November 2018

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THE JUDGES OF ISRAEL

God led Israel out of Egypt in the days of Moses. After Moses, God then worked through Joshua. It was Joshua who six years after crossing the Jordan, or 46 years after the exodus from Egypt, divided the land as an inheritance to the tribes of Israel (see Joshua 14). Then Joshua died at age 110 years (see Joshua 24:29). In general terms, Joshua died around 1420 B.C., give or take 10 years.

Much later Saul was anointed as Israel's first king. That was around the year 1092 B.C., give or take 5 years. This date can actually be established reasonably accurately, based on the information provided in 1 Kings 6:1.

So from the time when Joshua died until Saul was made king was a period of about 320-330 years. That was **the period of the Judges of Israel**. Those were times of anarchy, chaos, wars, civil war, foreign invasions and servitudes, and **an endless cycle of idolatry** for the tribes of Israel.

The history of the first approximately 250 (or 240) years of that period is covered in the Book of Judges. The remaining approximately 80 (or 90) years are covered in the early chapters of First Samuel, i.e. until the point in time when God instructed Samuel to anoint Saul as king. **Samuel was in effect the last of the Judges of Israel.**

Now the Apostle Paul said in Acts 13:20 that the period of the Judges was "about 450 years" (Greek "hos etesin tetrakosiois kai pentekonta"). That's clearly **not correct**. It is in error by about 120-130 years. So **how did Paul get that wrong figure of 450 years**?

Paul got that 450 years figure from **his training as a Pharisee**. The Pharisees simply added up all the years mentioned in the Book of Judges, including servitudes, etc. That comes to 410 years. But the Pharisees did not count the 40-year servitude to the Philistines in Judges 13:1, because that servitude clearly overlaps with Samson's time. So instead of 410 years, the Pharisees came up with 370 years. See the chart at the end of this article for the details. Then the Pharisees added 80 years for Eli and Samuel. That gave them 450 years.

Some people, who realize that Paul's figure of 450 years is at odds with the facts, attempt to find some other way to rationalize this figure of 450 years. So here is the correct way to understand Paul's statement. In Acts 13:17 Paul speaks about the exodus from Egypt. In Acts 13:18 Paul covered the 40 years Israel spent wandering in the wilderness. Verse 19 covers the six years Israel spent under the leadership of Joshua, until they inherited the land. Paul is clearly proceeding chronologically.

Acts 13:20 starts with the Greek words "kai meta tauta". These words mean "**and after that**". With "that" Paul is clearly referring to "**after Joshua had divided the land to the 12 tribes of Israel**". Paul is still proceeding chronologically.

The rest of the sentence then says: "after that He (God) gave them judges for about 450 years until Samuel the prophet". The expression "**until Samuel** the prophet" is intended by Paul to indicate **the end of that "about 450-year period"**. Acts 13:21 continues chronologically with the 40 years for King Saul. Paul was trying to the best of his knowledge to be chronologically correct.

The problem is that 450 years before Saul was anointed takes us back to more than 50 years before the

exodus from Egypt. 450 years before King Saul takes us back to when Moses was still less than 30 years old, at which time Moses was still a prince in Egypt. Paul had simply accepted an incorrect figure from his training as a Pharisee. There was no need for Paul to ever study the exact chronology in great detail. So he erroneously assumed that the Pharisees were correct in the chronology they had established. But the Pharisees were not correct. That's like Mr. Armstrong was God's servant, but he accepted a wrong calendar from the Pharisees, and at first he also made a mistake with counting for Pentecost. All of us in God's Church still hold some views and opinions that are not correct, because we are still human. That is also true for God's servants.

Now the Bible shows us that Eli was a Judge for 40 years (1 Samuel 4:18), but it does not reveal for how many years Samuel judged Israel. So the Pharisees assigned 40 years to Samuel, but without any biblical support.

After Samuel had anointed Saul as king, Samuel lived for another more than 30 years. Samuel only died when David was well into his early 20's (see 1 Samuel 25:1), and that was less than 10 years before Saul died, after Saul having reigned for 40 years. So Saul had clearly reigned for more than 30 years when Samuel died.

Samuel's age at the time of his death is not mentioned. But he is unlikely to have been much over 100 years old. It is likely that Samuel was perhaps around 70 years old when he anointed Saul as king, making him perhaps slightly over 100 years old when he died.

Anyway, **it was from the Pharisees** that Paul had acquired the figure of 450 years.

Now when the Pharisees added up all the years listed in the Book of Judges, they did not seem to realize that **a number of Judges were in office at the same time**, but in different parts of Israel (e.g. one Judge in the south, and at the same time another Judge in the north). Placing all these Judges in chronologically consecutive positions inflated the actual number of years that were involved.

Now unless Paul had made an intense personal study of established dates for chronological purposes, something he is unlikely to ever have done, because that was not something the Pharisees did, he would have freely accepted this common flawed teaching amongst the Pharisees. This wasn't a point of doctrine, and ultimately it makes no difference whether Paul got the right number of years or not.

But for the record, **Paul's 450-year figure is wrong by more than 100 years**. That 450-year figure is something Paul had been taught "at the feet of Gamaliel" (see Acts 22:3).

Consider:

The Book of Judges lists 410 years when we include the 40 years of servitude in Judges 13:1. Add to that 40 years for Eli and 40 years for Samuel, and we have a figure of 490 years. But that is impossible!

We cannot have 490 years from Joshua's death to Saul being anointed as king, because 1 Kings 6:1 tells us that there were only 480 years from the exodus to the fourth year of Solomon (1 Kings 6:1).

And it came to pass in the **480th year** after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the **4th year of Solomon's reign** over Israel, in the month Zif, which *is* the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD. (1 Kings 6:1)

This figure of 480 years includes: **40 years** for wandering in the wilderness, **40 years** for King Saul, **40 years** for King David, Solomon's first **3 years**, **6 years** from crossing the Jordan until they inherited the land, and **20 or more years** for Joshua as the leader of the nation. In round numbers these periods take

up about 150 years of that 480-year period. So 480 - 150 = 330 years left for the period of the Judges, dealing in round numbers.

In simple terms: The period from Joshua's death until Saul was anointed as king was **at least 150 years shorter** than the 480-year period from the exodus to the 4th year of Solomon. Therefore the period from Joshua's death until Saul was anointed as king cannot be longer than 330 years.

But that 330-year period includes the time when Eli was a Judge (40 years) and also the time when Samuel was a Judge (probably for around 40 years, if not longer). And it also includes all the periods when Israel was in servitudes to foreign nations (114 years are listed in the Book of Judges).

So when the Book of Judges lists 296 years for the first 12 Judges, then there simply aren't any 296 years available. In fact, there aren't even 200 years available for those 12 Judges. Therefore the inescapable conclusion has to be that for much of the time in this period of the Judges there were **two Judges functioning simultaneously**, but in different areas of the country. And therefore the years that are listed would have overlapped to a considerable degree.

The 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1 force this conclusion upon us.

This is generally understood by most Bible commentators, that the 450 years mentioned by Paul cannot be correct. And many have tried to find some justification for this wrong number.

But the point is: the number of years involved in the period of the Judges is **not significant** one way or the other. It is nothing more than **a reference point**. We should certainly set the record straight, and not misapply the incorrect figure of 450 years that the Apostle Paul mentioned. And we should not attach any significance to that wrong figure.

The Pharisees got that period of their history wrong, as they also got countless other things seriously wrong, including, for example, the chronology presented in the Seder Olam. Think of the Talmud as a chronicle of all the biblically incorrect teachings of the Pharisees. Paul unfortunately accepted that 450-years figure without any real proof from the Old Testament itself.

In defense of Paul: if this had been a salvational issue, then Paul would undoubtedly have been motivated by God's spirit to pick up this mistake. But it wasn't a salvational issue. It was nothing more than **incidental information**. And so it slipped past Paul. It didn't really make a difference in any way.

This should suffice as some background to the period of the Judges of Israel.

Paul wrote that the things recorded in the Old Testament were recorded as examples and as lessons "for our admonition" (see 1 Corinthians 10:11). So now let's examine the accounts for the 12 Judges listed in the Book of Judges.

For 7 of those 12 Judges the Bible gives us less than 10 verses each about these people. Only 5 of those 12 Judges are dealt with at some length. Let's start by considering the conditions after Joshua had died.

CONDITIONS WHEN GOD RAISED UP JUDGES

And **the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua**, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel. (Judges 2:7)

But four short verses later this had changed.

And **the children of Israel did evil** in the sight of the LORD, and **served Baalim**: And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and **followed other gods**, of the gods of the people that *were* round about them, and **bowed themselves unto them**, and provoked the LORD to anger. (Judges 2:11-12)

Every time these problems with idolatry started, God would punish the people, but then also provide help, so that the people might be restored into a right relationship with God. God raised up Judges. This was God's first way of providing human leadership for the whole nation.

Nevertheless **the LORD raised up judges**, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. (Judges 2:16)

God provided good leaders. But the people never really listened to those good leaders.

And yet **they would not hearken unto their judges**, but **they went a whoring after other gods**, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; *but* they did not so. (Judges 2:17)

Another major problem was that the people also **freely intermarried** with the nations around them, something that God had explicitly forbidden in Deuteronomy 7:3.

