

No good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly

This psalm was probably first sung by pilgrims travelling to the tabernacle to worship God (5). It sets out the incomparable happiness of all those who enjoy fellowship with God. The word *'blessed'* is found in three verses which describe the blessedness of:

- Those who dwell in God's house (4).
- The man whose strength is in God (5).
- The man who trusts in the Lord (12).

The loveliness of God's house is not in the building itself, but comes from the presence of God there. We should pray much for the presence of God to be felt among us when we meet together to worship him. Do you long to be at worship each Lord's Day as much as the psalmist longed to be at the tabernacle (1–2,10)? Do you arrive early to worship God or do you drag yourself into church as the first hymn is being sung? We are pilgrims not to the tabernacle, but to heaven and our strength is in the Lord (5; Hebrews 11:13–16; 1 Peter 2:11). If we seek fellowship with him we will go from strength to strength (7).

This world cannot give anything to compare with the blessings of the child of God. The Lord protects us (our *sun and shield*). He gives grace for every situation in which we find ourselves and the promise of glory. Then there is the wonderful promise, *No good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly* (11). He may withhold good health and creature comforts because they are not good for us at the present time, but he blesses us with good things. We know his presence and peace as he smiles upon us, and we have contentment and joy in the Holy Spirit.

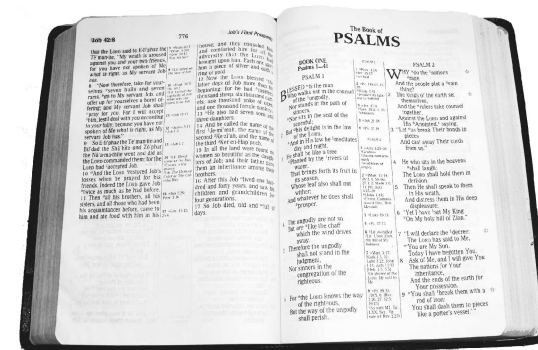
*How vast the treasure we possess!
How rich thy bounty, King of grace!
This world is ours, and worlds to come;
Earth is our lodge, and heaven our home.*

*I would not change my blest estate
For all the world calls good or great.*

(Isaac Watts)

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



June 2016

Bible readings from Judges chapters 13 to 21
Ruth and Psalms 79 to 84

Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?

The Lord answered Manoah's prayer and the Angel again appeared to his wife, but waited on this occasion for her to bring her husband to him. Manoah asked the Angel about the boy's rule of life and his work and he confirmed the instructions given on his previous visit (9–14). Manoah wanted to prepare a young goat to feed the Angel but was told to offer it as a burnt offering to the Lord. He did not realise at this time that he was speaking to *'the Angel of the LORD'* and he asked him what his name was so that he could honour him when his words were fulfilled (15–17). The Angel did not reveal his name to Manoah but asked him, *'Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?'* (18).

'The Angel of the LORD' is more than an angel – He is God and is called God (3; cp. verses 21–22; see footnote on Judges 6:16 in notes for May, page 17). Manoah and his wife fell prostrate to the ground as the Angel did *a wondrous thing* (the same basic word as *wonderful*). He ascended in the flames from the offerings and disappeared from view. Manoah was convinced that they would die because they had seen God (19–22). In these days when there is little true fear of God among us and when many have a casual approach to worship, let Manoah teach us that we must reverence God and adore him.

His wife rightly pointed out that if God had wanted to kill them:

- He would not have accepted the burnt offering and the grain offering that they had brought to him.
- He would not have shown them the things they had seen, nor told them that they would have a son who was to be a Nazirite and who would begin to deliver Israel from Philistine oppression (23).

Their son, Samson grew up knowing God's blessing and the moving of the Holy Spirit upon his life (24–25). **Manoah and his wife were learning to appreciate that the Lord is wonderful. Christians are still discovering this truth – have you?**

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Your sheltered ones

Asaph here cries out to God at a time when Israel's survival was threatened by an alliance of neighbouring states (1–8). They were stirring up trouble and exalting themselves (2). They were determined to destroy Israel (4). When God's people are persecuted, their enemies are really fighting against God. Our enemies are the enemies of God (2). They made a covenant (Hebrew translated *'confederacy'*) against God (5 – cp. Acts 9:5).

