

(Through the Bible) Judges 8-14

by Chuck Smith

The sermon explores Gideon's leadership, humility, and the consequences of idolatry following his victory over the Midianites.

Duration: 44:40

Scripture: Judges 9:7-15, Judges 10:6-7, Judges 10:10-18

Topics: "Faithfulness Of God", "Spiritual Guidance"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Samson from the Bible. Samson challenges thirty Philistines to solve a riddle, promising them thirty shirts and garments if they succeed. The riddle is about finding sweetness from something strong and meat from something that eats. After three days of failing to solve the riddle, the Philistines accuse Samson's bride-to-be of trying to deceive them. Samson later encounters a lion, and with the spirit of the Lord, he tears it apart. The preacher emphasizes the faithfulness of God in protecting Samson and the importance of seeking God's guidance in all situations.

Transcript

The Ephraimites were troublemakers, and in chapter 8 we find them giving Gideon a bad time. But we see with what splendid diplomacy Gideon deals with these Ephraimites. They came to Gideon, and they began to chide him sharply because he had not called them to go with him against the Midianites.

Now it is interesting to note that they came to him after Gideon had the victory. And it was assured that Gideon had the enemy on the run. Then they came to him and said, Why didn't you call us to come out and help you against these Midianites? And they really began to give him a bad time, chided him sharply.

But Gideon said, Well, what have I done compared with what you have done? Actually, you captured the two kings. And really, what have I done in comparison? Well, Gideon only wiped out 120,000 of them. And so, yet very diplomatically, he handles the situation very well.

These guys are hot-tempered. They come and they start making this ridiculous kind of an accusation. And Gideon, I feel, handles the situation very, very well.

Perhaps a little bit too well as far as the Ephraimites themselves are concerned. Because later on, they tried the same trick with another fellow, Jephthah, and he didn't handle it so well. But Gideon was very gracious in his dealing with them.

Verse 2, he said, What have I done in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? In other words, you guys came in and the gleanings that you got, the leftovers, are really better than the vintage that we took. And hath God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian or Ebenezer? What was I able to do in comparison to you? Then their anger was abated towards him when he said that. So, it was just a very gracious thing on the part of Gideon.

I look at Gideon and I must admire the man. There is a, I feel, a true humility in this man. Admirable quality.

When the Lord actually called him to lead the Israelites against Midian, you remember he said, Lord, I can't do that. My father's house is really nothing and I am the least of my father's house. Who am I to do this? And yet, he was the kind of a fellow when convinced of the call of God, went at it in a very sincere way.

Now, when he could really be glorying in the victory over the Midianites, take this as an opportunity to really, you know, pride himself. It wasn't so. Now, perhaps he learned and learned well the fact that God wanted the glory in the battle.

You remember, that's why God narrowed his army down. That's why God cut them down from 22,000 to 300 in order that God would get the victory for whatever was accomplished. Sounds like the fire department wants you to know they're at work tonight.

So Gideon came to Jordan. He passed over with 300 men that were with him who were faint, still they were pursuing the enemy, for there were still some 15,000 of the enemy still alive. They wiped out 120,000.

15,000 were still alive. And so he's pursuing. That's a pretty brave thing.

With 300 guys, you're chasing 15,000. It's alright as long as they're running, but what if they turn around? So, it's really a very commendable thing that he is still doing. But his men are tired at this point.

Now, an interesting thing to me is that there are still 300. Up to this point, he hasn't lost a single man in this battle. God has done a pretty thorough job in wiping out the enemy.

And no wonder Gideon was not about to take the credit and is willing to let other men glory, but he wouldn't glory himself. And so they came to the city of Succoth. And they said to the men of Succoth, Hey, give some bread to my men because they are faint and all.

And they said, Look, fella, is the enemy in your hand? No way. We just saw 15,000 of them go by. There's only 300 of you guys.

And we don't want to be guilty of helping you because if we help you, then if you be defeated by them, they'll come back and get us. And so they refused to feed Gideon's men. Gideon says, When I return with their heads, I'm going to drag you guys through the cactus.

And so he went on to the next city of Penuel. And he asked the men of Penuel. He said, Give my men some food.

They're fainting. And we've still got the enemy to wipe out. And they said, The enemy isn't yet delivered in your hand.

We're not going to help you. Gideon says, When I come back from the victory, I'm going to tear down your tower. And he, with his 300 men, pursued then the remainder of the Midianites, about 15,000 of them, and they wiped them out.