Neither shall you make marriages with them; your daughter you shall not give unto his son, nor his daughter shall you take unto your son. (Deuteronomy 7:3)

But that is precisely what the people of Israel did after Joshua had died.

And **they took their daughters to be their wives**, and **gave their daughters to their sons**, and **served their gods**. (Judges 3:6)

Racial mixing was thus a common occurrence in Israel during this very chaotic but formative period in their history, even as it is a common occurrence in our world today. We in God's Church today commonly underestimate the impact these racial intermarriages had on the genetic profiles of the tribes of Israel, when we talk about "ethnic Israelites". Later we'll see an example of a leader in Israelite society insisting on all of his 60 children marrying non-Israelites. And many of that leader's numerous wives were no doubt non-Israelites as well, making his own children from those wives only 50% Israelite to start with.

Now one immediate result of racial intermarriages back then was that the people turned to idolatry.

And **the children of Israel did evil** in the sight of the LORD, and forgat the LORD their God, and **served Baalim** and the groves. (Judges 3:7)

FIRST SERVITUDE = TO MESOPOTAMIAN KING

God therefore punished Israel by imposing on them the first of six servitudes to foreign rulers during this period.

Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of

Chushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and **the children of Israel served Chushan-rishathaim eight years**. (Judges 3:8)

Then the people of Israel cried out to God for help. And that was when God raised up the first judge.

FIRST JUDGE: OTHNIEL

And when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, **the LORD raised up** a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, *even* **Othniel** the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. (Judges 3:9)

The first Judge was a nephew of Caleb. Caleb himself had been 79 years old at the time when Moses died, and when Israel crossed into the Promised Land. Caleb was 85 years old when the land was divided amongst the tribes (see Joshua 14:6-10). Caleb's brother had not died in the wilderness, and therefore he must have been less than 20 years old at the exodus. The only two people older than 60 years when Israel crossed the Jordan were Joshua and Caleb. Everybody else in Israel at that point in time, including Caleb's younger brother, was less than 60 years old.

So Othniel may have been born in the wilderness; and he was then in his 20's or 30's when the land was divided amongst the 12 tribes, at a time when his father Kenaz was perhaps in his late 50's. Othniel then lived through the remainder of Joshua's time (likely 20+ years), and the 8 years of servitude to the Mesopotamian ruler. So Othniel was likely in his 50's or 60's when God raised him up as a Judge.

And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and **he judged Israel**, and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and **his hand prevailed** against Chushan-rishathaim. (Judges 3:10)

Othniel is one of four Judges for whom it is specifically stated that "the spirit of the Eternal came upon him", the three other Judges in this group being Gideon, Jephthah and Samson. This is not to necessarily say that the other eight Judges didn't have God's spirit; it is just that it is not stated that they did have God's spirit. I do, however, suspect that some of those other Judges didn't have God's spirit, as I will explain later.

One common way God established a person as a Judge was for God to give that person **a military victory** over whoever happened to be the current enemy nation. That is also how God established Othniel.

And **the land had rest 40 years**. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died. (Judges 3:11)

It is not clear whether Othniel was a Judge for that entire period of 40 years, though that is certainly a possibility. But the focus in verse 11 is on the people of Israel having peace (i.e. rest) for 40 years. That 40-year period of rest went until the next servitude started, which may well have been some years after Othniel had died.

So what lessons for us are there from this period?

The most important lesson thus far is that **good leaders do not really produce good people**. Moses had been a good leader, and the Israelites complained and rebelled constantly during his 40 years of leadership. Then Joshua had been a good leader, and the people likewise didn't really submit themselves to God with their whole hearts. What outwardly looked like the people "serving the Eternal" was barely skin-deep. And so when Joshua and the other leaders of that generation died, the people

almost overnight turned to idolatry. As Judges 2:17 tells us: "**they would not hearken unto their judges**, but they went a whoring after other gods".

The lesson is: **one bad example** invariably finds **100 followers**, but every **100 good examples** seldom find more than **one follower**.

That's the essence of human nature. People don't obey God and do what is right before God, simply because they see someone else obeying God. Good examples may well be recognized and noted, but they are **seldom emulated**. That is because most people don't interact in their own minds with the good examples that are being set for them.

And when we don't in our own minds interact with, and respond to the examples set by good leaders, then we are also not developing any godly character. Mechanical compliance with instructions that are set before us does not produce godly character.

It is only when we with our own minds process the good examples set for us, evaluate that information, and in our own minds reach conclusions to apply to our own conduct and behavior with a resolute commitment, that then we can initiate the process of developing godly character in the specific areas that apply to those good examples.

Consider what I am now going to say:

When people see a good example for the very first time, that presents the greatest possible opportunity for them to copy that good example. When they then see that good example a second time, after the first time did not motivate them to emulate that good example, then in very many cases the likelihood of them acting on that good example is less than 50% of what it was for the first time they saw this good example.

Every time they see that same good example the likelihood of them copying that good example decreases by perhaps 50%. And by the time people have witnessed a good example **a mere five times**, if they have thus far not been motivated to copy that good example, the chances of them **ever** copying that good example are in many cases **somewhere between 0% and 1%**! In other words, for every one person who commits to copying a good example, after having witnessed that good example five or more times, there will most likely be 99 or more others who have also seen that good example five or more times, but who will never copy that good example.

You think that is not correct?

In the years that you have been in God's Church have you ever become aware of another member who was very conscientious about praying every single day? Did it motivate you to also very conscientiously pray every day, to the point where your conscience bothers you if you haven't prayed that day? How about during your years in the Church becoming aware of at least one member who studies the Bible on a regular basis? Has his or her example motivated you to also study your Bible regularly? Or is serious Bible study (I don't mean superficial Bible reading) something that you did when you first came into God's Church, but you sort of grew out of many years ago? If this does not apply to you, and I certainly don't mean to imply that it must apply to you, are you aware of others in the Church to whom this does apply?

How many young people witnessed for years the faithful examples of how their converted parents conducted their lives, only to walk away from God's Church once they were adults? Do the examples of people who faithfully attend Bible Studies year in, year out, motivate the majority who are not interested in Bible Studies?

How about the examples set by people who carefully avoid junk foods and who strive to stay healthy ... how many people in the Church are motivated to follow such good examples? How about people who make an effort to exercise regularly ... how many people emulate their good examples? Oh yes, a few people will copy such good examples, but for the great majority such good examples mean nothing at all.

If you know of some people in the Church who make a point of fasting for spiritual reasons a few times every year, does that motivate you to also fast a few times every year? Or do you only fast (in addition to Atonement) when the Church requests you to fast, when the Church announces some kind of crisis (which in our age is usually of a financial nature; fasting for more money has to me never seemed like a very worthy reason for fasting).

Now did you perhaps think that the more often someone sets you a good example, the more likely it becomes that you will **eventually** copy that good example? If so, then you had better think again, because that is simply not how our minds works. Understand this:

Whenever we are exposed to a good example (e.g. people who pray regularly, regularly study the Bible, fast several times a year, etc.), which example it is within our power to emulate, then one of two things happens with our minds. **Either** our conscience is moved and we are **motivated to copy that good example** more or less right away. **Or** our mind excuses us from copying that example right away, and as a result our minds become **a teeny-weeny little bit hardened** towards that good example, a tiny little bit calloused towards that good example. And every time thereafter that we are exposed to that good example, if we don't respond to it, then that hardening will only increase. That will continue to the point where our conscience no longer tells us: you really ought to copy this good example.

A good example is "a witness" to people. In most cases that is all it is; in most cases it is never copied. God wants this world to have a witness, knowing in advance that the overwhelming majority of people will never copy those good examples. In this age the majority will always harden their hearts towards whatever good examples they are exposed to, in the same way that the Israelites always hardened their hearts towards God.

We should also understand that God doesn't give us a supermarket-choice of good examples to copy. In some cases God will expose us to **one single good example** (e.g. in the days of Noah), and if we don't emulate that one single good example, then **we will never again be exposed to that type of good example**. We turned down an opportunity to change for the better. And in some cases we don't get a second opportunity to witness that same type of good example.

The Judges in Israel set many good examples. But **almost nobody in the nation was motivated to emulate those good examples**. And so the people of Israel superficially obeyed God while there was a good leader, but they did so without real convictions. And as soon as the good leader had died, they went back to worshiping idols, like they had never stopped. Think of how quickly very many people let go of the right teachings in our age, once Mr. Armstrong had died.

To get back to Othniel, the Bible tells us nothing further about what Othniel did while he was a Judge. So let's move on.

SECOND SERVITUDE = TO MOAB

And the children of **Israel did evil again** in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD strengthened **Eglon the king of Moab** against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD. (Judges 3:12)

Israel once again descended into idolatry. And so God brought another foreign conqueror into the picture.

So the children of **Israel served Eglon the king of Moab 18 years**. (Judges 3:14)

That was the penalty for rejecting the true God. Once they were in trouble, then the people again turned to the true God and cried out for help. So God raised up another Judge.

THE SECOND JUDGE: EHUD

But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, **Ehud** the son of Gera, **a Benjamite**, a man left-handed: and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab. (Judges 3:15)

As with Othniel, so God also gave Ehud a military victory, this time over the Moabites.

