

# Making Promises

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## Part 5: The Judges

### Interpretive Lenses

- When reading the book of Judges, we are confronted with repeated acts of **violent atrocities** against other people, and the acts are committed by the supposed people of God. Still worse, is that these are commanded by God (*Judg. 1:2, 8*).
  - ◉ When the Israelites fail to accomplish these tasks, God holds them responsible and **judges** them for it (*Judg. 2:1-3*)
  - ◉ **“The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”** -Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*
- As we read the book of Judges, we should always remember that God is a just judge, and he cannot be so by allowing injustice and corruption to continue. Therefore, the pagan culture in the land of Canaan should be an **interpretive lens**, through which we read the book of Judges. God is judging a people, not committing genocide.
  - ◉ In their ritual worship the Canaanites would re-enact the stories of their gods, (Baals and Asherahs), which are stories of **violence, cruelty** and **lust**. To please their gods, they would indulge in behaviour that would range from prostitution, gross acts of indecency to child sacrifice.

### Abimelech

- Although this may have come about as a direct result of Abimelech's actions, the narrator makes **God's involvement** quite clear (*Judg. 9:23-25, 56-57*).
  - ◉ Whereas in many of the other stories in Judges see the nation of Israel attacking Canaanite enemies, Judges 9 tells of an **internal conflict** amongst the Israelites that Yahweh seems to have stirred up.
  - ◉ A closer look at the story reveals that Abimelech had been paid tribute out of **the temple of Baal** (*Judg. 9:4*). Then, he kills and sacrifices his brothers in the same place his father had dedicated to the Lord (maybe even the same stone) (*Judg. 6:24; 9:5*).

- The story of Abimelech is really playing on the theme of **Baal** contending with **Yahweh**. We know by the end of chapter 9 that Yahweh is sovereign, as not only are Abimelech and the corrupt people of Shechem defeated, but in doing so the temple of Baal is destroyed, (**Judg. 9:46-49**).

## Jephthah

- In **Judg. 11:29-40** it seems that God has responded favourably to **human sacrifice**, or at the very least allowed it to occur. There are two main questions which need to be wrestled with: first, was Jephthah's rash vow the result of the Spirit of Yahweh coming upon him? And second, did God give Jephthah victory because of his vow?
  - First, the Spirit of Yahweh coming upon a person does not mean that the judge becomes a model of **moral purity** and **devotion** to Yahweh.
    - ▶ The Spirit of Yahweh gives them the **strength** and **desire** to drive out the enemies that are before them.
  - It was because of his **compassion** and **mercy** that Yahweh gave Jephthah the victory (**Judg. 10:16**). The very fact that Jephthah was trying to manipulate God by vowing to offer a human sacrifice is evidence of Israel's Canaanisation. Had Jephthah been committed to keeping the law of the covenant he would have known that God abhors human sacrifice.
  - Many suggest that fulfillment of Jephthah's vow was not a murderous sacrifice, but **celebracy** (**Judg. 11:37-39**). Jephthah is offering a member of his house to the full-time service of the LORD, and thus not to the normal duties of a household, such a marriage and having children.

## The Concubine

- In chapter 19 we read the terrible story of the **concubine** of a **Levite** who was given to a group of reprobate men who gang raped her and left her for dead – a story which strongly echoes Sodom and Gomorrah but with much more tragic outcome.
  - As Israel becomes more and more **depraved** the actions they consider "right" become increasingly catastrophic. The end of the book of Judges is explained by the memorable refrain: **Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25**.
  - The book of Judges is about leadership showing the tragic **downward spiral** of Israel's leaders and people. It's a sobering examination of the human condition that highlights the need for a deliverer.
  - This story, taking place toward the end of the book, tells us a great deal about how we are expected to interpret this book. When people remove **God** as their **king**, everyone does what is right in his own eyes.

**Part 5: The Judges**

<b>Judges 1:2</b>	The Lord said, "Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand."
<b>Judges 1:8</b>	And the men of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire.
<b>Judges 2:1–3</b>	<u>1</u> Now the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, <u>2</u> and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? <u>3</u> So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you."
<b>Judges 9:23–25</b>	<u>23</u> And God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem, and the leaders of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, <u>24</u> that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers. <u>25</u> And the leaders of Shechem put men in ambush against him on the mountaintops, and they robbed all who passed by them along that way. And it was told to Abimelech.
<b>Judges 9:56–57</b>	<u>56</u> Thus God returned the evil of Abimelech, which he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers. <u>57</u> And God also made all the evil of the men of Shechem return on their heads, and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.
<b>Judges 9:4</b>	And they gave him seventy pieces of silver out of the house of Baal-berith with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows, who followed him.
<b>Judges 6:24</b>	Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and called it, The Lord Is Peace. To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites.
<b>Judges 9:5</b>	And he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, for he hid himself.

<p><b>Judges 9:46–49</b></p>	<p><u>46</u> When all the leaders of the Tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the stronghold of the house of El-berith. <u>47</u> Abimelech was told that all the leaders of the Tower of Shechem were gathered together. <u>48</u> And Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who were with him. And Abimelech took an axe in his hand and cut down a bundle of brushwood and took it up and laid it on his shoulder. And he said to the men who were with him, “What you have seen me do, hurry and do as I have done.” <u>49</u> So every one of the people cut down his bundle and following Abimelech put it against the stronghold, and they set the stronghold on fire over them, so that all the people of the Tower of Shechem also died, about 1,000 men and women.</p>
<p><b>Judges 10:16</b></p>	<p>So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord, and he became impatient over the misery of Israel.</p>
<p><b>Judges 11:37–39</b></p>	<p><u>37</u> So she said to her father, “Let this thing be done for me: leave me alone two months, that I may go up and down on the mountains and weep for my virginity, I and my companions.” <u>38</u> So he said, “Go.” Then he sent her away for two months, and she departed, she and her companions, and wept for her virginity on the mountains. <u>39</u> And at the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow that he had made. She had never known a man, and it became a custom in Israel</p>
<p><b>Judges 17:6</b></p>	<p>In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.</p>
<p><b>Judges 18:1</b></p>	<p>In those days there was no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the people of Dan was seeking for itself an inheritance to dwell in, for until then no inheritance among the tribes of Israel had fallen to them.</p>
<p><b>Judges 19:1</b></p>	<p>In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite was sojourning in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, who took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.</p>
<p><b>Judges 21:25</b></p>	<p>In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.</p>