Verse 10, There is already fallen about 120,000 that drew the sword. There were about 15,000 that were now in Karkor with their leaders Ziba and Zamuna. So Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelled in the tents on the east of Noba.

And he smote the host, for the host was secure. And when Ziba and Zamuna fled, he pursued after them and took the two kings of Midian, Ziba and Zamuna, and discomfited all the hosts. And Gideon the son of Joas returned from battle before the sun was up.

And they caught a young man from the city of Sakoth. And he said, Describe to me the leaders of your city, the mayor and the city council. And so the young man described for him the elders, the leaders of the city.

And so he went into Sakoth and he took these guys and drug them through the cactus, through the thorns and the briars to teach them a lesson for their failure to help them when they were in need. Then they came to Penuel and they broke down the tower of the city and smote the men of Penuel for their failure also to help them in their time of need. Then he said to these two Midianite kings, Describe for me the men that you killed over near Mount Tabor.

And they said, Well, actually they look sort of like you. Good looking. They look sort of like sons of God.

Gideon said, They were my brothers. If you would have spared their lives, I would now spare yours. But you killed my brothers.

And so he said to one of his young boys, He said, Rise up and kill these fellows. Well, his boy was quite young, probably a teenager. And he was, you know, Here are kings and for me to just kill them.

And so his boy hesitated. And so the two kings said, Fall on us, you know. Go ahead.

And yet he hesitated to do it. And so Gideon himself killed the two kings of the Midianites that he had taken captive. So then the men of Israel, verse 22, came to Gideon and they said to Gideon, Rule over us, you and your sons and your sons' sons.

In other words, they wanted to set up now a dynasty and a monarchy. They wanted now the family of Gideon to become the king over Israel and his sons and his grandsons. But Gideon, again, shows remarkable character.

Here is, you know, the popular movement. Gideon, draft Gideon for the king. And Gideon answered them, I will not rule over you and neither shall my son rule over you.

The Lord shall rule over you. So I see very much in the character of Gideon as a very commendable thing. He did absolutely the right thing.

The Lord rule over you. I'm not going to, nor my son. And so, Gideon then asked the men for his share of the victory and the loot.

He said, I'd just like the golden earrings. Now these Midianites were Ishmaelites and all of them had gold earrings, pierced ears with a gold ring in their ears. And so they dumped them all on Gideon.

And man, at the price of gold today, he would have been a wealthy man because it was 1,700 shekels of gold that these earrings weighed when they tossed them all in. 120,000 earrings, that'd be a pretty good hit really on the gold market today. So Gideon then made an ephod out of these.

It's sort of a gold kind of a robe out of them. But this gold robe that he made became a snare. It became a tourist attraction.

People used to travel down to Gideon's house to see this golden ephod that he had made out of the earrings of the Midianites. And the people began to worship it. They made it sort of an object of worship.

Thus it became a snare unto Israel. Now I don't think that Gideon had that in mind at all, that the people would make sort of an idol out of this golden ephod that he made from these earrings. But nonetheless, the people did.

Now at that point, I think, was where Gideon did make a mistake. When he saw how the people were, you know, sort of revering this gold ephod, he should have just tossed the thing in the fire and melted it down and made a gold brick or something. And so if he was guilty of any mistakes, it was this.

His allowing the ephod to remain after the people had made an idolatrous kind of a symbol of this ephod. And thus, the children of Midian were subdued and they did not lift their heads up against the Israelites, and there was quiet in the land for 40 years during all of the days of Gideon. And Jerebabeel, who is Gideon, and he received that name when he knocked down the altar of Baal that belonged to his dad.

The son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house. Now, he was a pretty prolific guy. He had 70 sons begotten, for he had many wives.

And his concubine that was in Shechem, she also bare him a son whose name was called Abimelech. And Gideon, the son of Joash, died in a good old age, was buried in the sepulchre of Joash, his father, in Orah, which is of the Avarese rites. So it came to pass that soon after Gideon was dead, the children of Israel turned again and went whoring after Balaam, made Baal barith their god.

And the children of Israel remember not the Lord their God who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side, and neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerobabel, or Gideon, namely in this, that according to all the goodness which he had shown unto Israel. Now, here's what happened. After the death of Gideon, this Abimelech, who was the son of his concubine in Shechem.

Now, you know, they used to say of the sailors a girl in every port. Well, Gideon had probably a concubine in every city. And so in Shechem, this concubine who had born this fellow Abimelech, Abimelech came to the men of Shechem.

