

Plan and Purpose Bible Lesson #III-27—Judges 9-

We read in Judges 8 that Gideon, or Jerubbaal had 70 sons by his several wives and had one son, Abimelech, by a concubine in Shechem. The story of Abimelech is portrayed in chapter 9. When he was grown, after the death of Gideon, he went to the men of Shechem and convinced them to let him rule over them rather any or all of the other sons of Gideon. When they agreed to this, he hired some worthless men and went to his father's house and killed all of his brothers with the exception of the youngest one, Jotham, to be sure that he wasn't challenged for the rulership that he had obtained. Jotham went to the top of Mt. Gerizim overlooking Shechem and gave a parable of trees to the men of Shechem in which he basically told them that either Abimelech would destroy them or vice versa and accused them of forgetting what all his father, Gideon, had done for them. He then ran away and escaped Abimelech. It turned out that Jotham's prophecy was correct in that Abimelech ended up fighting against the men of Shechem. When the men and their families took refuge in the tower in the city, Abimelech burned the tower killing about a thousand men and women. Abimelech then went to the city of Thebez and encamped against it and again the people took refuge in their tower. When Abimelech attempted to burn it, a woman dropped a piece of millstone on him breaking his skull. So that it couldn't be said that a woman killed him, he had his armourbearer take his sword and kill him.

Chapter 10 tells us that after Abimelech, a man by the name of Tola from the tribe of Issachar rose and judged Israel for 23 years. When he died he was followed by a man by the name Jair, a Gileadite, and he judged Israel for 22 years. When he died, the people went to worshipping the gods of the people of the land again and God sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites. This lasted for 18 years primarily on the east side of the Jordan. Eventually the Ammonites crossed the river and came against Judah, Ephraim and Benjamin. The people finally turned back to God, but God first told them to cry unto the gods they had been worshipping. When the people repented and humbled themselves before God and put away their strange gods, God again turned to them. Finally things came to a showdown with the Ammonites, but the children of Israel found they had no leader to lead them against the Ammonites.

Chapter 11 tells us the story of another man that God raised up to deliver the people from their enemies. This man's name was Jephthah. (Read Judges 11:1-11) I think we all could appreciate Jephthah's reluctance to lead the army into battle, not because he was afraid, but because of the hypocrisy of the elders of Israel. (Read Judges 11:11-28) Jephthah tried to talk to the king of the Ammonites rather than go to war with him. It appears to me that he made some pretty good points as to why the Ammonites should not be coming against Israel and was pretty much following God's laws of war. However, the king of Ammon refused to back off. (Read Judges 11:29-31) This vow proved to become a real problem to Jephthah that we want to discuss in detail when we read of Jephthah's return home from the battle. (Read Judges 11:32-40) In accordance with God's laws of war, God promised that when Israel followed His law, He would go before them to fight against their enemy. He did so here and Jephthah and his army were totally successful.

The problem to Jephthah was when he returned home. At first look at Jephthah's vow, it would appear that he had to offer his daughter as a burnt offering. But let's take a closer look at it. There are

two things that need our consideration. First, according to a note by Dr. Bullinger in his Companion Bible, the word that is translated “whatsoever” in verse 31 is masculine. The first thing that came from his house to meet him was feminine. Thus technically, the vow was impossible of fulfillment.

In the King James translation, the latter part of verse 31 reads, **“whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD’s, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.”** The word “and” is from a Hebrew word that is translated several different ways. It is often translated “or” which is apparently the way it should have been translated here. It is so translated in my New American Standard Bible. The vow is in two parts that by using the word “or” makes it so that Jephthah could do either part. Since offering one’s child as a burnt offering was prohibited by law (Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5) such an offering would have not been accepted by God. So the other part of the vow is what Jephthah did. He dedicated his daughter to God and she remained a virgin all of her life as we are told in verse 39: **“And it came to pass 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.”**

