

APRIL 30

Some of what is written here in Judges isn't so much "the history of the nation," as it is biographical sketches of how being lost on earth damages the soul. There is a price tag associated with living far from God, whether you are a believer or an unbeliever. Our sickness is so grave and deep that to think we can live a day without God, connected intravenously to His Word, listening every moment to His Spirit to be led by the Spirit, is just crass foolishness and unbelief. It shows what we really think - that all this Jesus stuff is good, but not really vitally necessary. We could easily end up like the men we will be reading about, not realizing that God put their stories here, publicly, in plain view, so that we could learn the lessons and avoid their tragic mistakes.

Notice, too, that almost nothing is said about Israel as a unified nation. The further you go, the more provincial things become. Rather than tribes banding together to help one another, they are a nation in name only. So where was that unity supposed to be if they didn't have a king? They were to be unified around their common worship at one place where all the men of Israel were to gather three times a year: at the tabernacle. Once they lost their worship, they lost their unity. The same thing happens to us, but we are smarter in our disobedience. They worshiped idols, visibly, and neglected the only true worship that united the nation and people. We worship Sundays, often singing the same songs that everyone else is singing. But our worship isn't supposed to be around a building or a service; it is around our Savior and His mission, the Great Commission.

Israel's worship was daily, in the offerings for sin, reminding them of the kindness of God and the depth of their need. Their worship on the feast days was in remembrance of their history of deliverance.

Our worship and following Jesus in the Great Commission does all of this for us. As we go out we are reminded of grace and His kindness in our salvation. In this recognition, we bring the message of the work of our Savior, the power of which brings fruit and redemption. To worship on Sunday, and not worship in going forth in the harvest, might mean there are other things more important to us that fill our needs and desires and you can guess what the Bible calls those things. And so we end up in the same place as the people we're reading about. They knew the stories, but they didn't know the Word or the God who wrote it. We need to constantly fight against that happening to us.

Judges 11-12

Judges 11

Vs. 1-11 Notice that Jephthah's life history seems similar to Abimelech's, and that he also surrounded himself with worthless company. That he *went out* means he and his merry men robbed people and towns outside of Israel. He gained a reputation, and part of his résumé said he was good at fighting and leading men.

Notice, too, that more is said about Jephthah and what he knew, or didn't know, than about his battle. The battle against the Ammonites is only vs. 32-33.

Vs. 4-11 You don't read anywhere here that the elders of Gilead sought God regarding their decision. Apparently Jephthah was ceremonially made the leader of the people of Gilead at Mizpah and Jephthah spoke to the Lord there. The only thing noteworthy about this place was the covenant Laban and Jacob made there.

Vs. 12-28 Notice that Jephthah sought a peaceful solution first. His understanding of events and time (300 years) is pretty accurate. If you sense that he knew his history well, then take note of

what follows. Jephthah didn't know the Lord well at all. Again, we'll see that knowing "about" the stories is not a substitute for being in the Word and knowing the Lord through His Word.

V. 24 In a way, it seems like Jephthah makes this a duel of the gods. This reasoning would have worked well if Israel had been obedient. If they were ignoring God, God would ignore them and it would make it look like the other gods are bigger. Just a caution here, notice that you could understand that Jephthah really believed that Chemosh had given the Ammonites their land. He doesn't call Chemosh a false god.

Vs. 29-40 It is hard to find any verses in Scripture, next to each other, which are so stunning and frightening, than vs. 29-31. The Spirit came upon Jephthah. That's good. Jephthah makes a vow to God to offer the first person that comes out of his house as a burnt offering to God. How can that be? It shows that religious sincerity can be totally wrong and ignorant of God, even in the service of God. We see this even today among Christians, and we still do not grasp the power of sin and the need for each of us to be in God's Word. Listening to a sermon and stories about God or singing about God doesn't do the same thing as sitting together with Him, looking at what He has said. It is the difference between looking at a pill and actually taking it.

Vs. 34-40 I have done all the gymnastics with these verses trying to get Jephthah off the hook, imagining that there was a group of people dedicated to God, like Samuel, who served at the temple for life as virgins, like nuns, but these people didn't exist. Also, vows could be broken that were in violation of the law. The solution would have been simple. According to the law, Jephthah could have bought or redeemed her with money so that she didn't have to fulfill this vow. If he had only known the Bible. The most simple and obvious reading of the text is that Jephthah had a simple, sincere, second-hand understanding of God and he had mixed the paganism of his culture into it. The worship at the tabernacle had failed and the Levites were not doing their jobs. Jephthah was a sincere victim of extreme ignorance in his worship and understanding of God.

I say this is all tragic, in light of guys like Jephthah and Samson, being in Hebrews 11:32 in the "Hall of Faith." Their faith made them acceptable and pleasing to God, and they did amazing things, but their ignorance and sin utterly ruined their lives.

