

## **MAY 4**

Like most people, I love things in chronological order. In fact, I assume things are in chronological order. When I read the Chronicles of Narnia to my kids, I read book six to them first. Before I read the Lord of the Rings, I made myself read The Hobbit first, just to get the right order of things. People who don't write things in chronological order are "artsy," and will be tolerated if they do a good job and get stuff straightened out in the end and don't lose us in between.

In Judges, God is "artsy," in that the final two stories, chronologically, would have been placed toward the beginning. Apparently He felt this was a better idea. Interestingly, the two stories are in chronological order to each other. So, again, before we read Judges for today, it is good to know that this event happened within the decades immediately after Joshua's death. Look at Judges 20:28, Phinehas is the high priest. It is hard to give an exact time, but it is within the life time of Phinehas, who probably was in his 30's or 40's when Joshua died. This will make a few things we read today a little more understandable. It will make other things we read very alarming.

### **Judges 19-20**

#### Judges 19

Vs. 1-20 There are some similarities to the previous story in that this man was a Levite. This "wife" had been unfaithful to him, but he wanted her back, so all was well. Bethlehem is mentioned in both stories and Ephraim is mentioned in both stories. Both stories tragically involve an entire tribe departing from God.

I always wonder when I read this why 10 verses are devoted to the guy trying to get away from his father-in-law. I guess it might have to do with the sense of hospitality or the lack of purposefulness in life. Apparently the guys enjoyed each other's company.

V. 12 This verse is utterly ironic.

Vs. 14-15 In any event, once they arrive in the town square of Gibeah, you start getting that "Sodom and Gomorrah" feeling. No one offered them hospitality, making it necessary for them to remain exposed in the town square.

Vs. 16-21 This is exactly what happened when Lot found the two angels sitting in the square of Sodom.

Vs. 22-26 So here is a city of Israel, of Benjamin, that has gone "Sodom." How did that happen? Apparently it wasn't known far and wide, or this man would have stayed among the Gentiles in Jerusalem (Jebus).

No angels were there to save them so the man gave the mob his unfaithful wife rather than the virgin daughter of his host. Whatever happened to protecting the womenfolk? Apparently they didn't watch westerns back then. I find this repulsive all the way around.

Vs. 27-30 This Levite seems scared and heartless to me. Sending around "pieces" was a custom to call all the tribes together. It meant that if they didn't answer the call and show up, they would wind up like the animal. Later, King Saul will call Israel together using the pieces of an ox. That these were the pieces of his maid-wife, a human, made this shocking and alarming. It got everyone's attention.

Notice the mention of Egypt. This is another clue that this generation was still near to the Exodus and the generation of Joshua.

## Judges 20

Vs. 1-7 There are some interesting things here. First, notice the mention of *from Dan to Beersheba*. This means from north to south. Apparently the tribe of Dan (and yesterday's event) had already taken place and the tribe of Dan had migrated from the middle of Israel to the northernmost point. Just like in Romans 1:18ff, the defection from God took place before the moral defection.

If you look at the map you'll see that the people gathered before the Lord at Mizpah, south of Shiloh and just four miles north of Gibeah. This doesn't mean the tabernacle was there. It means that they gathered together to inquire of the Lord. Apparently the tabernacle was still eight miles north at Shiloh. Next to Mizpah was Bethel, and it seems that the ark of the covenant was in Bethel for some reason. You might think that Phinehas brought the ark to Bethel because it was closer to the battle, but v. 27 gives you the idea that the ark was there on a permanent basis. This was not normal.

Vs. 8-17 The repetition that caught my eye in this chapter was *as one man*. This is another one of those things that shows it was early in the history of Israel. Later, during the time of Samson and Samuel, it is hard for the nation to do anything unified. Samuel, in leading Israel, will bring unity to the nation in worship.

Just the mention of Israel having 400,000 men and Benjamin having only 26,000 gives you a funny feeling. It is almost a shock to see that Benjamin wouldn't hand over the men of Gibeah. I guess they had confidence in their 700 special forces guys.

Vs. 18-25 The people did the right things in assembling and questioning God (Phinehas and the Urim and Thummim) and seeking only to punish the guilty in Gibeah. So, a huge question is, "Why did God tell Israel to fight Benjamin twice, but allow them to lose twice?" In those two battles, Israel lost 40,000 men. Why did God allow them to lose twice?