And he said, look, is it better that one man rule over you or seventy rule over you? One man who is your brother, who comes right out of Shechem, who understands your needs and all, or all of the sons of Jerobabel? What's best? And so he convinced the men of Shechem that they should come against the sons of Gideon and wipe them all out. And so Abimelech led a group of vain fellows. And they came to the houses of Gideon's sons and they wiped them all out with the exception of just one of his sons, Jotham.

But all of the other sons of Gideon were killed. A very reprehensible action on the part of Jerobabel, unconscionable. But Jotham hid himself.

And all of the men of Shechem gathered together in all the house of Melo. And they went and made Abimelech king by the plane of the pillar that was in Shechem. Now when Jotham heard that they had made Abimelech the king, he went to the top of Mount Gerizim, which is above the city of Shechem.

And it is sort of a natural amphitheater. From the top of Gerizim you can call down in the valley and they can hear you quite plainly. Sort of a natural amphitheater.

It is an interesting thing to me how far sound travels over there in that land. You think of Jesus speaking to a crowd of 10,000 people and they're all able to hear Him and that's without amplifying systems. And it sounds sort of far-fetched or preposterous.

But there are many places in the land where the acoustics are just natural acoustics are really fantastic. If you're standing up on the Herodian, there can be children playing two miles away and you can hear their conversations to each other. That's not an exaggeration.

You that go with me to Israel this year, I'll prove it to you. But the acoustics are tremendous. The sound travels.

They don't have their sound pollution like we have here. Here our sound decibels are rising year by year and all of the sounds that were subjected to their sound pollution. Over there you can hear children miles away, dogs barking and so forth as the children are playing.

You can hear them laughing, screaming and all a couple of miles away. And it's just sound really carries over there. And I don't know what phenomena it is that creates it, but sound would have to carry for Jesus to be able to address such large multitudes of people.

Even down by the beach. There at Caesarea, right near the Mediterranean. In an amphitheater that is there that was built by the Romans.

I can stand on the stage and drop a pin and you can hear it sitting up there in the amphitheater with several hundred people. The sound just carries very well. The acoustics are quite interesting in many areas of the land.

And the Sea of Galilee, same thing. The sound really carries. And of course that's where Jesus was addressing so many people.

And also there at the Temple Mount where Jesus addressed so many people. So, Jotham, the son of Gideon, the one that Abimelech didn't kill, went up to the top of Mount Gerizim. And here is Shechem down below.

Now, Mount Gerizim is a pretty good climb to get up to the top of the mountain. And he knew that he had a good running distance on the guy, so he stands up there and really tells them off. And rebukes them for what they have done.

Actually, he preaches sort of a parabolic type of a message. He gives a parable how the trees of the forest came to the olive tree and they said, rule over us. And the olive tree said, should I leave my fatness and so forth and rule over you? No way.

So they came to the fig trees and said, rule over us. And the fig tree said unto them, should I forsake my sweetness, my good fruit? No way. And so they came to the vine and said, rule over us.

And should I forsake the wine and so forth that cheers God and man to rule you? No way. And so they came to the bramble and said, come rule over us. Now, of course, he's calling in essence this Abimelech a bramble.

And you guys have, you know, you're settling for a bramble to rule over you. And having finished his rebuke and his speech, rebuking them for the evil that they had recompensed to Gideon. Here, Gideon had become your deliverer.

He freed you from the hand of Mennonites and now this is the way you treat, you know, Gideon and his offspring. And he gave them a real rebuke. Then he took off running as fast as he could go.

And as I say from the top of Grison, you got a good lead on anybody that might want to chase you. So Jotham got away from them. Now he said, if you've done a good thing, great.

Rejoice in Abimelech. But if not, then let fire come forth from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem and the house of Milo. And let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from the house of Milo and devour Abimelech.

In other words, let there come strife between the men of Shechem and Abimelech. And Jotham ran away and he fled to Bir and dwelt there for the fear of Abimelech his brother. Now Abimelech reigned for three years and God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech in order that the cruelty that was done by Abimelech might be avenged.

And so the men of Shechem began to set an ambush for him at the top of the mountains for the people. And they robbed all of those that were going along that way and it was told to Abimelech. Then this guy Gael, sort of a big mouth kind of a guy, said to the men, he came with his brothers and he went over to Shechem and he said to the men of Shechem, now look fellas, who is Abimelech and who is Shechem that we should serve them? Is he not the son of Jerebabeel and Zebal his officer? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem for why should we serve him? In other words, he's an outsider.

We ought to be serving Hamor and his family. Let them be the kings. And he said, what to God, the people were all under my rule because I could really do a good job here, you know.

