "What is Your name, that when Your words come to pass we may honor You?" 18 And the Angel of the Lord said to him, "Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?" Judg 13:15-18

Manoah then sought to show hospitality to strangers and became another who "sought to entertain angels unawares"(Heb 13:2). Thinking he would honor the man by offering him a meal, the angel asked only that if he was interested in giving up a kid it could not be offered to Him but given as a burnt offering to the LORD. This was not what Manoah had in mind. His true intent was to honor this person. He then asked His name so after the child was born and the words came to pass they might speak of Him in honor. His answer was intriguing since it gave no answer. He simply revealed His name was wonderful(KJV - secret; lit. - wonderful, incomprehensible, extraordinary). The root of the term is used in the next verse to describe the wondrous thing he did. It was not until then that Manoah was made fully aware of the nature of the person to whom he had been speaking.

So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it upon the rock to the Lord. And He did a wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on — 20 it happened as the flame went up toward heaven from the altar — the Angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar! When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their faces to the ground. 21 When the Angel of the Lord appeared no more to Manoah and his wife, then Manoah knew that He was the Angel of the Lord. 13:19-21

As the flame and smoke arose into heaven, the angel of Jehovah ascended in the midst of it and disappeared from their view. Immediately they knew that this was not a man of God or any human prophet. They knew they had been in the presence of the angel of Jehovah.

And Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God!" 23 But his wife said to him, "If the Lord had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these things, nor would He have told us such things as these at this time." 13:22-23

The different reactions between Manoah and his wife seems to indicate that she had a more discerning spiritual nature than her husband. She has fully grasped the import of this revelation and the role they were to play in the next deliverer of God's people. She is fully prepared to do all that the angel of Jehovah has asked, and as she does these things, all that the angel revealed came to pass.

So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him. 25 And the Spirit of the Lord began to move upon him at Mahaneh Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol. 13:24-25

There is so much left unsaid here that we are left with nothing tangible to conclude. The Lord blessed him and the Holy Spirit began to move him, but in what way is left unsaid. Many speculate that there were great feats of strength in his youth, or that he was moved to become a leader over others seeking to throw of the yoke of the Philistines, but the reality is that God only revealed he was blessed and that the Spirit was moving him.

Judges 14 - Samson's Early Years

Now Samson went down to Timnah, and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines. 2 So he went up and told his father and mother, saying, "I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife." 3 Then his

father and mother said to him, "Is there no woman among the daughters of your brethren, or among all my people, that you must go and get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" And Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she pleases me well." Judg 14:1-3

As Samson began his work, even his parents showed concern. When he expressed a desire to marry one of the daughter's of the Philistines, they remind him that she was the daughter of an "uncircumcised Philistine." They could not have forgotten the promise of the angel that "he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." Judg 13:5

Yet there was no prohibition against such a marriage as there had been the seven nations of Canaan(Deut 7:1-4). They were not of Canaan, but of his brother Mazraim(Gen 10:6-18). Still his parents realized the idolatry and ungodliness of the Philistines along with their tyranny and brutality and were deeply opposed to this marriage.

But his father and mother did not know that it was of the Lord — that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines. For at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel. 14:4

Clearly this is a very difficult passage requiring all our wisdom to properly navigate it to the truth. We know God tempts no one.

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Jas. 1:13-15

So any interpretation that begins with God using Samson's temptations to bring about this issue is clearly going in the wrong direction. So what does it mean "that it was of the Lord?" Since we know it wasn't something God in which was directly involved, only a few options can be considered.

First, Samson must have known he was a Nazarite and why. His hair was long and he had never eaten anything from the grapevine. Since his parents had not been forbidden to reveal these things to Samson, how could he not know he would become God's next judge. That is what the angel had specifically stated:

*And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and **he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.**" Judg 13:5*

So why would a man destined to deliver Israel from their enemies choose to marry one? Since Samson's later character continues to reveal rebellion and weakness, the only logical conclusion is that Samson was not taking it seriously.