So **Moab was subdued** that day under the hand of Israel. And **the land had rest 80 years**. (Judges 3:30)

We are not told that Ehud actually judged the people. But by virtue of Ehud being the recognized military leader of the nation, we can infer that he also fulfilled the role of subsequently judging the people. It is unlikely, however, that Ehud was a Judge for that entire 80-year period. Very likely Ehud died before those 80 years of peace came to an end. And the next Judge was also during this same 80-year period.

THE THIRD JUDGE: SHAMGAR

And after him was **Shamgar** the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines 600 men with an ox goad: and **he also delivered Israel**. (Judges 3:31)

This is all we are told about Shamgar. We are not told that Shamgar actually "judged" Israel. Implied is that the Philistines had become Israel's main enemy, and he killed 600 of them, perhaps even at one occasion. The key statement here is that Shamgar "delivered Israel".

This was still during the previously mentioned 80-year period, as becomes apparent from the next verse.

We are not told to which tribe of Israel Shamgar belonged. In fact, we are told nothing at all about Shamgar, apart from this one verse. That tells us that there was no period of time that applied exclusively to Shamgar, as the following verse also implies. In Shamgar's hands, and obviously with God's help, the ox goad was as effective a weapon of warfare as any sword.

The next verse reverts to Ehud, the previous Judge.

And the children of **Israel again did evil** in the sight of the LORD, **when Ehud was dead**. (Judges 4:1)

The incident with Shamgar very likely took place while Ehud was still alive. So note: here we have an example of the 2nd Judge and the 3rd Judge being contemporaneous.

THIRD SERVITUDE = TO A CANAANITE KING

And the LORD sold them into the hand of **Jabin king of Canaan**, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host *was* Sisera ... And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and **20 years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel**. (Judges 4:2-3)

Same story: Israel sins and God brings on another servitude to a foreign king, this time to a Canaanite nation. This servitude lasted 20 years.

Then the people of Israel cry out to the true God once again. This time we are given a more detailed discussion, describing how God delivered Israel out of this particular oppression. God did so by raising up the next Judge, a woman.

THE FOURTH JUDGE: DEBORAH

The first three Judges had all been strong fighters, who were not afraid to lay their own lives on the line. And God had given each one of them a mighty victory.

But then it got to the stage where there was a dearth of really brave men, men filled with faith that God was on their side. So God used a woman to lead the nation.

And **Deborah**, **a prophetess**, the wife of Lapidoth, **she judged Israel** at that time. (Judges 4:4)

When it tells us that Deborah was "a prophetess", then it doesn't mean that she gave sermons or that she preached to anyone. Being "a prophetess" meant that **she delivered messages from God** to the people of Israel. She communicated God's instructions to the nation.

When it tells us that Deborah "judged Israel", then that means that **Deborah was the arbiter** in all disputes amongst the people, in the same way as the Judges that went before, and the Judges that would come after her. She settled disputes.

She lived in the territory of Ephraim, so in all likelihood she was an Ephraimite.

Now to illustrate the dearth of really brave leaders amongst the men at that time consider the following:

As a prophetess she received from God an instruction to convey to the chief military leader amongst the Israelites at that time, who was named Barak. So she calls the man, and conveys God's message to him. **So how courageous was Barak?** Did he have the courage of an Othniel or an Ehud or a Shamgar?

The answer is: **Barak was somewhat fearful**, and in essence he said: I'll only do it if you go with me. But if you don't go with me, then I'm not going. The fact that Deborah had told him that this was an instruction from God didn't seem to make a difference. So Deborah told him, I'll go with you, but **the journey will not be for your honor**.

Male leadership in Israel was very weak at that time. And **therefore** God used a strong woman to provide the needed leadership. This was an indictment against the men in Israel at that time. There should have been at least a few men with the courage to step forward and accept leadership responsibilities from God. But there weren't any. Shortly I'll mention the powerful lesson we need to learn from this.

But first let's look at the relevant verses.

And she sent and called **Barak** the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said unto him, Has not the LORD God of Israel **commanded**, *saying*, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and **take with you 10,000 men** of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun? (Judges 4:6)

Here is a clear command from God. And all Barak could muster was a conditional reply.

And Barak said unto her, If you will go with me, then I will go: but **if you will not go with me**, ***then* I will not go**. (Judges 4:8)

Why did Barak set this condition? He set this condition because he lacked the faith that God would really help him. What military leader in his right mind says: I will only carry out this military campaign if a certain woman goes with me? What is that woman going to do during his military campaign? She's not going to fight as a soldier, is she? So why insist on her being there? She can pray to God for help from any other location in the country, without needing to be personally present for the battle.

Now the following statement doesn't apply to all Israelite men at that time. But it applies to all those who might have been considered as military leaders. **There was a paucity of real male leadership in Israel at that time.**

Deborah immediately pronounced **a penalty** on Barak for this lack of faith in God. She said:

And she said, I will surely go with you: notwithstanding **the journey that you take shall not be for your honor**; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh. (Judges 4:9)

God would still give the victory to Israel. But the honor of victory, which normally would have gone to Barak, was going to be given to someone else, a woman. We all know the story of Jael, the wife of Heber, hammering a huge tent-peg right through Sisera's temples, nailing him to the ground (see Judges 4:21).

Now afterwards Barak was involved in the victory song that he sang with Deborah (see chapter 5). And the chapter concludes with the statement:

So let all Your enemies perish, O LORD: but *let* them that love him *be* as the sun when he goes forth in his might. **And the land had rest 40 years**. (Judges 5:31)

While Barak accepted the leadership role for the military campaign against Jabin, the king of Canaan, nothing is said about Barak after this song, one way or the other, though much later Paul gave Barak an honorable mention in the very randomly selected list of people Paul presents in Hebrews 11:32.

Since Deborah had been judging Israel before this military campaign, I would assume that she continued to do so after this campaign; and that the 40 years applied to Deborah judging Israel.

Now here is the lesson I referred to earlier.

Idolatry will always produce weak male leadership!

Idolatry will always weaken the man's leadership position and leadership abilities. Even if some men are not involved in idolatry themselves, when the vibes in the whole nation reflect an affinity with pagan customs and a spirit of idolatry, then even those men not involved in idolatry themselves are very likely

to be influenced in some negative ways by those vibes. Think of Lot.

The result: **thanks to idolatry men are no longer men!**

That's what idolatry will do to a nation. And that's what idolatry did in a very forceful way to ancient Israel during the period of the Judges. This lesson also applies to our time today: **idolatry will produce weak men and domineering women**. That's the essence of Satan's religion.

This is not in any way meant to be a reference to Deborah, not at all. She was a strong, godly woman. And God used Deborah at a time when the best of the available men were weak. And Deborah was most assuredly not "a domineering woman".

Rather, think of what idolatry did to King Solomon. When he built all those pagan shrines, Solomon had become weak, and his many wives had become demanding. Solomon is the perfect (very sad) example of what idolatry will do to a man.

So much for Deborah. Let's continue with the story.

FOURTH SERVITUDE = TO MIDIAN

And the children of **Israel did evil** in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them **into the hand of Midian seven years**. (Judges 6:1)

So Deborah and Barak are dead. And, like clockwork, Israel jumps right back into idolatry. This time the Midianites impose a servitude on Israel. And as soon as the crops in the fields are ready for reaping, so the Midianites come up and take everything away, and the Israelites are starving.

So the people of Israel once again cry out for God's help.

And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and **the children of Israel cried unto the LORD**. (Judges 6:6)

God then sent an unidentified prophet to the people, telling the people that they were not obeying God (see Judges 6:8-10).

THE FIFTH JUDGE: GIDEON

After that God sent an angel to a man named Gideon, who was secretly threshing wheat, "to hide it from the Midianites" (verse 11). The angel (the word means "messenger") very likely was Jesus Christ Himself, indicating the importance that God attached to what would happen. Anyway, "the angel" said the following to Gideon:

And **the LORD** looked upon him, and said, Go in this your might, and **you shall save Israel** from the hand of the Midianites: **have not I sent you**? (Judges 6:14)

Gideon asked how he was to do this job. So Jesus Christ again reassured Gideon.

And the LORD said unto him, **Surely I will be with you**, and you shall smite the Midianites as one man. (Judges 6:16)

Now Gideon's father had his own "altar of Baal" in his backyard (see Judges 6:25), and God instructed Gideon to throw down that pagan altar. That was a test God gave Gideon. Gideon obeyed God and threw down that pagan altar and he also cut down a grove associated with the rites of Baal worship (Judges 6:30).

[Comment: The Hebrew word here translated "grove" is "asherah". This word does not refer to trees but to **a carved wooden image** dedicated to the Canaanite goddess Asherah, which image was usually implanted into the ground adjacent to an altar dedicated to Baal. For more information here see the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, under the entry for "ashar", which entry includes the word "asherah". So what Gideon did is destroy both the altar of Baal and the wooden image that was standing by it.]

This angered the local Israelites, who were steeped in Baal worship, and so they wanted to kill Gideon.

Then the men of the city said unto Joash, **Bring out your son, that he may die**: because he has cast down the altar of Baal, and because he has cut down the grove that *was* by it. (Judges 6:30)

It looks like those people took their paganism a lot more seriously than their responsibilities towards the God of Israel.

Anyway, Gideon was certainly a very brave man. He was willing to rely totally on God. Gideon gathered an army of 32,000 men. But for God's purposes that army was far too large. So first Gideon sent 22,000 men home (Judges 7:3), and then he sent a further 9,700 men home. That left Gideon with just 300 men (Judges 7:6-7).