I think God is trying to make a strong point here and in the three stories that follow. People can call upon God sincerely and follow Him sincerely, yet His own people can still be ignorant of Him. The same Corinthians who had the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14 were the same people worshiping demons in chapter 10. When Jesus says that we need to hear His words and do them, He is commanding us with profound simplicity. We need to know His words. The Bible is meant to teach us about God, about our Lord, to know His heart and mind and plan and will. Then, we need to do what He says. The reality is that many believers don't know His Word, but they know something about it, so they assume they know Him and His will. This "feeling" about God actually becomes an extension of their own wills and desires and plans. Being a disciple means having one Lord, one Word, one Spirit and one command to follow.

Judges 12

Vs. 1-7 Do you remember the Ephraimites who came after Gideon to make trouble? Their concern in v. 1 is that they wanted a share in the plunder. This time they picked on the wrong guy.

V. 6 Can you imagine losing 42,000 people in a single battle? At the end of Numbers, over 300 years before, the Ephraimites numbered about 32,000. Who knows how the tribe might have grown in this time, but it probably means that losing 42,000 men reduced the tribe to near extinction.

V. 7 just seems sad to me.

Vs. 8-15 These guys are all localized even though it says they judged Israel. Notice that two of these men were rich with children and donkeys, meaning they were also very rich with stuff.

Notice that Abdon was buried in the hill country of the Amalekites. The Amalekites would not have been there, if Israel had followed God.

Today's reading is why, as disciples, we need to follow Jesus in the harvest making disciples, who make disciples. Discipleship is growth in Christ in His Word. Jesus summed it up like this in John 15:7-8, "*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.*"

Without loving the Lord and following Him in the Word and obedience, we are really only following our own desires and making our own god. Even believers get lost on earth, forget who their Lord is, and they forget there is a harvest.

John 1:1-28

This is one of the most amazing chapters of the Bible.

Vs. 1-5 The Jehovah's Witnesses insert an "a" in "...and the Word was *a* God." It is totally wrong, but they use it to support their view that Jesus was once Michael the Archangel who was turned into a god.

Notice that Jesus was the maker of all things. And He is life. And knowing Him gives all men *light*.

I was reading this morning that the Pharisees told Jesus to rebuke His disciples, and Jesus told them that if the disciples were silent, the very stones would cry out. God the Son, the maker of all things and the life and light of men was entering Jerusalem and they couldn't see it. How sad.

Vs. 6-8 A big point that John makes involves the witness of John the Baptist. John was the fulfillment of not only Old Testament prophecies, but He was also the final OT prophet.

Vs. 9-13 If you understand this, you see that there is no room for Islam or any other religion. The one Creator came to His creation. Because of the power of sin in us, mankind couldn't see He was the Creator, and Jesus' own family and nation rejected Him. But salvation became open to all who would receive Him. Verse 13 shows that being born again is a creation by God and has nothing to do with us, other than receiving Him.

Vs. 14-18 John never recovered from this amazing visitation. Neither should we. The wonder of these verses needs to live in us.

Notice in v. 15 that John and the Spirit are making a point that John the Baptist said that Jesus was the Christ.

Vs. 19-28 This event would have happened at least 40 days after Jesus was baptized. After the temptation in the wilderness, Jesus returned to John, victorious. John had become such a phenomenon that this was an official delegation sent to question him. He not only said he wasn't the Messiah, he said he was the herald who went before the Messiah.

V. 26 Jesus was already back from the wilderness. John knew He was there.

V. 28 This Bethany was on the east side of the Jordan.

We are not finished with the witness of John the Baptist. Just like John the Baptist, our only reason for being here now is to give praise and testimony to our Lord in the harvest.

Psalm 101

This psalm begins sunny, but ends darkly in judgment, or does it? I think this was written by David after he was the king.

Vs. 1-3 David is committing his life to following the Lord in the influences of heart and his conduct in his house.

Vs. 4-5 He also declares that he will not have close associates who do not follow the Lord. He would also be a judge for the innocent, helping them against the arrogant and proud. Too bad he didn't keep to this. We'll see that the more political David became, the more compromised his heart became.

V. 6 David is promising to show God's kindness to these people in obedience to the Word.

Vs. 7-8 David might be overstating his devotion to keeping Israel worshiping God and keeping the people holy.

We tolerate wickedness in our lives, and out of necessity, in our towns, cities and world. But shouldn't there be a desire to see wickedness done away with? That may not be our heart, but it is the heart of God to judge all wickedness. Here is something that Jesus said regarding this judgment, and you'll see that the result is kind of unexpected. It is unexpected in that none of us realizes the dampening power that sin and wickedness actually have on a person, a family, a town, city, country or on the world in general.

The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (Matthew 13:41-43)

Removing the wicked allows the righteous to shine like the sun.

Proverbs 14:13-14

When I read this, I think of what Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." We can fool others, but God knows what is in our hearts. By reading through the Bible like this, learning more about God and His heart, the Spirit is changing you and giving you a different treasure in your heart, out of which you learn to speak and live. Again, it is all about hearing and doing.