He was not the devout, serious, sincere servant God wanted, but like Jonah, God could and would still make things happen. Although Samson may not have considered it in this light, God intended to use it to force Samson into his work. This is all that can truly and fairly be inferred from "it was of the Lord — that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines."

The Philistines were ruling over Israel at this time and what is affirmed is that God would use it to create a clash between Israel and the Philistines. As the account unfolds, we see the unfaithful way in which the Philistines acted It soon led to a complete break between Samson the Philistines.

Samson and the Lion

The passage does not state whether this is the first time, but clearly we get an insight into how Samson was to accomplish his work. It gave him a strength far beyond other men. The roaring of the lion signified an imminent attack, so Samson simply defended himself with his bare hands.

So Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came to the vineyards of Timnah. Now to his surprise, a young lion came roaring against him. 6 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. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. 14:5-6

This event revealed the manner in which the Spirit of the LORD would come upon Samson. Although his parents were on the journey with him they were not present at this time and he did not reveal it to them. At that time it appears that all was arranged for the wedding.

A short while later as Samson was returning for the actual wedding(14:8-9), he returned and saw the lion he had slain had dried up and a hive of bees had created some honey within it. The weaknesses in his own character again as it was unclean for Israel to eat anything that had come into contact with a dead body(Deut 14:3-8). Perhaps this was why he did not tell his parents where the honey had come from.

When he arrived the festivities began and thirty men were chosen to be his companions(with one as his companion and friend 14:20). He then proposed a riddle based on his encounter with the lion. He was so convinced they would not guess it that he was willing to put up 30 changes of clothing against them.

Once again, we see a reckless character and an attitude toward the riddle that verges on gambling.

They accepted, but could not guess the riddle so they threatened to kill his young bride. Which again revealed the brutality and lawlessness of these people. She then began to beg and plead and weep with Samson to tell her the secret of the riddle. After he revealed it to her, she told the men and they gave him the answer within the appointed time.

These things might have happened to anyone in Samson's position. The Philistines had done an evil and wicked thing. The Holy Spirit then moved Samson and so began the conflict between himself and the Philistines. He went to Askelon (about 20 miles away) and killed 30 men, took their garments and used them to pay for the riddle. His anger was kindled against his wife and he left her for a time until he calmed down.

The father then gave his wife to the companion he had used as his friend (we would say best man). Now all is prepared and in the next chapter the battle will begin. Whether Samson wanted to be God's deliverer or not no longer matters, He had become a thorn in the side of the Philistines and would soon do what God had wanted him to do.

As the Philistines ruled over Israel, it appears that the type of injustice and unfairness that had been inflicted on Samson was happening all over the land, and God had determined to use this particular act of treachery to bring the proper vengeance upon them.

We see the danger of the covetousness that turned the riddle into an opportunity to gamble. Obviously neither side could afford to lose what was wagered and the entire thing turned into a big moral mess. The thirty 'companions' sought to betray Samson using the threat of a horrible death against his wife. Instead of trusting Samson, the wife chose to betray him by crying and pleading with him to give up the secret and which she then told the companions.

Samson is so angry over the way he had been treated by the companions and by his wife, that instead of taking his wife with him, he left and went back to his father's house. The chapter ends with a far worse act of treachery and betrayal. Samson's wife was given to his 'best man' to be his wife. Samson is unaware of this until he returns.

Samson began to Avenge the Tyranny of the Philistines

If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province, do not marvel at the matter; for high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them. Eccl 5:8

So many terrible things like this have been done to men. Samson in all honor and integrity and youthful anticipation found a woman he loved and sought to make her his wife. By treachery and oppression she was taken from him and given to another. How many such terrible stories fill the pages of history? Yet this time, God revealed his own displeasure through his judge Samson. This time the act of treachery was done to a man who could do something about it.

The fact that it was the time of the wheat harvest not only lets us know that it is late springtime (April/May), but sets the stage for what Samson decided to do after the fullness of their treachery was revealed to him.