Now the Midianite army consisted of 135,000 men, and Gideon was willing to attack them with his 300 men, based on God's instructions. Gideon had one man for every 450 Midianite soldiers. Those were the odds that God wanted. And Gideon was indeed a brave man.

We know the story of Gideon's night-time attack, in which 120,000 Midianite soldiers died (see Judges 8:10), leaving the fleeing Midianite leaders with only 15,000 men. Once the Midianites were fleeing, then many other Israelites also joined the fight. Gideon and his 300 men were "faint", but they kept pursuing the fleeing Midianites across the Jordan River (Judges 8:4).

It was a resounding victory for Gideon.

The people were so impressed with this victory, that they offered to make Gideon their king.

Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, **Rule you over us**, both you, and your son, and your son's son also: **for you have delivered us** from the hand of Midian. (Judges 8:22)

This shows how steeped Israel had become in paganism. They looked to the human leader. They all knew that Gideon's army of 300 men had destroyed an enemy army of 135,000 men. It was an obvious fulfillment of God's promise in Leviticus 26:8, that "five of you shall chase an hundred, and **an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight**: and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword". But the people didn't give God glory for this victory. No, they just looked at Gideon. This was also the first attempt by the people to have their own king.

Gideon responded correctly to this tempting offer to become king. He pointed the people towards God.

And Gideon said unto them, **I will not rule over you**, neither shall my son rule over you: **the LORD shall rule over you**. (Judges 8:23)

But **then Gideon did something very foolish**. He asked his men to give him all the golden earrings which they had taken from the dead enemy soldiers. He ended up getting 1,700 shekels of gold, a very large amount of gold. Gideon wanted the gold in order to make **an idolatrous religious object**. And so we are told:

And **Gideon made an ephod thereof**, and put it in his city, *even* in Ophrah: and **all Israel went thither a whoring after it**: which thing became **a snare** unto Gideon, and to his house. (Judges 8:27)

Gideon used the gold to make a pagan object, in competition to the Levitical priesthood which God had established. So note: the same man who had torn down a pagan altar of Baal in his city of Ophrah later put up in that same city a different pagan item made of gold. The intent was to bring tourists (i.e. religious pilgrims) to his town, and that intent was certainly achieved.

From God's perspective, however, there was no difference between the altar of Baal which Gideon had torn down, and the golden ephod that Gideon later made. Both were pagan objects. And so that golden ephod "became a snare unto Gideon", meaning that this had **very bad consequences for Gideon**.

Gideon then judged Israel for 40 years.

Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more. And **the country was in quietness 40 years in the days of Gideon**. (Judges 8:28)

Of note is that **Gideon was the first Judge with "many wives"** (verse 30). He had 70 sons with all these wives. In addition, when Gideon traveled, he also had a concubine in Shechem, and that concubine had a son whom Gideon named "Abimelech" (verse 31). So in summary, Gideon had 70 sons with his many wives, and later in his life he had one illegitimate son named "Abimelech" with an out-of-town mistress (i.e. a concubine).

Remember that years earlier Gideon had said that he was not willing to become their king. But the name "**Abimelech**" literally means "**my father is king**". So he gave his illegitimate son the name "my father is king", in a way implying that Gideon was the king after all. That wasn't a good name to give his illegitimate son. It certainly gave that son ideas, like: if my father was the king, then **I should also become king**.

Anyway, Gideon judged Israel for 40 years and then died "in a good old age" (Judges 8:32). And the moment Gideon died, Israel was back into Baal worship, like they had never stopped. The commitment to the God of Israel by the people during Gideon's time had never been more than skin-deep.

And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that **the children of Israel** turned again, and **went a whoring after Baalim**, and made Baalberith their god. (Judges 8:33)

It sounds like they couldn't wait to get back into idolatry.

Now come the problems for Gideon's family. Gideon's illegitimate son tries to kill all 70 of his half-brothers. He manages to kill 69 of them, with the youngest named Jotham being the only one to escape.

Abimelech then set himself up **as king over Israel**, like a fulfillment of the name Gideon had given him, and he reigned for three years (Judges 9:22). Eventually in some fighting against a walled city a woman threw a piece of a millstone on Abimelech's head and then he died (Judges 9:53-54). So within less than five years after Gideon's death 69 of his 70 sons are dead, as is also his illegitimate son Abimelech, who had wanted to be king. At that point only one son was still alive.

The inescapable conclusion has to be that God did not bless Gideon's family. It had been a serious mistake for Gideon to make that idolatrous ephod. And it had been another serious mistake to accumulate so many wives. God's instructions for kings apply to all who would find themselves in leadership positions. They certainly also apply to Judges. For those leaders God had very clearly said:

Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold. (Deuteronomy 17:17)

Gideon clearly transgressed this instruction, as did Solomon a few centuries later. And so Gideon's family was almost totally destroyed very soon after Gideon's death. The illegitimate son became a curse for Gideon.

Let's move on to the next Judge.

THE SIXTH JUDGE: TOLA

Israel had gone back into Baal worship. So God raised up another Judge.

And after Abimelech **there arose to defend Israel Tola** the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in mount Ephraim. And **he judged Israel 23 years**, and died, and was buried in Shamir. (Judges 10:1-2)

The statement "after Abimelech" shows that Abimelech was counted in the chronology.

These two verses are the only information we are given about this man Tola. He was from the tribe of Issachar, and he lived in the area of Ephraim. The statement that Tola "defended Israel" implies another foreign enemy, and a victorious campaign against that enemy. But who else was involved is not revealed. And so the account continues with the next Judge.

THE SEVENTH JUDGE: JAIR

And after him arose **Jair**, a Gileadite, and **judged Israel 22 years**. (Judges 10:3)

Gilead was a part of Manasseh. So Jair was a Manassite. The only other things we are told about this man Jair are the following two verses.

And he had **30 sons** that rode on **30 ass colts**, and they had **30 cities**, which are called Havoth-jair unto this day, which *are* in the land of Gilead. And Jair died, and was buried in Camon. (Judges 10:4-5)

The most outstanding thing about this man was that he had 30 sons, who had one city each. He obviously didn't have those 30 sons from one wife. So Jair also "multiplied wives to himself". What this tells us is that Jair used his status as Judge to personal advantage, and he gave his 30 sons prominent positions within the nation. That's what we usually call nepotism.

Nothing more is said about this Judge.

FIFTH SERVITUDE = TO PHILISTINES & AMMONITES

The Judge has died, and Israel immediately plunges back into idolatry.

And the children of **Israel did evil again** in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of **Syria**, and the gods of **Zidon**, and the gods of **Moab**, and the gods of the children of **Ammon**, and the gods of the **Philistines**, and forsook the LORD, and served not him. (Judges 10:6)

This time the Israelites really went into idolatry in a big way! Not only did they serve Baalim and Ashtaroth, but they also served the pagan gods of **five neighboring nations**: Syria, Zidon, Moab, Ammon, and the Philistines. And serving the pagan gods of the Philistines and the Ammonites didn't stop those nations from invading Israel. The Israelites were in fact serving more pagan gods than any of those nations individually. It seems like they embraced all the pagan religions they could get hold of. Looking at our world today, in this regard it seems like nothing has changed.

So God was again angry with Israel and therefore imposed a fifth servitude on them. This time it was to the Philistines and to the Ammonites.

And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of **the Philistines**, and into the hands of **the children of Ammon**. (Judges 10:7)

This lasted for 18 years.

And that year **they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel 18 years**, all the children of Israel that *were* on the other side Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which *is* in Gilead. (Judges 10:8)

So the Israelites very predictably once again cried out to God for help.

And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, saying, **We have sinned** against You, both because **we have forsaken our God**, and also served Baalim. (Judges 10:10)

But this time God said: I have had enough of your rebellion.

Yet you have forsaken me, and served other gods: wherefore **I will deliver you no more**. (Judges 10:13)

So this time the people realized that they weren't going to get off that easily. So they started to make some **real changes**, for a change.

And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD: and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel. (Judges 10:16)

Once they started to make some real changes, God was getting ready to give them another Judge.

THE EIGHTH JUDGE: JEPHTHAH

Meanwhile the armies of the Ammonites and of the Israelites were gathering near one another, and getting ready to do battle (see Judges 10:17). But the Israelites had a major problem. **They didn't have any man to lead their army**, someone who would control strategy and plan how and where to attack the enemy, etc. They had no leader with any kind of fighting experience.

They were desperate!

There was one man who was known as a strong military leader. But he had been ostracized by his own family, and he had gone to another area to live in peace. That man's name was Jephthah.

Now **Jephthah** the Gileadite was **a mighty man of valor**, and he *was* the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah. (Judges 11:1)

The word here translated as "harlot" may also refer to "a tavern keeper", i.e. his mother may have been a hotel-cum-restaurant/bar owner. But either way, **Jephthah was the illegitimate son, not of the original man named Gilead, but of a much later descendant of Gilead**, who also happened to be named "Gilead".

The original Gilead was a great-grandson of Joseph, and a grandson of Manasseh (see Numbers 26:28-29). Consider that not only Manasseh himself had died before Moses even led Israel out of Egypt, but that Gilead's father Machir very likely died either before the exodus or during the 40 years in the wilderness, and that at best Gilead would have been a contemporary of Joshua. But that was considerably more than a century before the time of Jephthah.

