

....Slew Him at the Passages

<<< Judges 12:1 – 13:25

~ In this leg of our Spiritual Safari expedition through the entire Word of God we're going to examine a spiritual disease in the tribe of Ephraim. The infection is jealousy, and it leads to defection later on. When the northern kingdom of Israel splits from the southern kingdom of Judah in the days of Solomon, we will see Ephraim at the center of the rebellion. Jealousy is likely the poorest of all spiritual conditions; it's a cancer that, within the church, is the primary reason for most of the problems. It produces every conceivable malicious symptom. Paul said to the Philippians, "... let nothing be done through strife nor vain glory." Those are tantamount to vanity and envy; and are the root of the trouble that inevitably bubbles up within any modern Christian organization. When a complaint is lodged about the way the church is being run – or when the preacher is opposed or gossiped about – it is obvious someone has become jealous; you can just write that all down. Well, that's the problem Israel has in this section of Scripture and Jephthah must protect himself from it, because they are threatening to burn his house down with him in it....

XII

1 And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward, and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee? we will burn thine house upon thee with fire.

2 And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at great strife with the children of Ammon; and when I called you, ye delivered me not out of their hands.

3 And when I saw that ye delivered me not, I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon, and the LORD delivered them into my hand: wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day, to fight against me?

4 Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim: and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites.

5 And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay;

6 Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.

~ So, this is a time in Scriptural history when your Hebrew had better be pronounced with the correct accent. Many English-speaking people find it difficult to properly pronounce Spanish, and other foreign words. I studied French and I love that language; but I can't speak it as they do. The first time I heard a true Frenchman speak I thought it was a joke. The way he spoke was not the way I spoke French. Well, it turns out he was right, and I was wrong. It's difficult for a non-native to frame a language the way a native does. "Shibboleth" was pronounced by foreigners without the proper emphasis on "h" – and that was bad – in fact, it meant death....

7 And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then died Jephthah the Gileadite, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.

~ Alright, Gilead is on the east bank of the Jordan River and, now that Jephthah is dead and buried, three Gileadite judges rise to power who, collectively added together, amount to nothing. What we have are three brain dead vegetables doing nothing but being brain dead on a flower strewn path. Actually, they all did something, but that something wasn't judging Israel properly, correctly and completely; and they did not do any service to Israel nor God. None of them did what they should have done.

The first is from Bethlehem; and Bethlehem was in Judah in the south. This was Jephthah's successor but, instead of being busy getting his thirty daughters some husbands, he devoted all his time to getting his son's their wives. It seems the daughter detail was neglected during his brief seven-year rule. Obviously, he didn't have any time for judging Israel. He appears to be a real family man, that's for sure; and it may sound honorable, but it's not what he was called to do.

We have an overload of religious nonsense preventing vast multitudes of contemporary Christians from making a proper engagement with Christ. Many people feel an extreme loyalty and duty to their biological family, which can be wonderful and honorable. But it's not always wonderful; and it is RARELY honorable. When you break your engagement to the Word of God and the Lord Jesus Christ as a result of that earthly family loyalty, you are worshipping them as an idol. Those are usually the worst, most spoiled-rotten ilk produced in society. Our families can be shown love without neglecting that which God is calling us to do. I'm afraid this may be the number one cause of Christian Tragedies. Certain priorities must come first and, my friends, the Lord DEMANDS to be first in your life. When your family sees you placing the Lord Jesus Christ first in your life for the right reasons, they will know you love them. That's how it works. This happens to be a critical tenet of truth in Holy Writ....

8 And after him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel.

9 And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters, whom he sent abroad, and took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years.