After a while, in the time of wheat harvest, it happened that Samson visited his wife with a young goat. And he said, "Let me go in to my wife, into her room." But her father would not permit him to go in. 2 Her father said, "I really thought that you thoroughly hated her; therefore I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister better than she? Please, take her instead." 15:1-2

Samson's temper had cooled, and he brought a young goat as a gift or act of reconciliation. He then sought to go into his wife. One can only imagine the attitude of the father at this point. He has done a terrible thing and must now reveal it to Samson. He sought to soften the blow by offering him her younger sister but Samson was deeply offended. Under these circumstances, normally there would be nothing else to be done, but these are not normal circumstances. God intended to use Samson begin to throw off the yoke of tyranny and oppression that these Philistines had brought upon Israel for the past forty years (Judges 13:1). Things escalated rapidly.

And Samson said to them, "This time I shall be blameless regarding the Philistines if I harm them!" 4 Then Samson went and caught three hundred foxes; and he took torches, turned the foxes tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. 5 When he had set the torches on fire, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up both the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards and olive groves. 15:3-5

Whether at the Spirit's inspiration, or just his own idea, he catches 300 foxes (or jackals) and tied a firebrand between their tails. Their fear of the fire which was constantly following them would cause them to run quickly through the standing grain so that multitudes of fires would be breaking out all at once all over the area. Before it was finished, the harvest of wheat as well as the oliveyards (like our vineyards - olive orchards) were all burned and thus destroyed. This would bring nearly a complete loss to the community. This was their food and livelihood.

Then the Philistines said, "Who has done this?" And they answered, "Samson, the son-in-law of the

Timnite, because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion." So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire. 7 Samson said to them, "Since you would do a thing like this, I will surely take revenge on you, and after that I will cease." 8 So he attacked them hip and thigh with a great slaughter; then he went down and dwelt in the cleft of the rock of Etam. 15:6-8

It was clear that this was a manmade disaster so they sought to know the how and the why so they could punish those involved. When the treachery of the father was revealed to them, they responded with equal treachery. They burn down the house of the father on both the father and his daughter, killing them. The brutality and treachery of these people appears to have no bounds. Now Samson felt completely justified to escalate the conflict to an even higher level. He avenged those who killed his wife. The expression 'smote them hip and thigh' seems to be an idiom of the day.

Our own idioms, "beat the fire out of" or "beat them half to death" seem pretty tame compared to this one. The fulness of its meaning is brought out in the phrase 'with a great slaughter.' It doesn't sound like there was much left of the community after Samson finished with them. As news of this spread, the next level of escalation begins.

Now the Philistines went up, encamped in Judah, and deployed themselves against Lehi. 10 And the men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" So they answered, "We have come up to arrest Samson, to do to him as he has done to us." 11 Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines rule over us? What is this you have done to us?" And he said to them, "As they did to me, so I have done to them." 15:9-11

God doesn't reveal exactly how large the force these Philistines gathered together to deal with Samson, but it was a force large enough that the 3000 men in Judah would rather deal with Samson than with that force. The men in Judah do not see in Samson a deliverer, but only a trouble maker. When the Philistines reveal their intent, these 3000 men from Judah decide to comply with their request. Either a lack of faith, or a lack of knowledge prevented them from seeing the opportunity God had given them. They find Samson and grumble to him about his conduct toward the Philistines. He simply answers that he has only done to them what they had done to him.

After getting assurance that the Israelites themselves would not harm him, Samson allows them to bind him with new ropes. This seems to be placed in the text to show conclusively that it was not the weakness of the rope, but the strength of Samson that led to what happened when he was turned over to the Philistines.

When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting against him. Then the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him; and the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds broke loose from his hands. 15 He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and killed a thousand men with it. 15:14-15

The Philistines can't hold in their excitement at capturing this enemy and began shouting. What their plans were for him will never be known, though what they did the next time is likely what they had in mind. The 3,000 men of Judah are left in obscurity and the Spirit of God again comes mightily upon him. The ropes were changed and easily broken, and his strength was multiplied in a miraculous way. He found the jawbone of a donkey lying nearby and used it as a club. By the time the encounter was over, 1000 of the Philistines lay dead and Samson was completely victorious. But another pressing need arose.