So Jephthah's father was a much later man, who happened to have the same name as the founding father of the Gileadite portion of the tribe of Manasseh.

Anyway, now the leaders of Gilead turned to Jephthah for help. So Jephthah confronted them with the words:

And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, **Did not you hate me, and expel me out of my father's house?** and why are you come unto me now when you are in distress? (Judges 11:7)

So the leaders promise that if Jephthah accepts the job of leading their army, then they would make him the leader over all the inhabitants of Gilead. At this point the Gileadites formed a large section of the tribe of Manasseh, large enough to have their own leaders.

And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Therefore we turn again to you now, that you may go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, **and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead**. (Judges 11:8)

Jephthah accepted their offer.

Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and **the people made him head and captain over them**: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the LORD in Mizpeh. (Judges 11:11)

So Jephthah immediately begins from a position of strength to negotiate with the king of Ammon. Negotiations break down and Jephthah prepares for the battle.

Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over *unto* the children of Ammon. (Judges 11:29)

Here is a vital lesson for us:

Once it is certain that God's spirit is with someone, then victory for that someone is also assured!

In any dispute, be it physical warfare or be it in words and in arguments, if one party has God's spirit and the other party does not have God's spirit, then victory is always assured for the party that has God's spirit. When faced by unconverted opposition, God's spirit will never be on the losing side.

This principle applies as much to us today as it did to Jephthah over 3000 years ago. If God's spirit can be correctly identified in any dispute, then that will also be the side that will win, or the side that is correct. If we can understand this principle, then that will have far-reaching consequences. For example, consider a doctrinal dispute between two parties, where only one party has God's spirit. That will be the party that is correct before God.

[As an aside unrelated to our subject: What if in a dispute it seems clear that **God's spirit is present on both sides**? How can that work? This is only possible in one very specific type of situation, and it will then always work out in a very predictable way. Here is how this goes.

Jesus Christ said that "every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation" (see Matthew 12:25). This should tell us that God's spirit will **never** support **both** sides in any dispute. So the only option here is:

Initially one side of the dispute has factual information which it is aware of, while the other side is not yet aware of this factual information.

If God's spirit is present in the people on both sides of such a dispute, then those who are not yet aware of certain factual information will be very willing to listen to the information the other side will present to them. **A refusal to listen to and then evaluate such information would be proof that God's spirit is not present on that side.** God's spirit will never motivate anyone to refuse to evaluate information they had previously not been aware of. And when they then do evaluate the information that is presented to them by the other side in such a dispute, then **they will all reach the same conclusion**.

That is precisely what happened **in Acts 15**.

Some people had correct understanding, and some people did not have correct understanding. But the people on both sides of this dispute had God's spirit. So first Peter stood up and presented some information for both sides to consider (Acts 15:7). Then Paul and Barnabas presented further information for both sides to consider (Acts 15:12). Then James stood up and both summarized and assessed all the information that had been presented "to the multitude" (see verse 12). And then, where there had been a dispute, **there was now 100% agreement**. And therefore "the apostles and elders with the whole church" (Acts 15:22) agreed on how to proceed from then on.

This does not apply to things of a personal nature, such as likes, dislikes, preferences, personality, etc. But as far as doctrines are concerned, as far as understanding the Scriptures is concerned, when both sides are aware of the identical factual information, then both sides will reach the identical conclusions, if God's spirit is present on both sides. If after considering the identical factual information both sides cannot come to the same conclusions, then this assuredly means that **God's spirit is not present on one of those two sides**. God's spirit will never be "divided against itself".]

Anyway, Judges 11:29 tells us that God's spirit "came upon Jephthah". This tells us that God had made Jephthah the leader, and that **victory for Jephthah was assured**.

But then Jephthah did something **incredibly stupid**!

He tried to make a bargain with God, and not just any bargain. **He made a bargain that entailed**

factors that were totally beyond his own control!

Here is what happened.

And **Jephthah vowed a vow** unto the LORD, and said, If You will without fail deliver the children of Ammon into my hands, **Then** it shall be, that **whatsoever comes 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. (Judges 11:30-31)

First of all, this vow was **not at all needed**. We don't have to bribe God to help us. That's what pagan religions do ... the pagans have to give something to their gods, if they expect their gods to work on their behalf. But if we in sincerity seek to obey God, then God will help us, and bribes can easily be provocative to God.

Second, we can **never** approach God from a position of: if You, Lord, do something for me, then I will do something for You. That approach is an attempt to bargain with God. It is bargaining because **what we want God to do for us is invariably of far, far greater value than what we offer to do for God**. But we expect God to be impressed by what we are offering to do for God, impressed enough to help us.

Third, any attempt to bargain with God is an expression of **a lack of faith**. We feel we can't expect God's help simply because we are in sincerity living our lives in accordance with God's laws and God's wishes. No, if we really want God's help, then we have to offer God something in addition to our regular obedience to His laws. Bargaining with God is always evidence of a lack of faith.

Fourth, in those situations where it was acceptable to make vows (i.e. during Old Testament times), the commitments had to always be **restricted to those things over which the person had full control**! In other words, people back then should only have made vows that applied to **their own actions** and **their own conduct**. Under no circumstances was it right to make a vow that applies to the conduct and the actions of other people.

I realize that we have the example of Jonadab the son of Rechab making a binding commitment for future generations, as seen here:

But they said, We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, **You shall drink no wine, neither you, nor your sons for ever**: (Jeremiah 35:6)

The immediate question here is: is there something wrong with drinking wine? **Why** impose this kind of restriction on future generations? What is it supposed to achieve? Real character can obviously never be legislated onto future generations.

Now while the Rechabites were to be commended for adhering to the commitment that their father had made, **it was a very foolish commitment**. Why impose this unasked-for restriction? What purpose will it serve? Are we to infer that God would prefer us to not drink any wine? What about at the Passover? It was a foolish command that Jonadab had imposed on future generations.

What if today there are descendants of the Rechabites who have no idea of their own genealogical line of descent? They don't know they are Rechabites. Are they also bound? Do they sin if they drink alcohol?

Yes, certainly, Almighty God can require that we make binding commitments to God, going into the future. But even then we cannot make commitments that depend on other people fulfilling those commitments. And we human beings should **never** make commitments that other people will be required

to carry out, or to put into action.

We can only make commitments that apply to our own actions and our own conduct.

Consider this statement.

Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he has charged us, **to drink no wine all our days**, we, **our wives**, our sons, nor our daughters; (Jeremiah 35:8)

Wives always come from other families. What if the women these Rechabites married had **drunk wine before they ever met their future husbands**? What if those women had drunk wine at the Passover every year, and years later married a Rechabite?

Can you see the problems in trying to dictate what people in future generations will be bound to do? Imposing that type of commitment on other people is wrong!

So as far as Jephthah was concerned, the point is this:

Jephthah knew with absolute certainty what animals were acceptable for "a burnt offering", and what was not acceptable for a burnt offering. He knew that you could not just offer any old thing that came along as a burnt offering. There were very specific rules for burnt offerings, and those rules are spelled out in Leviticus chapter 1.

So under no circumstances was Jephthah saying carte blanche that he would offer "as a burnt offering" whatever would come out of the door of his house. Jephthah **knew** that there was absolutely no way that **a bullock** or **a sheep** or **a goat** or **a turtledove** or **a young pigeon** would somehow come out of his front door to meet him. That suggestion is preposterous.

But to attempt to offer anything other than these specific animals "as a burnt offering" would be an extremely serious sin, akin to Cain offering his vegetables to God. And contemplating the prospect of a human sacrifice would be utterly perverse and depraved.

Jephthah knew quite well that a bullock, a sheep, a goat, a turtledove, or a young pigeon were the only animals he could possibly offer to God "as a burnt offering". But none of those animals were about to come out of his front door. And Jephthah knew that.

So under no circumstances was Jephthah even considering "offering as a burnt sacrifice" whoever or whatever might first walk out of his house to meet him. Yes, Jephthah was foolish in making this vow, but **he really wasn't that stupid**!

So we are dealing with **an incorrect translation**, which has unfortunately misled us.

Jephthah actually made **a twofold commitment**, and that is obscured in our translations. Here is what the Authorized Version says:

Then it shall be, that **whatsoever comes 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. (Judges 11:31)

Now the Hebrew verb here translated as "I will offer up" (Hebrew "alah") has a pronoun attached to it as a suffix. That pronoun can mean **either "it" or "him"**. It is always the context that tells us whether it should be translated into English as "it" or as "him". If you know the context, then it is assumed that you

will also understand this correctly.

Consider an analogy in English:

If I say to you: "**go ahead and take a shot**", without a correct context you might not know what I really meant. The context is the key. So if we are at a rifle range, then you would know that I meant for you to shoot a rifle at a target. And if we were standing on a basketball court, then you would know that I meant for you to throw the basketball through the hoop. And if we were standing on a soccer field in front of a goalkeeper, then you would know that I meant for you to kick the ball into goal. And if we were involved in answering difficult questions in a quiz, then you would know that I meant for you to give the answer you thought might be correct. **The context is always the key**. However, irrespective of which circumstances we are in, one thing you would always without question know is that I certainly did not mean for you to pick up a gun and shoot the person standing in front of you. That's **an impossible interpretation**, given that both of us are members of God's Church. Only someone who is totally clueless of the correct context would even consider this "impossible interpretation".