Vs. 26-28 I think that God wanted to bring the people to a real place of desperate dependence and humility. Actually, it is probable that all of the tribes were sinning at this point. The offerings would have been to confess and cleanse their own sin. I think God allows us to meet disaster for the same reasons. It is often after a defeat, that we become desperate and honest in seeking God's will and mind, and we begin confessing our sins. The sacrifices should have come first. Having hearts cleansed should have been the first priority.

I get the feeling that the people were so desperate, they finally decided to try to do everything according to the book. Just for trivia, God didn't spare David either when David decided to transport the ark on a wagon. After he lost one man in that adventure, David went to the Bible and figured out how God wanted it done, with the Levites carrying it with poles and with sacrifices and offerings for sin and for thanks.

Notice that this is the first mention of Phinehas and notice that the people moved from Mizpah to Bethel where the ark was located. Something is not right here. When we get to Judges 21:4, the people will build an altar at Bethel to sacrifice. If the tabernacle was there, they would have had an altar. But apparently the altar they were using at Bethel was just stones, and after the sacrifices were finished, it needed to be rebuilt. This is all hard to grasp because Israel was forbidden to sacrifice anywhere but at the tabernacle and then only on one altar. And, only the priest could do the sacrificing. The feel of this whole thing is wrong.

Vs. 29-48 When everything was finished, Israel had lost 65,000 soldiers, plus Israel destroyed at least 20,000 people in the towns of Benjamin. Only 600 people of Benjamin were living. Just think, an entire tribe was reduced to 600 men. In Numbers 26:41, before the people crossed the Jordan, Benjamin numbered 45,600 people. This means that Israel killed at least 45,000 men of Benjamin.

### **John 3:22-4:3**

This is another one of those rich sections of Scripture with the gospel in it.

Vs. 22-24 No one knows where this was, but it is supposed that it was directly east of Shechem (see the map for Judges) on the Jordan River. Many of John's disciples stayed with him and became "johnites," instead of followers of Jesus.

Vs. 25-30 This conflict led John the Baptist to set the record straight.

V. 27 This is a very interesting statement for church planters and for those who puzzle over church growth, especially for churches who are "right," but reaching no one, criticizing bigger churches who are "wrong," but ministering to people. Obviously, there are some standards for evaluation of truth and error, but within the believing church, this is a good statement to keep in mind before we blast our brother.

Jesus will use this "bride" imagery later, after Matthew's dinner for Jesus, to ease the tension with these disciples as the Pharisees try to pit John's followers against Jesus. Somehow this talk got back to Jesus and He used it.

V. 30 This is the famous statement that older church leaders need to be preparing to make. Making disciples means equipping and installing the next generation of leaders, now. For older leaders their joy should be complete, not in holding power until it is pried from their lifeless fingers, but from seeing those who they have trained go beyond them. In this case, John hadn't mentored Jesus; he had gone before Him and borne witness to Him.

Vs. 31-36 These verses seem to be a commentary by the writer, the apostle John. What a meaningful statement in such few words. Notice how true belief is defined in the context of these verses. To *believe* in, but not *obey* Jesus, is not to *believe*. Jesus will really expand on this on His next Passover visit in John 5.

Notice that not to *obey/believe* Jesus is equal to having never seen life. How ironic to have lived on earth for years, but never to have seen life.

John 4:1-3

This is setting us up for tomorrow. This is why Jesus left Judea and went to Galilee. Tomorrow we will see that Jesus took the short-cut.

As disciples following our Lord in the harvest, our privilege is in seeing someone come to Christ and finally to know life. Nothing beats that. Then to see them become a disciple who makes disciples, who makes disciples in the harvest is what makes our joy full.

### **Psalm 104:24-35**

Continuing to expound on God's glory from yesterday.

Vs. 24-26 This is sort of like what God says in Job. His wisdom in all aspects of creation is beyond our understanding.

Vs. 27-30 Every creature on the earth is utterly dependent on God, regardless of their number or their obscurity. The same holds true for mankind.

Vs. 31-32 This shows that the joy of the Lord and the fear of the Lord can stand side by side.

Vs. 33-35 Verses 33, 34 and the end of 35 show the proper response of people to God. The sinners and the wicked are those who ignore God. You can understand why the psalmist thinks they should be removed. When they are removed, then all of mankind will be totally free to give God the glory He is due.

Matthew 13:41-43 *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.*

**Proverbs 14:22-24**

In v. 24 I understand that wisdom is the wealth and crown of the wise. There are a lot of people who are wise in Christ and "rich," who are not rich in money; and many of them live in the third world making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples, hungering now for the sake of His kingdom.