Then he became very thirsty; so he cried out to the Lord and said, "You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant; and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?" 19 So God split the hollow place that is in Lehi, and water came out, and he drank; and his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore he called its name En Hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day. 20 And he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines. 15:18-19

Samson's relationship with the Lord here is seems a little ambiguous and difficult to decipher. From Hebrews 11 we are told that he was a man of faith so it seems best to interpret these words in that light. He has seen God work through him and now as a result of this hard labor, he is faint with thirst and in dire need. So he boldly frames his request in light of the dire consequences. The fact that God helped him shows his heart.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. 1Jn. 5:14-15

Samson Judged Israel for Twenty years

The final statement in this chapter is full of meanings that we cannot fully understand. We have seen many judges now who judges Israel, yet each time we are left somewhat in the dark about exactly what that encompassed.

We saw the role of all the Judges earlier in the book. There is no reason the think things are

different here.

Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. 17 Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the Lord; they did not do so. 18 And when the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; Judg 2:16-18

With this in mind how do we interpret that fact that Samson 'judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years(15:20)? Obviously the events recorded in the next chapter would have only take a few weeks out of those twenty years. So what about the rest of the time?

Possibly Samson did many similar acts of deliverance to those just described. Perhaps the rest of Israel learned the incidents surrounding his birth and understood God had raised him up as their judge. Perhaps for a time he held back the idolatry of the people.

And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way. Judg 2:19

There is so much we don't know of those 20 years. God only gave two glimpses into his life. They do not reflect highly on his character, revealing his dealings with two women: A harlot and Delilah.

The Harlot at Gaza

Chapter 16 opens with Samson's visit to a harlot in Gaza. As noted in the introduction God simply records the events of the lives of his people. Sometimes good and sometimes bad but always brutally honest. The law condemned this visit but God simply recorded it without comment. The weaknesses of men are as varied as the lusts of the flesh that create them. Each struggles with his own sins and repents of them to gain forgiveness. God grace covered this event and therefore we must infer that Samson had the right attitude after this moment of weakness.

Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her. 2 When the Gazites were told, "Samson has come here!" they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. They were quiet all night, saying, "In the morning, when it is daylight, we will kill him." 16:1-3

The Philistines gathered to capture him but at midnight, he picked up the gates enclosing and protecting the city of Gaza and carried it up to the top of a nearby hill. This escape along with the gates up on the top of the hill must have been a story told both by the Philistines in anger and Israel in hope.

Delilah

While the story of the harlot was passed over in silence, Delilah became the "infamous" Philistine woman who brought about his fall. The valley of Sorek is the valley that connected Samson's home with Timnah (the town of the woman he sought to make his wife).

How they met is not revealed, she is introduced after Samson fell in love with her. One gets a sense of how important Samson had become by the fact that all five(Judg 3:3) of the Lords of the Philistines wanted him destroyed. Each of the five offered Delilah money 1,100 pieces of silver.

And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Entice him, and find out where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to afflict him; and every one of us will give you eleven hundred pieces of silver." Judg 16:5

Samson's childlike innocence or folly is revealed in how he made this into a game. He obviously learned nothing from his wife and trusted this woman. It doesn't appear she struggled with her conscience over this man's life or trust in her. She immediately went to work to get the secret and allowed soldiers to lie in wait in her inner chamber while she sought to wile this secret from him.

During the course of Delilah's attempts to get the information Samson gave four answers

Seven green withes never dried(6-9).

So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and with what you may be bound to afflict you." 7 And Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, then I shall become weak, and be like any other man." Judg 16:6-7

There is some ambiguity in what a withe is. Later translations have *cord*s(NAS) and *bowstring*(NKJ), or *thongs*(NIV) the truth is we cannot with certainty know but Delilah knew and soon had him bound exactly as he had described. To test them, she cried out that the Philistines were upon him and watched to see what would happen. When he easily broke them she knew he had "mocked" her or made fun of her by telling her something that was not true.