Who is Abimelech? And so he said, if you would just commit yourself to me, I would remove Abimelech. And so he called to Abimelech and said, increase your army. And so when Zebal the ruler of the Hittite city heard the words of Gael, the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled and he sent messengers unto Abimelech privately saying, behold, Gael the son of Ebed and his brothers are come to Shechem and they are fortifying the city against you.

Now therefore, come by night and the people that are with you and lie in wait in the field and it shall be in the morning as soon as the sun is up. You shall rise early and set upon the city and behold, when he and the people that is with him come out against thee, then may you do to them as you find occasion. So Abimelech rose up and all the people that were with him by night and they laid wait in Shechem in four companies.

And Gael the son of Ebed went out and stood at the entering of the gate of the city and Abimelech rose up and the people that were with him and lying there in wait. And when Gael saw the people, he said to Zebal, behold, there come people down from the top of the mountains. And Zebal said, ah, no, that's just an illusion.

That's just the sun rising and the sun coming down. It looks like people, just an illusion that you see. So Gael spake again and said, look, there are people coming down by the middle of the land.

Another company is coming along the plain of Mionim. And then said Zebal unto him, okay, where's your mouth now? And you said, who is Abimelech that we should serve him? Is not this the people that you have despised? Go out now and fight with them. So in one of those positions, okay, now where's your mouth, man? You've been saying, who is Abimelech? There he is.

Go out and take him on. You said, you know, if he were just here, I'd handle him. So Abimelech chased him and many were overthrown and wounded even to the entering of the gate.

And Abimelech dwelt in Aruma and Zebal thrust out Gael with his brothers that they should not dwell in Shechem. And it came to pass on the next day that the people went out into the field and they told Abimelech. And he took the people and divided them into three companies and he laid him wait in the field.

And he looked and behold, the people were come forth out of the city. He rose up against them and smote them. And Abimelech and the company that was with him rushed forward and stood in the entering of the gate of the city.

And two other companies ran upon all the people that were in the fields and they killed them. And Abimelech fought against the city all that day and he took the city and killed the people that were therein. And he beat down the city and sowed it with salt.

And when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard that they had entered into the fortress of the house of the god Bereth, it was told Abimelech that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. Abimelech got up to Mount Zalman with his people and he began with his axe to cut down the boughs from the trees. He laid them on his shoulder and he said to the people, follow my example.

So they all cut down the boughs. And he came to the tower and laid these boughs around it, set fire to them and actually cremated the people who had sought refuge there in the tower. About a thousand men and women.

So it was a pretty good sized tower actually. And so then he went to Thebes and encamped against Thebes. And in Thebes there was a strong tower within the city.

And all of the men and women fled to the tower there in Thebes. And so Abimelech came to the tower. He fought against it.

He was up against the door trying to burn it with fire. And a certain woman took a piece of a millstone. Now millstones are sort of lava, kind of rock.

And they're millstones. I've seen them four feet high. And they have tracks in which the millstone rolls.

It's chiseled out to where it's round. It has a hole in the middle of it. And then the stick or the post would go through the center of the millstone and it would roll and they would often hook an oxen to it.

And they had this stone groove that went around in a circle. And the oxen, as he would go around, would pull the stick and it would cause this millstone to go around the groove and the ladies would come and just pour their wheat in the little groove. And as the millstone would go by, it would grind the wheat into flour.

And so they'd have their stone ground wheat by these millstones. But these millstones, probably many of them weigh, that I have seen, weigh as much as 400 or 500 pounds. Interesting that Jesus said concerning teachers that would destroy the faith in the heart of a child, it would be better for them if a millstone were hung around their neck and they were tossed in the Sea of Galilee than they to offend one of these little children.

Now, gentle Jesus, meek and mild. Look upon this little child. Hey, no, he wasn't so meek and mild.

He was pretty tough on these false teachers and those that would destroy faith in the heart of a child. He said, man, you know, put them in concrete and dump them in the ocean, you know. You'd have been a good mafia exterminator.

Really, He said, put a millstone on her neck. Throw them in the sea. You'd never come up for sure.

Well, now there was this woman in the tower and she had a piece of a millstone. Here's old Abimelech down there, you know, trying to set the door on fire and she drops the millstone and cracks his skull. And so he's lying there and he said to his armor bearer, quick, thrust me through.

I don't want him to say, a woman killed me. Pride, look at a little dude. Even when you're dying, you know.

What difference does it make? And so the guy thrust him through anyhow, so they didn't say a woman killed him. So Abimelech was wiped out and the evil that he did against Gideon's sons was sort of recompensed. Now in chapter 10, we go through a series of judges quite rapidly.