The above analogy very closely resembles the statement Jephthah made. Whether we understand the Hebrew verb with the pronoun suffix to mean "**I will offer it**" or whether we understand this verb to mean "**I will offer** (**to**) **him**" depends entirely on how we understand the actual context in which this verb is used.

Given the fact that Jephthah understood perfectly that only five types of animals could be offered up as "burnt offerings", and given that Jephthah also knew with absolute certainty that none of those five animals were about to come out of his front door to meet him, therefore the meaning "I will offer **it** up" is clearly "**an impossible interpretation**". The context demands that the intended meaning here has to be "I will offer **him**".

Next, there is no word for "for" in the Hebrew text; "for" was simply supplied by the translators. The translators provided that additional word because they were thinking in terms of this statement applying to "whatsoever" would come out of the door of Jephthah's house. But that is not at all what Jephthah was saying. Jephthah was in fact using the pronoun "Him" to refer to God, because Jephthah was speaking about God.

So here is how this verse should be translated correctly:

Then it shall be, that whosoever comes 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 to Him** (i.e. to the LORD) **a burnt offering**. (Judges 11:31)

Can you see the change when we replace the pronoun "it" with the pronoun "him" in this verse? And it should be "Him" because it refers to God.

Jephthah made **two** commitments.

The **first** commitment was that **the person** who would walk out of his front door "**shall surely be the Eternal's**". The **second** commitment was that Jephthah would in addition also bring **a burnt offering**, obviously consisting of one of the animals God had listed as acceptable. These **two bargaining chips** Jephthah presented to God in an effort to secure God's help. And those two bargaining chips were completely independent of one another.

Further, the Hebrew verb participle here translated in part as "**whatsoever**" should really be translated as "**whosoever**", as in: "that **whosoever comes forth out of the doors of my house** ...". "Whatsoever"

is really a misleading translation, because the translators were thinking of this first commitment applying to an animal sacrifice.

The translators did not understand that Jephthah was making two distinct commitments, and therefore **the translators conflated the two commitments together into only one commitment**. That's the type of mistranslation you frequently get when people translate something that they don't really understand.

We need to recognize that **Jephthah obviously fully expected a human being to come out and meet him**! And that is what his statement reflects. In the first part of his vow Jephthah was not at all thinking of animals that could be sacrificed. He was thinking of a human being, a person, an individual.

And when Jephthah said that the first person would surely be "the Eternal's", he was thinking of that person dedicating the rest of their life to the service of God. Jephthah was in fact making a vow along exactly the same lines as the vow that Hannah, the mother of Samuel, made. Notice Hannah's vow:

And **she vowed a vow**, and said, O LORD of hosts, **if You will indeed** look on the affliction of Your handmaid, and remember me, and not forget Your handmaid, but will give unto Your handmaid a man child, **then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life**, and there shall no razor come upon his head. (1 Samuel 1:11)

That is exactly the same type of vow that Jephthah made.

Hannah said: "if ... then I will give him unto the Eternal all the days of his life".

Jephthah said: "if ... then (whosoever that person may be) shall surely be the Eternal's".

"Give him to the Eternal" and "he/she shall surely be the Eternal's" make exactly the same statement. It is about dedicating some specific individual, **other than self**, to a lifelong service of God. It clearly removes freedom of choice from that person.

To put this commitment Jephthah was making into our terms today, Jephthah was saying the following. **If it is a man** that comes out to meet me, then he shall live **the life of a monk** for the rest of his life. And **if it is a woman** that comes out to meet me, then she shall live **the life of a nun** for the rest of her life. Understand that this is only an analogy!

Obviously, they were not literally going to be either a monk or a nun. But if the person who would "surely be the Eternal's" was a woman, she would lose the freedom to marry and have a family. Whoever the person was, he/she would also lose a great deal of freedom regarding traveling and socially interacting with most other people. The person would be devoted to the service of the Eternal, basically living the life of **a servant/slave to the High Priest**.

Think of the example of "Anna, a prophetess", who "departed not from the temple, but served God with fasting and prayers night and day" (see Luke 2:37). That is the type of life to which Jephthah was committing the person who would first meet him. Anna did this of her own free will. But Jephthah impulsively imposed this on **the unfortunate person who would come to meet him**. That represents a huge difference.

So let's just permanently banish the stupid and absurd idea that Jephthah was somehow committing to perform a human sacrifice. That is an extremely perverse idea that the god of this age would want people to believe.

Jephthah was committing himself to dedicating some specific person to **a lifelong service to God**, in the same way that Samuel's mother dedicated her potential son to the lifelong service of God. And **in addition** to that specific commitment Jephthah also committed himself to bringing a burnt offering to God. But these two things are totally independent of one another.

Now even with this problematic translation sorted out, it was still extremely foolish of Jephthah to make such a commitment.

Who could possibly come out of the door of his house to meet him?

The only options were: **Jephthah's own wife**, or **his only child**, or **one of his servants**, or **a visitor** who happened to be in the house. There are no other options for who might possibly be the first person to come out of his house.

Jephthah did not have the right to make that kind of commitment for the life of any of these people. What if his wife had walked out first? What if a visitor had walked out first? When Jephthah made this stupid commitment, he was committing someone else's life to God. How stupid is that?? He was committing someone else to do something for the rest of his or her life (her life, as it turned out).

That is not something that impresses God!

God expects us to commit **our own lives** to Him, not the lives of other people, from whom we have simply taken away their freedom of choice. This latter option is of no value at all before God.

Now how did this happen? Why did Jephthah make this stupid vow?

What happened to Jephthah is exactly the same thing that later happened to David. Satan caught David off guard, and David then did something extremely foolish. As we are told:

And **Satan** stood up against Israel, and **provoked David** to number Israel. (1 Chronicles 21:1)

In spite of getting correct advice from Joab, David would not listen ... until it was too late.

So why did Jephthah make this stupid vow? **He was provoked by Satan** to make that vow, in exactly the same way that Satan provoked David.

The same thing has surely happened to all of us at one time or another: we impulsively did something extremely stupid, and then the undesirable consequences followed, causing us to suffer in some way. Why did we do it? We don't really know. But the truth is that Satan provoked us into doing that, and we succumbed.

There is an important lesson here for us, and that is this:

When Satan manages to provoke us, then we lose the ability to reason soundly and logically. Succumbing to a provocation from Satan always entails the loss of a certain amount of understanding ... until it is too late.

That's the way it was for Jephthah, and that is the way it was for David, and that is the way it has been for every human being who has succumbed to a provocation from Satan.

Let's continue with the biblical account.

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

Now Jephthah is faced with the inevitable consequence of his stupid vow. It hadn't occurred to him that his only child might be the first one to meet him. What if it had been his wife? Now he realizes that Satan has trapped him. But now it is too late.

Jephthah had effectively taken from his daughter the freedom to live her own life as she wanted to live it, to marry and to have children, and eventually grandchildren. Instead, Jephthah had committed his daughter to living as a servant of the High Priest at the Tabernacle of God, with the understanding that she would never be permitted to get married. In some regards this was like the life of a nun.

Now it is one thing if someone of his or her own free will decides to make that kind of commitment, after having carefully thought through all the ramifications for such a commitment. But it is a different thing altogether if someone makes such a commitment that will be binding on another person's life. That scenario turns the other person into a slave, whose free will has been taken away.

One lesson here is: **we should never make any binding commitments that could compel someone else to sacrifice their life for those commitments**. And further, we should never voluntarily make any commitments that apply to us ourselves, **if those commitments are not absolutely required of us**. Here is Jesus Christ's clear instruction:

But I say unto you, **Swear not at all**; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: (Matthew 5:34)

An oath is a commitment. All we are to do is to back up our word, so that our yes and our no mean yes and no. Here is the point:

But let your communication be, Yes, yes; No, no: for **whatsoever is more than these comes of evil**. (Matthew 5:37 AV)

"Whatsoever is more than these" involves unasked-for commitments. And they don't come "of evil"; **they come "from the evil one"**, i.e. from Satan. **Unasked-for commitments are invariably evidence of the person succumbing to a provocation from Satan.**

Think about this the next time you witness someone voluntarily committing themselves to do something that hasn't been asked for. We should always **promise less and do more**, rather than promising more and doing less. It is perfectly okay to do more, without ever having uttered any verbal commitment to do so.

And especially we should never attempt to bargain with God, trying to motivate God to do something for us by offering to do something else for God in return. We should always freely ask God for help, favor, our needs and protection, etc., but without promising to do something in return for God. All that is needed is our resolute commitment to obey God for the rest of our lives. Don't make any unasked-for commitments above that.

To continue with Jephthah's account ...

His daughter showed a considerable amount of understanding for her father's foolish vow. She only made one request: give me two months to bewail my future existence.

And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone **two months**, **that I may** go up

and down upon the mountains, and **bewail my virginity**, I and my fellows. (Judges 11:37)

The issue was not that her life was at stake. The issue was that she would never have the opportunity to get married. And that point is repeated after the two months have expired.

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**. And it was a custom in Israel, (Judges 11:39)

Jephthah's daughter accepted a nun-like existence at the tabernacle, in order to comply with her father's foolish vow.