New ropes wherewith no work hath been done, then (10-12)

Then Delilah said to Samson, "Look, you have mocked me and told me lies. Now, please tell me what you may be bound with." 11 So he said to her, "If they bind me securely with new ropes that have never been used, then I shall become weak, and be like any other man." Judg 16:10-11

She tried again and he gave another untruthful answer. She got the new ropes, bound him with them and again cried out the Philistines were upon him, once again Samson's untruthful answer failed to give her what she needed. One has to wonder why his suspicions were not aroused, but he continued to 'play this game with her.'

Weave the seven locks of my head with the web. (13-14)

Delilah said to Samson, "Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me what you may be bound with." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my head into the web of the loom" — Judg 16:13

This time proceeded exactly like the previous two. She again accused him of making fun of her and telling her lies. This time he again gave an untruthful answer and all else proceeded as before.

Samson's Fall(15-20)

Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and have not told me where your great strength lies." 16 And it came to pass, when she pestered him daily with her words and pressed him, so that his soul was vexed to death, 17 that he told her all his heart, and said to her, "No razor has ever come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaven, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man." Judg 16:15-17

This time she worked on his emotions. She used his love as leverage. She complained that his heart is not with her because he wouldn't tell her where his strength lay. She then goes on to such daily pressing and urging that his soul was vexed to death. Finally, he revealed the truth about the Nazirite vow. For some reason, she sensed that this time was different. She sent for the lords of the Philistines and they were so convinced they brought the money with them. She then made him sleep upon her knees, called for a man to shave off the seven locks of his head.

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. 21 Then the Philistines took him and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza. They bound him with bronze fetters, and he became a grinder in the prison. 22 However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven. 16:20-22

This time when she said the Philistines are upon thee, the LORD had departed from him and his strength was gone. The Philistines were not gentle. They put out his eyes, brought him down to Gaza, bound him with fetters of brass, and made him grind in the prison-house.

Samson's End(22-31)

The mercy and compassion and the gracious dealings of God are again revealed in Samson's life. As his hair began to grow again(along with the necessary inference of his penitence and godly sorrow for sin), Samson was given a final opportunity to use his strength to the glory of God.

Now the lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice. And they said: "Our god has delivered into our hands Samson our enemy!" 24 When the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said: "Our god has delivered into our hands our enemy, The destroyer of our land, And the one who multiplied our dead." 25 So it happened, when their hearts were merry, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may perform for us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he performed for them. And they stationed him between the pillars. Judg 16:23-26

A great sacrifice was being offered to Dagon the idolatrous god of the Philistines to offer praise and honor to him for delivering Samson into their hands. As they praised Dagon for delivering such an enemy into their hands, someone came up with the idea of bringing the blinded and fettered Samson into the temple as evidence of their god's power. They made sport of him, which carries the idea of mocking and scorning. They made up some games or activities to shame Samson and his God.

Did Samson feel the terrible anguish of one who had brought shame upon God by their own conduct? Did he only care about the loss of his eyes? Although he expressed only the latter, Heb 11 must be taken into consideration. There must have been some faith here.

Then Samson called to the Lord, saying, "O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!" Judg 16:28-29

As they set him between the pillars an idea formed in his head. He asked those who led him by the hand to let him feel the pillars in the temple. We are also told that there were about 3000 men and women and all the Lords of the Philistines. Samson offered a humble prayer that the Lord heard.

He then used all his might; to push against those pillars and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people. The account closes that the dead that he slew at his death were more than they that

he slew in his life. He is then buried by his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him. Again we are told that he judged Israel twenty years.

Then Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life. Judg 16:30

There are many enigma's in the story. All we have to go on is God's assessment of him in Heb 11. Any interpretation of his life must be done taking that into account. For our judgment of him must concur with that of the Lord.