After Abimelech, there rose to defend Israel, Tola, a man of Ishkar, from the tribe of Ishkar. He dwelt in Shamir in Mount Ephraim. He judged Israel for 23 years.

He was buried in Shamir. And after him, there arose Jer, a Gileadite. And he judged Israel for 22 years.

Now he had 30 sons that rode on 30 ascots. And they had 30 cities, which are called Havath-Jer until this day, which are in the land of Gilead. And Jer died and was buried in Caman.

And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and they served Balaam and Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the children of Ammon, the gods of the Philistines. And they forsook the Lord and did not serve Him. So here we go again.

Another apostasy where the children of Israel turn against God and they begin to worship every god that is around. Now here was the hardest thing to comprehend. God at the time of Jeremiah, when the people again were in an apostasy, God said to Jeremiah, has it ever been in any nation, in any land, where people have forsaken their gods? And yet Israel has forsaken Me, the true and the living God.

And they've worshiped these other gods. They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and they have hewn out for themselves cisterns, cisterns that can hold no water. God was appalled by the thing.

Hey, this doesn't happen. People don't forsake their gods even that are not gods. And yet the children of Israel, it seems, were perennially forsaking God and turning to idolatry.

Unthinkable. And yet they did. So this is just another one of the apostasies.

Actually, it is the sixth time that it has been recorded that they forsook God and began to worship and serve these other gods. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel. He sold them this time into the hands of the Philistines and in the hands of the children of Ammon.

And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel for 18 years and all the children of Israel that were on the other side of Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. Moreover, the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight against Judah and against Benjamin and against the house of Ephraim so that Israel was sore distressed. Now, Reuben Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh that was on the other side of Jordan, they were now being oppressed by the Amorites that were over on that area that actually were in the territory before they had come.

But then the children of Ammon passed on over Jordan and began to fight in the land of Judah and Benjamin and all, Ephraim. And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord saying, We have sinned against Thee, both because we have forsaken our God and also because we have served Balaam. Double sin.

Forsaking God, one. Serving Balaam, two. And the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Did not I deliver you from the Egyptians, from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, from the Philistines, from the Sidonians and from the Amalekites and the Minoanites who did oppress you and you cried to Me and I delivered you out of their hand? Yet, you have forsaken Me and served other gods.

Wherefore, I will deliver you no more. Go and cry unto the gods which you have chosen. Let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.

So, Israel at this point had come to a very sad point in their history where God said, Hey, I've delivered you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites and all of these people, the Philistines and now you've forsaken Me. I'm not going to deliver you anymore. You go and call upon the gods that you have chosen to serve.

Let them deliver you. It is possible for a person to sin against the grace of God to the point where God turns that person over to a reprobate mind. God is through us.

That's it. God said to Jeremiah concerning Ephraim, He said, Hey, Jeremiah, don't pray anymore for Ephraim for her good. For if you do, I'm not going to even listen to your prayers.

To, what was it, Hosea, He said, Ephraim has given over to her idols. Let her alone. I'm through.

Not going to deal with them anymore. I've had it. Tragic when God says of a person, Hey, that's it.

Not going to deliver you anymore. You've chosen to serve these other gods. You made your choice.

All right, call on them. Let them deliver you from your tribulation. People oftentimes say, It really doesn't make any difference which God you serve.

You know, all roads lead to heaven. False. It makes a big difference.

The God that you serve, but it really makes the big difference when you're in trouble. That's when the difference really shows up when you're really needing help. And God says, Crying to the gods that you've chosen to serve, but they can't help me.

So, the children of Israel said unto the Lord, We have sinned. Again confessing. Do thou unto us whatsoever seems good to you, deliver us only we pray thee today.

And they put away the strange gods from among them. They served the Lord and His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel. So, God is a soft touch, I guess.

And the people did the right thing and God went ahead to deliver them once more. And the person that God chose at this time was Jephthah the Gileadite. Chapter 11.

He became the ninth judge. He was a mighty man of valor. He was the son of a harlot.

And Gilead begat Jephthah. And Gilead's wife bore him sons. And the wives' sons, when they grew up, they threw Jephthah out.

And they said, You're not going to inherit our father's house. You're the son of a strange woman. So, Jephthah fled from his brothers and he dwelt in the land of Tob.

And there gathered unto him vain men who began to sort of pal around with him. And it came to pass in the process of time that the children of Ammon made war against Israel. And ever so, when the children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead sent to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob.