10 Then died Ibzan, and was buried at Bethlehem.

11 And after him Elon, a Zebulonite, judged Israel; and he judged Israel ten years.

12 And Elon the Zebulonite died, and was buried in Aijalon in the country of Zebulun.

~ That's about as brief of a biography of a judge we have in the entire Word of God. This man doesn't even have sons and daughters mentioned – if he had any. I guess he just sat around twiddling his thumbs during his decade long rule. The next judge, Abdon, outdid old man judge Jair; whom we met in chapter ten. Talk about keeping up with the Joneses – or the Jair's in this case. Jair only had thirty sons riding around on their asses; but here, this man has more than twice as many family losers' sitting on their donkey's all the time. This man with his ilk would have formed a parade of seventy-one riding out of town. It was all just a prideful show that, once again, contributed nothing to the nation Israel. The borough – called the donkey or ass colt – is known as the mockingbird of the desert. The only thing donkey's do is bray; and that's about what Israel got from this man – a whole lot of braying – no praying. So, that makes three judges spanning about twenty-five years who were simply passed over in seven short verses. My, how time flies. The "hoop of history" – our safari philosophy of history – established in our very first report from Judges, is spinning like a top again....

13 And after him Abdon the son of Hillel, a Pirathonite, judged Israel.

14 And he had forty sons and thirty nephews, that rode on threescore and ten ass colts: and he judged Israel eight years.

15 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.

XIII

1 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 forty years.

2 And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not.

3 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son.

~ Alright, this judge had a glorious opportunity; he is one who was outstanding and whom we can't just pass by. Everything was propitious for a prosperous career for this judge. Unfortunately, Samson will end up a complete and tragic failure. We're going to raise some serious questions about him as a sinner as we consider our next several reports. Three important items to note about Samson as we move along are: (1) we have the secrets of his success given to us (2) we learn the secrets of Samson's strength and (3) the secret of Samson's failure is presented, also.

Between useless judges and forty years in the hands of their most hated enemy, the Philistines, we have covered sixty-five long and very bad years in Israel's history so far in this report. So, God is going to raise Samson to be the judge now. This is also the last time we will read about the children of Israel "... doing evil in the sight of the Lord." The small civil war that took place in Jephthah's day will escalate into atrocity. We're going straight into darkness from this seventh and final apostasy and end Judges in complete chaos and confusion. Israel is conquered by the enemy, and they will only be partially delivered by Samson.

Moving on, our safari through Judges has been in the southern region heretofore; but now, we go all the way to the farthest northern location in the tribe of Dan. The Philistines remained largely in the southern and coastal regions; in what is called the Gaza strip presently. Samson, the Danite, will travel way down into the south where we will see him begin as a judge....

4 Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing:

5 For, lo, thou shalt 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.

~ The birth of Samson was as miraculous to his parent's as Isaac was to Abraham; or Joseph and Benjamin was to Jacob. Before Samson was even born, God marked him out and raised him up to execute a gigantic task –

delivering Israel. Israel is in a very bad way – again – as God had delivered them into the hands of the Philistines because of their sins and willful disobedience.

The Angel of the Lord, Whom we believe to be the pre-incarnate Christ Jesus on safari, instructs Samson's mother that her baby is to become a Nazarite. You will recall when we studied the sixth chapter of the book of Numbers, the vow of the Nazarite was a three-fold vow: (1) a Nazarite was not to touch any wine nor strong drink. In fact, they weren't to even consume grapes or go into a vineyard. Grapes, in the Word of God, represents the joy of the Lord. A Nazarite was to find their joy directly in the Lord. Today, believers are told to not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit. See, one of the fruits of the Spirit of God is joy, friends! We are to find our joy in the Lord and not in ANYTHING down here on the earth or of the earth (2) the Nazarite was never to cut his hair or shave any part of his body. Paul will later say, "... if a man hath long hair it is a shame unto him!" I'm not going to reconcile those two seemingly contradictions for you here – because YOU aren't a Nazarite – but a man with long hair today is nothing but a shameful sissy. A Nazarite was willing to bear shame – for God (3) A Nazarite was NEVER to touch any manner of a dead body. These conditions signaled there was no natural claim on a Nazarite man. These were men who put God first – even above relatives and loved ones.