What we need to also understand is that **in the end that vow killed Jephthah**. Consider that he had a young unmarried daughter. So Jephthah wasn't by any means an over-the-hill old man. He was still a warrior in his fighting strength. Yet **within six years of this incident he died**. He died before his time. The grief over what his stupid vow had done to his daughter killed him.

Judges 12:7 simply tells us: "and Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then died Jephthah the Gileadite".

ONE MORE LESSON FROM JEPHTHAH

There is one other specific application for the lesson we learn from Jephthah's vow. That application is as follows:

Someone wants something from us, or they want us to do something for them. But they realize that there is a good chance that we will say no. So then they try to preempt the possibility of us denying them what they want. They'll say something like:

I want you to promise that you will do what I am going to ask you to do for me. Or words to that effect.

They in effect want us to say "yes" before we actually know what it is that we are saying "yes" to. Have you ever experienced that? Have you yourself ever done that to someone else? A variation of this is when someone, usually a very wealthy or powerful person, promises, unsolicited, to do whatever we ask them to do, or to give us whatever we may ask for (i.e. they have succumbed to a provocation from Satan).

Now children very commonly use this approach to get something from their parents. But **adults also use this approach**. So: whenever some adult says to you "**promise me that you will do what I will ask you to do**" ... what should your response be?

The correct response to any request along those lines is to say: **GET BEHIND ME SATAN!** If that seems a little too strong for you, you could alternatively say: **are you totally out of your mind?** This is the way to deal with adults who use this approach on us.

If you are then inclined to elaborate on your response, you could add:

"Do you understand that you are asking me to make a Jephthah vow? Under no circumstances will I **ever** commit myself to do something, when I have not yet been told what that "something" is (i.e. apart from unconditionally submitting our lives to God)! Do you understand that your line of reasoning is 100%

the way that Satan reasons ... **wanting people to commit before they even know what they are committing to**? For me to agree to do something without first knowing what that something is, would be a clear example of me tempting God. And I don't intend to ever do that!"

Now **if you are dealing with young children** who use this approach, then you ought to explain along the following lines:

You really want that something very badly, don't you? Satan also knows that you want that something very badly. And so **Satan tries to help you** to pressure me to give you what you want to have. And the way Satan helps you is by telling you that I must say "yes" before you even tell me what you want. But it is never good for us to listen to Satan, is it?

God tells me to **never say "yes" to anything,** where I don't yet know what that "anything" is. Only God can make unconditional commitments, because God has all power. But we human beings don't have all power. And therefore it is very easy for people to ask us to do things that are beyond our power to perform. Or the things they ask for are not appropriate to do. Or there are other considerations.

So you must **always first tell me** what it is that you want from me, before I can make a decision. And then when I say "yes", then I know from the start exactly what I am committing myself to do. And when people want a "yes" from us before they reveal what they want, then that is always **very suspicious**. So when you do this, it says that you think I might say "no" if I knew what you are going to ask for. It is a way of trying to pressure me to say "yes". And **if you try to pressure me, then I will not give you what you want**. I don't let anyone pressure me into doing anything. So please don't use this approach again. It is not how God would want you to ask me for the things that you want.

Or words to that effect.

This type of situation, with adults and with children alike, embodies the essence of Jephthah's foolish vow. Never make any commitment without knowing exactly what you are committing to do.

Right, let's move on to the next Judge.

THE NINTH JUDGE: IBZAN

There are only three verses devoted to this Judge.

And after him **Ibzan of Bethlehem** judged Israel. And he had **30 sons**, and **30 daughters**, *whom* he sent abroad, and took in **30 daughters from abroad** for his sons. And **he judged Israel seven years**. Then died Ibzan, and was buried at Bethlehem. (Judges 12:8-10)

Coming from Bethlehem meant that Ibzan was of the tribe of Judah. Ibzan obviously had many wives. For every one of his 30 sons he chose a foreign wife, and he made sure that every one of his 30 daughters married a foreigner. It was a time when intermarriage with foreign nations was quite common. Ibzan flagrantly transgressed Deuteronomy 7:3.

Nothing eventful about his time as a Judge is mentioned.

We might note that Ibzan had his 30 sons and 30 daughters well before he became a Judge, because he died within 7 years of becoming a Judge. His children appear to have been adults before he was a Judge for 7 years. So he had acquired his own large number of wives before he became a Judge. And

since he made a point of getting a foreign wife for every one of his 30 sons, it seems likely that a number of Ibzan's own wives were also foreign women. Ibzan was responsible for a fair share of racial mixing into the tribe of Judah.

THE TENTH JUDGE: ELON

There are only two verses for this Judge.

And after him **Elon, a Zebulonite**, judged Israel; and **he judged Israel 10 years**. And Elon the Zebulonite died, and was buried in Aijalon in the country of Zebulun. (Judges 12:11-12)

We are told nothing at all about Elon, other than that he was a Zebulonite, and that he judged Israel for 10 years.

THE ELEVENTH JUDGE: ABDON

Only three verses are devoted to this Judge.

And after him **Abdon** the son of Hillel, a Pirathonite, judged Israel. And he had **40 sons** and **30 nephews**, that rode on 70 ass colts: and **he judged Israel 8 years**. And Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died, and was buried in Pirathon **in the land of Ephraim**, in the mount of the Amalekites. (Judges 12:13-15)

Abdon was an Ephraimite. It seems that a number of the later Judges had many wives. It also seems that he gave his sons and his nephews privileged positions in Israel. They were somehow important because Abdon had become a Judge in Israel. Seems like they were almost treated like royalty?

He judged Israel for 8 years. This tells us that, like Ibzan, Abdon had all of his 40 sons well before his 8 years as Judge. Abdon had clearly accumulated his many wives long before he ever became a Judge, because he died a mere 8 years after becoming a Judge.

This brings us to the last Judge who is mentioned in the Book of Judges, and that is Samson. The remaining two Judges (Eli and Samuel) are then discussed in 1 Samuel.

THE TWELFTH JUDGE: SAMSON

Once again Israel had gone back into idolatry. So God imposed a servitude to the Philistines, which lasted 40 years.

And the children of **Israel did evil again** in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them **into the hand of the Philistines 40 years**. (Judges 13:1)

This time God went about selecting a Judge who would deliver Israel differently. This time **God selected a set of parents** for the man whom God would make the Judge. So God chose Samson as a Judge before Samson had even been begotten by his father.

An angel told Samson's mother:

For, lo, you shall conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for **the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb**: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. (Judges 13:5)

The first thing that this tells us is that there weren't any Israelites alive at that time, who had the character, leadership and commitment that God was looking for in the next man whom God would choose as a Judge for Israel. This is **the principle** involved in John the Baptist's statement that "... God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (see Matthew 3:9).

The principle here is that **when there isn't anybody available** for a specific job that God has in mind, **then God will plan for a specific individual to be born**, who will then do the job God wants done. God did the same thing with Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 1:5) and with John the Baptist himself (see Luke 1:13-17), planning ahead to have specific men available for specific jobs that God wanted done.

So at the time of Samson there wasn't any man alive who could fulfill the role and the responsibilities that God had in mind for the next Judge. Therefore God planned to have a specific man born.

And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and **the child grew, and the LORD blessed him**. And **the Spirit of the LORD began to move him** at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol. (Judges 13:24-25)

God blessed Samson, and God gave His spirit to Samson. But we should keep in mind that throughout his life Samson had a free will to do what he wanted to do. He used his own free will, and God used Samson "to begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (see Judges 13:5).

So as a young man Samson then sees a young Philistine woman, and he tells his parents "get her for me to wife" (Judges 14:2). We've already seen that marriages with the surrounding nations were very common. So while it was not really desirable from the perspective of Samson's parents, neither was it particularly unusual in Israelite society for a man to marry a foreign woman.

We know the story of Samson killing a lion with his bare hands, and later finding honey in the skeleton of the lion he had killed. At his wedding he then posed a riddle to 30 Philistine men, that involved a bet. Basically it went: solve my riddle and I'll give each of you a change of clothing; if you can't solve it, then each of you gives me a change of clothing. They couldn't solve the riddle, but pressured Samson's wife to find out the answer. Samson then lost the bet. So he went down to the Philistine city of Ashkelon, randomly **killed 30 Philistine men** and took their garments to pay for the bet he had lost.

That was the start. After that he killed more Philistines "with a great slaughter" (see Judges 15:8). So the Philistines came into Judah with a great army, to capture Samson. They pressured the army of Judah to capture Samson for them. So Judah sent 3,000 men to capture Samson for the Philistines, who had threatened to destroy the land of Judah if they refused to capture Samson for them. Samson willingly went with the army of Judah, who had bound him very securely.

The Jews delivered Samson to the Philistines, who were excited to see Samson bound before them. Samson gets angry, God's spirit comes upon him and he breaks the cords with which he had been bound, and then kills 1,000 Philistines with "the jawbone of an ass" (see Judges 15:14-15). The rest of the Philistines fled in stark terror, and never again pressured any Israelites to deliver Samson to them.

Samson then judged Israel for 20 years, during that 40-year servitude to the Philistines (see Judges 15:20 and Judges 16:31). This was different from earlier servitudes to foreign nations, in that apparently there had been no Judges during those servitudes. In those cases whenever a new Judge arose, then that spelled the end of that particular servitude. Not so with Samson. Even while Samson was a Judge in

Israel, the Philistines were still "rulers over the Israelites" (see Judges 15:11). And while Samson killed many Philistines, the Philistines continued to be the rulers throughout Samson's time.