And they said to Jephthah, Come and be our captain that we might fight with the children of Ammon. And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did you not hate me and expel me out of my father's house? Why are you now come because you're in distress? The elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Therefore, we turn again to thee now that you may go with us and fight against the children of Ammon and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead. So, Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If you bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the Lord delivers them before me, shall I be your head? And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, The Lord be witness between us if we do not according to your words.

In other words, will you let me rule over you? So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead. The people made him the head and captain over them. And Jephthah uttered all of his words before the Lord in Mizpah.

And Jephthah sent messengers unto the kings of the children of Ammon saying, What have you to do with me that you've come against me to fight in my land? And the king of the children of Ammon answered and said to the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land when they came up out of Egypt from Arnon even to Jabok and unto Jordan, and now therefore restore those lands again peaceably. So there was a little sort of a running feud. Jephthah said, And he said, Hey, why are you guys coming to fight to take away our land? And they sent back and said, Hey, we were here before you ever thought of being here.

We lived here before you came and you came and took the land away from us. So he wrote back to them another message. He said, No way.

We were willing to live peaceably. You came out against us. You started the fight and we whipped you.

And so the land belongs to us. We've been dwelling there all along. How come you haven't come sooner to reclaim it? Why didn't you take it then, you know, if it was your land? And so we settled in it.

It's our land. And so they then gathered together to battle. Now at this point, Jephthah made a vow unto God.

He said, Lord, if you will deliver these people of Ammon or the Ammonites into my hand, give me the victory over them, then I will sacrifice unto you the first thing that comes out of the door of my house when I return home as a burnt offering unto thee. So God delivered the Ammonites into the hands of Jephthah and he was coming home victorious, leading the armies. And who should come out the door of his house than his daughter, his only child, with a tambourine and a song that she had made up of the great victories of her father and how great a dad and everything he was.

And when he saw her come out the door, he said, Oh, sweetheart, you've brought grief to my soul today. And she said, Dad, whatever you've promised the Lord to do, go ahead and do. And so he told the vow that he had made.

And she said, alright, you know, you've made the vow to God and you're to do it. But, she said, allow me a couple of months to go through the mountains with my friends and just sort of bewail my virginity. And so she went through the mountains bewailing her virginity for a couple of months.

And it came to pass, verse 39, at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed, and she knew no man. And it was the custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah, the Gileadite, four days in a year. Now, number one, God had forbidden human sacrifice.

There is a question of whether or not he actually killed her. The burnt offering sacrifice was actually a sacrifice of consecration unto God. And there are some commentators who teach that he gave her to God to perpetual virginity.

In other words, to keep her from ever marrying. And she was consigned to a life of celibacy because of the vow her father had made. That is possible.

It isn't probable, but it is possible. From the apparent reading of the text, he did this awful thing and actually sacrificed his daughter unto the Lord. However, I am convinced that God did not require it of him, nor would God require it of him.

Under the law, where your first child actually was to be given to God, God made provisions for the redemption of the first child with an animal. And I'm certain that God would have allowed Jephthah to make a substitution for his daughter in this case. We must remember that in the society that was surrounding the children of Israel in those days, human sacrifice of your children was a very common thing to the pagan gods.

In the worship of Molech, in the worship of Baal, the common practice was the sacrificing of your children unto your gods. In the uncovering of the houses of the Canaanites, in the foundations of the houses they discovered many jars with the skeletons of babies. They considered a good luck omen to actually bury your baby in the foundation when you built a house.

Sacrificing it unto the gods and so forth. And it was common practice among the pagans by which the children of Israel were surrounded, but it was something that was strictly forbidden by God. So if Jephthah did it, he did it of his own will, not because God demanded it.

It is a very horrible thing. It is hard for us to understand. We cannot really blame God.

You say, but why did God allow her to come first out of the house? Why didn't He chase the cat out in front of her or something? That I don't know. Now, remember the men of Ephraim when Gideon came back having gotten the victory? And they said, why didn't you call us? Well, here they are again. Chapter 12.

And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together and went northward and said unto Jephthah, why did you pass over to fight against the children of Ammon and you didn't call us to go with you? We're going to burn you and your house with fire. Well, they got by with this kind of stuff with Gideon. Gideon was just a very diplomatic, mild-mannered fellow.

But not so Jephthah. He was the son of Harlot. Tough cookie.

He grew up with a tough crowd. And you don't mess with Jephthah like you would with Gideon. And so they came to Jephthah throwing on him the same trip that they threw on Gideon years earlier.