The Lord Jesus makes it perfectly clear that, unless we deny father and mother, we aren't able to follow Him. That doesn't mean ignore or neglect them; what it means is: we are to put Christ FIRST. I'm afraid a total and complete ignorance of the Bible today amongst believers has caused them to absolutely lose sight of basic Bible facts in this modern churchy age of misinformation and disinformation we find ourselves in. Samson was to be God's man; and success in the Lord was to be the secret of said success! Only as Samson performed his God-appointed tasks could he accomplish success. Well, Samson never completely attained. Verse five says Samson would "begin" to deliver Israel. That means he didn't finish. It also means success knocked on Samson's door, but he only ever began everything; never saw it through. Samson was the "jack of all trades" – master of none.

We have a whole bunch of Christians like this who begin so many things, but never follow through. Paul asked the Galatians, "... ye did run well, who did hinder you?" Many people begin to read and study the Bible, but then they just quit one day for no apparent reason. They drift and fall by the wayside. We have had a lot of beginner's right here on safari; and they were always the troublemakers. We need to learn how to follow through and complete the tasks God assigns us....

6 Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name:

7 But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death.

8 Then Manoah intreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.

9 And God hearkened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field: but Manoah her husband was not with her.

10 And the woman made haste, and ran, and shewed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the other day.

11 And Manoah arose, and went after his wife, and came to the man, and said unto him, Art thou the man that spakest unto the woman? And he said, I am.

12 And Manoah said; Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?

13 And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware.

14 She may not eat of any thing that cometh of the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing: all that I commanded her let her observe.

15 And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee.

16 And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread: and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the LORD. For Manoah knew not that he was an angel of the LORD.

17 And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour?

18 And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?

19 So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD: and the angel did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on.

20 For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground.

21 But the angel of the LORD did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was an angel of the LORD.

22 And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God.

23 But his wife said unto him, If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these.

24 And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him.

25 And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

~ Samson began to deliver Israel in the northern region, but God won't keep him there long. Moving along, in our next report, we'll see Samson's strength was neither in his arms nor physique. Samson's strength was not in his hair, either, although he became weak when it was cut off but – no, friends, Samson's ONLY strength was when "the Spirit of the Lord began to move him!" The only time YOU will ever be strong in the Lord is when the Holy Spirit is moving you along, too. The Spirit of the Lord was not upon Samson when he cut his hair because Samson had failed to live up to his Nazarite vow by doing so. When we don't make good on our vows to the Lord, friends, we can NOT expect Him to strengthen us, either.

The pictures of Samson in children's illustrated Bibles are totally preposterous. To depict some big muscle man is a total misrepresentation of this judge. He was the biggest sissy in or out of the Bible; and we'll see why as we consider his entire account. Samson is a puny little dried up milquetoast man. Don't think of him as the strong man in a circus – think of Samson as the midget with a beard; in fact, the name "Samson" literally means "little sun." Now, can you imagine a small sun? We'll see him make his parents get his wife for him. He didn't even have enough nerve to ask Delilah to marry him. He was also a Riddler – just like in a Bat Man movie. Samson is always playing pranks like a middle school boy. He also allows women to make a fool of him. This is no strong he-man; this is the weak man. Samson is the before picture in a vitamin advertisement with a before and after picture! We'll find him tied to mommy's apron string like the little sissy he was – as weak as water.

Our present and modern world is looking for strong things to deliver them - they don't realize God only uses the weak things in the world for His purposes. Israel was astonished in wonder as they asked how this little runt could perform the feats he did. Well, there was only one explanation – God. The world makes constant loud noises; God says “be still and know that I am God!” Paul says, "study to be quiet." Man made the drum, but God made the silent depths of the forest! There was no tinsel or trees or Santa Claus parades that year when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. It was a quiet night – a holy night. Alright, we'll continue considering Samson completely as our Spiritual Safari travels on from here ~

>>>