This is an example of an overlap between one servitude and the time assigned to one Judge. Mostly the overlaps would have involved two Judges functioning simultaneously in different locations.

Samson's weakness was his attraction to Philistine women. When he was attracted to a woman in the city of Gaza, they locked the gates and tried to trap him till morning. **Lucky for them** Samson got up at midnight and carried away the city gates for over 30 miles, to the area of Hebron. That was more than a full marathon with a couple of thousand pounds on his shoulders. I say "lucky for them" because if Samson had stayed till morning, and they would have attacked him, he would in all likelihood have killed every single man in Gaza. So they were "lucky" that he only took the city gates (see Judges 16:1-3).

Then Samson got involved with a Philistine woman named Delilah. Eventually the Philistines shaved off his hair, and put out his eyes, and imprisoned him in chains. During his imprisonment his hair grew again. On a special festival occasion for their pagan god Dagon the Philistines brought Samson out to amuse them. Samson then tore down the two foundational pillars for that complex, and in the process killed an additional 3,000 Philistines. Samson also died, and he was then buried in the family burial place.

That concludes the discussion of the first 12 Judges of Israel. They are the only Judges listed in the Book of Judges.

SOME ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Here are some additional comments on this period of the Judges of Israel.

It is not stated from which tribe Shamgar came. So the other **11 Judges** represented **7 different tribes** of Israel: Benjamin (1), Dan (1), Ephraim (2), Issachar (1), Judah (2), Manasseh (3), and Zebulon (1). In addition there was 1 usurper as king from the tribe of Manasseh. The last 2 Judges (Eli and Samuel), covered in the next book, were both from the tribe of Levi.

This broad spread of leadership across **7 different tribes of Israel** (8 if we include Eli and Samuel) shows that God selected a leader wherever God could find one, when such leaders were needed. In general terms there was **a great dearth of real leaders** in Israel during this period. And in one case when there wasn't any possible candidate to fulfill the leadership role God had in mind, **God selected a set of parents** to produce the leader that God was looking for.

This is always one of the consequences of idolatry, that there aren't any men who are real leaders in the sight of God.

Next, of all the Judges there were **only 3** who filled that office for **less than 10 years**. When God appointed leaders in Old Testament times, it was always with the intention that they would fill those positions for one or more decades. For example, the number 40 is associated with Moses, Othniel, Ehud (double 40), Deborah, Eli, Saul, David, and Solomon. Samson was given half of 40 years (i.e. 20 years), and his own willingness to confide in Delilah was the cause for not being a Judge for a longer period of time.

So when 3 Judges held that office for less than 10 years, then that should tell us something. Those 3 Judges were Jephthah (6 yrs), Ibzan (7 yrs) and Abdon (8 yrs).

Jephthah could have been a Judge for a long time, as God had given Jephthah His spirit. But Jephthah's foolish vow killed him ... he died from grief over what his vow had done to his only child. He was a Judge for the shortest number of years. And Jephthah's short tenure is explained by his foolish vow.

That leaves the other 2 Judges with extremely short tenures.

Ibzan was determined to promote intermarriage with other nations. So he made sure that all 60 of his children would intermarry with foreigners. Ibzan was thus guilty of two things: multiplying wives to himself, and promoting intermarriage with other nations. He was not a military leader and he had no victories over any of Israel's enemies. With 60 children from a harem of wives he had clearly been a prominent person in the tribe of Judah before he became a Judge. He was undoubtedly a wealthy man.

While this may not be correct, and I certainly cannot prove it, I would not be surprised if Ibzan had used his wealthy status to insert himself into the position of a Judge, not unlike Abimelech making himself a king. Since that would not have had God's approval, therefore God let the man die 7 years after he had become a Judge. This is just my own speculation. But **there has to be a very serious reason why the man didn't even hold that position for at least 10 years**. God doesn't appoint leaders for very short periods of time, unless the job entails dying as a martyr, or unless those leaders do something to cause their own death.

Abdon had 40 sons and a harem of wives. As with Ibzan, he had to be a wealthy man. And he also had all his children before he became a Judge. Nothing he did is recorded, other than advancing his sons and his nephews.

In fact, **God is not mentioned** in the verses that apply to both Ibzan and Abdon. God is not at all in the picture in the discussion of these two men. While I certainly cannot prove this, I believe that Abdon also inserted himself into the office of a Judge, by means of his wealthy influence within Ephraimite society, the same as I believe Ibzan had done.

Let me explain something.

When God chooses leaders, then they cannot possibly have major character flaws at the time when they are chosen by God!

At the time when God chooses any man or woman for a leadership position, then that person must without fail be a person of **total integrity** before God **at that point in time**. There is no other possibility! God will never, under any circumstances, choose greedy, selfish, idolatrous hypocrites for leadership positions. God will never choose people, who are engaged in breaking His laws, to lead God's people. Having a large number of wives amounts to breaking God's laws.

Now once someone, a man or a woman, has been chosen by God for a certain responsibility, **then** that person may stay faithful to God, or that person may reject some or all of God's ways of conducting ourselves. That's because everybody is a free moral agent until the day we die. And there certainly are examples in the Bible of people who turned out to be bad after God had given them certain responsibilities.

Focusing on just the matter of polygamy for a moment: when God first chose David and also Solomon, neither one was involved in polygamy. The same is true for Gideon. These men only "multiplied wives to themselves" after they had been chosen by God. And 70 of Gideon's 71 sons were killed within 5 years of Gideon's death. Much later Ahab's 70 sons met a similar fate (see 2 Kings 10:1-7).

The way people are at the point in time when God is looking at them to perhaps use them in some leadership capacity, will influence whether or not God will choose them. Think of someone like Jeroboam, who was humble when God first chose him, but who became an idolater once he was king.

Now both Ibzan and Abdon had many children by many different women **before** they became Judges. That was a reflection of their character. They were both influential people within their respective communities. And **I don't believe that God would have chosen them for the responsibility of judging the nation**. They didn't die in warfare, and they didn't commit suicide, and they weren't murdered. So the very short time (7 or 8 years) for which they held the position of Judge tells me that **God wasn't the one who gave them that position**. And therefore we are also not told anything at all about their time as Judges. Think of God allowing Athaliah to usurp the throne for 6 years (see 2 Kings 11:3). Ibzan and Abdon are in the same basic time-range as Athaliah.

Both of these men had significant character flaws before they even became Judges. The number of children which these men had are not mentioned to praise them. They are mentioned to expose character flaws. And that tells me that **they became Judges through their own scheming**, rather than them being chosen by God. Can I prove this? No! This is my own personal assessment of the descriptions we are given.

Next, we should note that **at no time** during the period of the Judges did leadership pass **from father to son**. No Judge was a son of a previous Judge. **The two instances** after the Book of Judges where there was a half-hearted attempt to pass leadership on to the sons of a Judge (i.e. first to the sons of Eli, and then to the sons of Samuel) **were both miserable failures**.

The lesson for us should be clear: kingly leadership is passed on by birth from father to son, yes. But **spiritual leadership**, which is controlled by God, **has never at any time been passed on from father to son! Never!**

Not with Moses, and not with any of the Judges in the Book of Judges, and not with Eli, and not with Samuel ... **and not with any father-son team in our age today**!

We've tried it in our age, haven't we? But it never works, and the reason for that should be obvious. Whenever a man designates his own son as his **spiritual successor**, then that is always based on **the unmitigated bias** the man has in favor of his own son. **It is never God's choice!** Never has God passed on spiritual leadership from a father to a son.

This doesn't mean that the son may not be a converted Christian, not at all. But being a converted member of God's Church is not the same as being chosen by God to take over the spiritual leadership role within the Church. God could have chosen Caleb to succeed Moses, because Caleb was also a dedicated servant of God. But God didn't do that, and so God chose Joshua, who wasn't even from the same tribe as Moses. The closest family link in the line of Judges was that Othniel was a nephew and son-in-law of Caleb, but he was not Caleb's son, and Caleb himself had not been a Judge.

Comparisons to the priesthood, which was passed on from father to son are misapplied. The 144,000 priests in the millennium will not have their priestly offices because of inheritance from their fathers. And spiritual leaders amongst God's people are not priests! (This is thoroughly explained in my 52-page article "Are There Any Priests Today?".) So appeals to the priesthood for justifying passing spiritual leadership on from father to son are misapplied.

Consider also that even while there were priests of the line of Aaron, God used prophets and seers as spiritual leaders. A few of the prophets happened to be priests, but none of them were the High Priest of

their generation. And most prophets were not from the tribe of Levi. Yet they were the men God used as spiritual leaders amongst His people, at a time when the priesthood of Aaron was still very much in existence.

Each father-son team can think: **we are the exception to the rule**. But that is not correct! When any spiritual leader amongst God's people seeks to pass his own leadership position on to his own son, then that is never of God. **Spiritual leadership over God's people is never a family business.** But that is how it is treated, when a leader's son is carefully groomed from Day 1 to eventually take over his father's position.

This never worked at any time in the Bible!

And that is one more vital lesson from the Book of Judges. And that is about all we need to cover at this time.

Frank W Nelte