And Jephthah said, I and my people. Now, look, notice Jephthah was a very egocentric person. Notice all the I's and the my's and so forth in these next few verses.

It demonstrates the guy's egocentricities. And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at great strife with the children of Ammon, and I called you, and you delivered me not out of their hands. And when I saw that you daily delivered me not, I put my life in my hands and passed over against the children of Ammon, and the Lord delivered them into my hand.

Wherefore then are you come up against me this day to fight against me? So notice all these personal pronouns. He's very egocentric. And Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead and they fought with Ephraim.

And the men of Gilead smote Ephraim because they said you Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim and among the Ephraimites and among the Manassites. And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites. They'd come over against them into the land of Gilead, crossed Jordan, coming over against them.

And so the men of Jephthah took the fords where they crossed the Jordan River. And as the Ephraimites were trying to sneak back into their own land, they'd stop them and they'd say, say Shibboleth. They'd say, are you an Ephraimite? Oh no, we're not an Ephraimite.

They'd say, say Shibboleth. And the guys from Ephraim couldn't pronounce the S-H sound. And they'd say, Shibboleth.

And they knew that they were then Ephraimites and so they wiped them out. And some 45-46,000 Ephraimites bit the dust. Forty-two.

And Jephthah judged Israel for six years. And he died and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead. So really he didn't reign too long, just six years.

And then the tenth judge was this guy Ibn Zan from Bethlehem. And his claim to fame was he had 30 sons and 30 daughters who he sent abroad to marry with the kings from other nations. And he took in 30 daughters from abroad for his sons.

So he shipped his daughters out and then took 30 daughters from other kingdoms for his sons. He judged Israel for seven years. He was buried in Bethlehem.

Then Elon became the eleventh judge. He was from the tribe of Zebulun. He judged Israel for ten years.

And he was buried at Ajalon in the country of Zebulun. Then Abednon became the twelfth judge, the son of Hillel. And he had 40 sons and 30 nephews that rode on 70 donkeys.

And he judged Israel for eight years. These guys really didn't do very much. Not much is told about them.

Now, again, the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord. And the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for 40 years. There was a certain man from Zorah.

He was of the tribe of Dan. And his name was Manoah. And his wife was barren.

And one day she was out in the field. And an angel of the Lord visited her there in the field and told her that she was going to become pregnant. She was going to bear a son.

And through her son, God was going to begin delivering the children of Israel from the Philistines. Now, the angel said, the son is to be dedicated unto God. You're not to allow a razor to come to his head.

A Nazirite vow. Not cutting your hair. Also, he was not to drink any wine.

Strong drink anything that came from the vine. For he was to be a Nazirite from his birth. Dedicated.

His life was to be dedicated unto God. A commitment of his life to God. Well, she was all excited.

She ran and she told her husband about this man that met her in the field. Told her that she was going to become pregnant and have a son. And that she was to not shave his hair and not give him any wine or strong drink.

And he said, what did he look like? And what did he tell you? And he said, oh God, if it's really You that appeared, appear again so we can get some further instructions on what we're to do with this child. So she was out in the field again. And the angel of the Lord appeared again.

And she said, would you mind waiting here? My husband wants to meet you. So she ran and got her husband and said, the man who appeared to me in the beginning is here again. So, Manoah came running up and he said, I heard the story and I didn't know what to do.

I just wanted to know a little bit more instructions. She was sort of excited. And I wanted to make sure I got the instructions straight.

How are we supposed to raise this kid? And what are we supposed to do with him and all? And tell me again. So, the angel repeated. He said, just like I told her, don't give him any wine, anything that comes from the vine.

Don't cut his hair. He is to be a Nazarite, dedicated unto God. And so, Manoah said, look, Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, verse 15, I pray thee, let us detain you until we have made ready a kid for thee.

And the angel of the Lord said unto Manoah, though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread. And if you offer a burnt offering, you must offer it unto the Lord. For Manoah knew not that he was an angel of the Lord.

So Manoah said unto the angel of the Lord, What is your name? So that when your sayings come to pass, we might honor you. And the angel of the Lord said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret? That word secret in the Hebrew is actually wonderful. Why do you ask me my name, seeing it is wonderful? So Manoah took the kid with a meal offering and he offered it on a rock unto the Lord.

And the angel of the Lord did wondrously, while Manoah and his wife looked on. For while the fire was coming up, the angel stepped into the fire and ascended into heaven. And Manoah fell on his face and said, Oh, we're going to be wiped out.