The psalmist encourages himself by calling to mind miraculous deliverances wrought by God for his people in the past, during the time of the Judges. He calls on God to repeat these mighty acts and to deal with his enemies (9–12; cp. Judges chapters 4 to 8). What the Lord has done in time past, he is well able to do again (13–18). He is the unchanging God and we should always encourage ourselves with this truth and remember this whenever we pray. Asaph not only prays against his enemies, but also for them. He prays, *'Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek your name, O LORD'* (16). We should pray that the Lord will turn the hearts of our enemies so that they become our friends and seek him.

There is a lovely description of God's people in verse 3. They are his *'sheltered ones'* (*'hidden ones'* AV; *'your treasured ones'* ESV). If you are a child of God, you are sheltered and treasured by him. You are protected by him (cp. Ruth 2:12; Psalms 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4). Look up these references and encourage yourself in the Lord. **Oh, discouraged believer, take heart! The Lord will never fail you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5–6).**

*Fear not, I am with thee, O, be not dismayed;
I, I am thy God, and will still give thee aid:
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.*

(*'K'* in Rippon's Selection, 1787)

You are gods ... but you shall die like men

Who are ‘*the mighty*’ and ‘*the gods*’ spoken of in verse 1? Some believe them to be angels but the context of the psalm and a statement from the Lord Jesus Christ would indicate that they are judges (cp. John 10:34–35). Authorities (including judges) have a solemn duty to uphold truth, righteousness and justice (Romans 13:1–5). Woe betide those who abuse such a sacred trust and pervert justice (2). Judges must defend the poor and the needy and deliver them from the clutches of the wicked (3–4).

In recent years many tyrants who have acted like gods have been toppled together with their rotten regimes. God says, ‘*You are gods ... but you shall die like men*’ (6–7). They are godlike in that they have been given authority by God and in this sense they are ‘*children of the Most High*,’ but they must remember that they themselves go the way of all men and that they shall die. **This is an encouragement to God’s persecuted people. Tyrants do not rule for ever.** Let them do their worst, the day of reckoning will surely come to them!

There is much injustice in the world today. In Britain, criminals are lightly punished and murderers are often released from life sentences after just a few years in prison. Many crimes are not punished at all. The victims of crime are hardly considered by the authorities. The godly long for the return of Christ when he shall judge in truth and righteousness: ‘*Arise, O God, judge the earth*’ (8).

*Hail to the Lord's Anointed,
Great David's greater Son!
Hail, in the time appointed,
His reign on earth begun;
He comes to break oppression,
To set the prisoner free,
To take away transgression,
And rule in equity.*

(James Montgomery)

Get her for me, for she pleases me well

Samson went to Timnah, a Philistine town situated about four miles west of his own town of Zorah where he met and fell in love with a Philistine woman (1–2). He was a man of immense physical strength, but his life was blighted by his great weakness regarding his inability to control his lust. His love affairs with Philistine women were to bring him sorrow and ruin.

Samson’s godly parents pleaded with him in vain to seek a wife from among his own people. The Lord had said that Samson should be dedicated to him as a Nazirite. How could anyone belonging to the Lord contemplate marriage with an unbeliever? His words, ‘*Get her for me, for she pleases me well*’ (3) show that he was more concerned to gratify himself than to please God. They must have gone to Timnah (to arrange the marriage dowry?) with a heavy heart, but they did not know that God had purposed to use Samson’s disobedience as *an occasion to move against the Philistines* (4–5).

Christian people, I plead with you not to grieve the Holy Spirit by marrying those who are not true Christians. **Many Christians live with bitter regret and remorse for their disobedience in marrying unbelievers. Let Samson be a warning to any who are contemplating such folly!**

Samson was alone in the vineyards of Timnah when he was attacked by a lion. *The Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him* and he was able, with his bare hands, to tear the beast apart. The God who enabled Samson to tear apart a lion was able to use him to overcome the Philistines. He visited his wife-to-be in Timnah and then went into the vineyards to see what had become of the carcass of the lion. He saw that it had become home to a colony of bees and he was able to take honey from it, which he shared with his parents (6–9). This incident gave him the idea for the riddle which was to puzzle and irritate the Philistine guests at his feast.