Gilead was an area on the east side of the Jordan River that had been settled by at least a portion of the tribe of Manasseh. Gilead was also the name of Jephthah’s father. Jephthah’s family are called Gileadites in chapter 12, but whether it was because of their location or their family name or both is not made clear. Apparently, when the Ammonites first came against Israel, Jephthah sent to the tribe of Ephraim for help, but didn’t get it. However once he won the battle, the tribe of Ephraim’s army came against Jephthah and the Gileadites saying that Jephthah should have asked them to help. I don’t quite understand why they went to war over this, but they did and Jephthah and his army killed 42,000 of the men of Ephraim. An interesting side note is recorded in this story concerning language. The Gileadites took control of the fords of the river and when came to the fords, the way they determined whether he was of the tribe of Ephraim or not was to ask him to say “Shibboleth.” If he answered “Sibboleth,” i.e. left out the “h,” they killed him. In the New Testament, at the time of Jesus’ trial, Peter was accused of being a Galilean, which he denied, but the accuser said that Peter’s speech confirmed it. The Galileans were primarily Benjaminites, so apparently there were different dialects among the various tribes.

We’re given a list of judges that succeeded Jephthah after he died.

Chapter 13 gives us the beginning of the story of Samson who became a judge in Israel. We need to see the whole story, so read chapter 13. The judges of Israel that we have seen came from various tribes of Israel and here Samson’s father is of the tribe of Dan. When Manoah asked the angel what his name was, the answer in verse 18 was “secret.” The Hebrew word is also translated “wonderful” which was one of the names, Isaiah says in Isa. 9:6, Jesus would be called. When the angel disappeared in the flame of the burnt offering, Manoah believed that he had seen God and would die. However, his wife reasoned that if what the angel had said was true, then they couldn’t die as they had a job to do in having this son and raising him.

(Read Isa. 14) Samson’s parents objected to him taking a wife from among the Philistines, but finally gave in to him and went to prepare for the wedding. For him to kill the young lion with nothing but his bare hands would have been quite a feat. I remember one time when I was in my late teens, I was walking in some woods and came across a couple of foxes that were caught in a trap. It probably wasn’t the right thing to do, but I decided it would be humane if I killed them. The only tool I had was a

club I picked up off the ground, but using that club I like to never killed those two foxes. It wasn't nearly as easy as I thought it would be. I can just imagine the strength and ability that Samson had to be able to kill the lion.

This is one of the very few places we have in Scripture that gives us an idea of the wedding ceremony. The feast lasted seven days, but we're not told at what point Samson actually took his bride for his wife. In verse 15, the Septuagint says fourth day instead of seventh day as in the King James. Something I read some time ago said that it was customary for the groom to take the bride in the middle of the feast. I don't remember where I read it, so can't confirm it, but it would appear that that might be the case here as from that time on, the woman is called Samson's wife. However, after giving the 30 young men the thirty sheets (probably shirts) and garments Samson's anger was so great that he left his wife in Timnath and went to his father's house. While he was gone, the woman's father gave his daughter to Samson's best man at the wedding.

(Read Isa. 15) In a few days Samson cooled down and went to see his wife only to find that she had been given to another man. The girl's father tried to give him her younger sister, but Samson apparently had quite a temper. We see the result when he burned the Philistine's wheat crop. L

Apparently not only the Philistines were afraid of Samson, but the men of Judah were as well as they took 3000 men to go up to where Samson was to take him back to the Philistines. The Philistine's fear of Samson was quite justified as we see that with the jawbone of an ass he slew 1000 of them. It is ironic that God then provided water for him from that same jaw bone.

We're then told that Samson judged Israel for 20 years. I assume that the Philistines left Israel alone during that period of time, again for fear of Samson.

(Read Judges 16) We're told the Philistines thought they had Samson trapped in the city when he went into a harlot there. Their intent was to kill him at the gate as he left the city the next morning. But as we see, Samson left at midnight and took the gate, the gate posts and the bar with him as he left.

We then have the story that Samson is most famous for, that of his love for Delilah. I'm not sure why he loved her as she tried to trick him several times for the benefit of the lords of the Philistines. It took several tries before he finally gave in and told her his strength was in his hair. She then had a man cut off his hair as he slept.

We're not told how many people were in the building but we're told that it was full and that there were 3000 on the roof top. This gives us an idea of how well built the building was to be able to support that many people plus the roof. However, the primary support appeared to be the two middle columns which Samson, having gained his tremendous strength back was able to move so that the whole roof collapsed. We're told he slew more in his death than he did in his life.

I need to add that the events that we read of in Judges are not necessarily in chronological order. I'm sure some of them are in order, not all. When we take up chapter 17 we'll see this as the events related in the rest of the book took place shortly after the death of Joshua before some of the events we have already looked at. JRL