We saw an angel of the Lord face to face. And his wife said, Hey, what do you mean? If God wanted to wipe us out, why would He tell us we're going to have a baby and all this and give us all these promises? And so he said, Well, I guess you're right. So, the level heads prevailed of Manoah's wife.

So she bare a son, called his name Samson. And the child grew, and the Lord blessed him. And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him in times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtoel.

And so, the valley of Zorah and Eshtoel are actually 8 miles from Jerusalem towards Tel Aviv. And it's a very beautiful, fertile valley through there. It was part of the inheritance of the tribe of Dan.

And so, this is where he grew up and God's Spirit began to move on him at various times. Now, Samson went down to Timnath, which was a Philistine city. And there he fell in love with one of the daughters of the Philistines.

And he came home and he said to his parents, I want you to go down and make arrangements for me to marry that girl. And they said, Ah, come on, Samson. All these beautiful Israeli girls around here.

Why do you have to go down and fall in love with a Philistine? Now, they didn't know that God was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. Samson, a self-willed young kid, he said, Hey, don't give me a bad time. Just go down and make the arrangements.

So, his parents went down to make the arrangements and Samson was tagging along behind them. And a lion jumped him. And the Spirit of the Lord came on him and he took that lion and ripped the thing in two, just like it had been a little goat or something.

Tossed the carcass over in the bushes, dusted off his hands, didn't tell anybody. The parents went on down to Timnath and he got to see his girlfriend. They made all the arrangements for the dowry and so forth, so that he could marry her.

And so, the time for the wedding came. And so, they were on their way back to Timnath. Again, his parents went ahead of him.

And curious, he got to the place where he had tossed the carcass over in the bushes and wondered what that old carcass looked like by now. And so, he went over to see what the carcass looked like. The degree

of deterioration and all at this point.

And he saw that bees had made a hive in the carcass. There was a honeycomb there. So, he grabbed it, began to eat the honey, caught up with his parents and gave them some of the honey to eat.

Still didn't tell them what happened. Went on down to Timnath. Started the whole wedding festival.

Now, in those days, they really did a big number for weddings. It was a seven-day kind of a feast prior to the wedding. Really celebrated, you know, the last of your single days.

So, they appointed 30 of the Philistines to be his companions for this period of revelry. The partying and all prior to the wedding. And so, Samson said to these 30 Philistines, I'm going to give you a riddle.

And if you can tell me the riddle by the time of the wedding day, then I will give you 30 shirts and 30 changes of garments. But, if you can't tell me the riddle at the end of the seven days, then you've got to give me 30 shirts and 30 changes of garments. The guy says, what's your riddle? And so, he gave to them the riddle.

And he said, out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness. And these guys for three days hassled with this thing. Out of the eater came forth meat.

Out of the strong came forth sweetness. And after three days, and they hadn't gotten anywhere with it, they came to his bride-to-be. And they said, what a rat you are.

You're just trying to rip us off. That's why you chose us to be his companions. Trying to get 30 shirts and 30 changes of garments out of us for your trousseau or whatever.

No way. They said, you better find out what that riddle is or we're going to burn you and your dad's house. And so, she came to Samson and said, you really don't love me.

He said, what do you mean I don't love you? Oh, if you loved me, you would have told me what the riddle is. He said, oh, what are you talking about? I haven't even told my parents what the riddle is. See, I told you you didn't love me.

And she started this business of tears. And day after day, you know, here's a bride-to-be always in tears. You don't love me.

And finally, Samson had it. Couldn't stand the tears anymore. He said, ah, I mean nothing.

He said, I killed this lion and out of its carcass there was a honeycomb. And so, out of the eater, there came forth sweetness. So, she told these guys.

And the day of the wedding came. And so, Samson said, okay, what's the riddle, fellas? And they said, what's stronger than a lion and what's sweeter than honey? And he really got angry. He said, if you hadn't been plowing with my heifer, you'd have never found out.

That's an interesting, I imagine, a colloquial kind of a phrase in those days, calling your wife a heifer. If you hadn't been plowing with my heifer, you'd have never known. And he got upset.

And he went down to Ashkelon, one of the Philistine cities along the coast of the Mediterranean, got hold of 30 Philistines, cracked their skulls, took their shirts and their clothes, came back and paid off his debt

and went home. After he cooled down, he came back to see his wife. And that's where the next problem began.

We'll get into that in our next week's study as we move along with Samson. Interesting character. I have a lot I want to share with you about Samson, but we'll wait until we get the full story next week.

And then we'll draw some interesting observations and analogies from Samson.

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