Then the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him

Samson gave a feast where he challenged thirty Philistine young men to solve his riddle. The winner was to be provided with thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing at the expense of the loser (11–13). Samson told his riddle, ‘*Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet*’ (14). The Philistines were baffled and three days into the feast, they were still none the wiser. They made dire threats to his bride and terrified her into obtaining the solution for them. The triumphant Philistines repeated the answer to Samson who now had to provide the prize. *Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily* and he went to the Philistine city of Ashkelon where he killed thirty of their men to obtain the prize. An angry Samson walked out on his bride and left her to return to his father’s house (15–20).

Samson later went to visit his wife and was furious to find that she had been given in marriage to his best man. He caught three hundred foxes (the Hebrew word can also mean ‘jackals’) which he tied in pairs. He attached blazing torches to them and loosed the terrified animals into the Philistine fields and so destroyed their harvest with fire. By way of reprisal, the Philistines burned to death Samson’s wife and her father (15:1–6). This was the very thing that she had so feared (14:15).

In an increasing cycle of violence, Samson brought havoc and slaughter to the Philistines (7–8). The fact that *the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him* (14:6,19; 15:14) does not mean that the Lord sanctioned Samson’s sin, but rather that he overruled this sorry situation to use Samson as an instrument to fight the Philistines (cp.14:4; *It was of the LORD — that he was seeking an occasion against the Philistines*). **God is sovereign, but we must never use this wonderful truth as an excuse for our sin.**

Oh, that my people would listen to me

This psalm is a summons to Israel to worship the Lord at one of their appointed feasts (probably the Feast of Tabernacles or the Passover). Verse 1 strikes a note of joyful, exultant praise. Worship must be reverent but that must not be confused with dullness or deadness. What kind of testimony are we to those visitors who are not Christians if we appear to be bored, disinterested and miserable in our worship? More important, what must the Lord think of us?

God’s goodness in delivering Israel from Egypt, and their rebellion against him is again recalled in verses 3 to 16. Notice the importance of listening to what the Lord has to say to us through his Word (8,11,13). Do you listen for him when you meet for worship, when you have your personal devotions? God had wonderfully delivered his people in bringing them out of Egyptian oppression and he called on them to keep themselves from foreign gods (8–9). They refused to obey God and he gave them over to their own stubborn heart. They followed their own foolish ways (11–12). If we rebel against God, we are heading for ruin! If we listen to him and obey him, he will bless us: ‘*Oh, that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways! I would soon subdue their enemies*’ (13–14).

God satisfies those who obey (16). Look at the promise in verse 10: ‘*Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.*’ Open your mouth wide to be filled with the praises of God. Open your mouth wide to pray with expectation for answers to your prayers. ‘Those who expect most from God are likely to receive the most’ (Benjamin Beddome, quoted in Spurgeon’s Treasury of David). God will supply all of your needs if you will listen to him and obey him. **Come to him with an open heart to receive his Word and an open mouth to glorify him in your praises and your prayers.**

Restore us, O God; cause your face to shine

This psalm is divided into three sections, each ending with the sentence, ‘*Restore us, O God; cause your face to shine, and we shall be saved*’ (3,7,19). God is described as the ‘*Shepherd of Israel*’ and the psalmist appeals to him to hear the bleating of his suffering flock. ‘*You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth!*’ (1–2). The Lord’s special presence was revealed at the ark of the covenant, between the cherubim on the mercy-seat (Exodus 25:22; Leviticus 16:2). Our mercy-seat is in heaven, where our great Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, sits. It is also a throne of grace where *we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (Hebrews 4:14–16).

*Approach, my soul, the mercy-seat,
Where Jesus answers prayer;
There humbly fall before his feet,
For none can perish there.*

(John Newton)

The question, ‘*How long?*’ is found again in this psalm as the suffering of the people is described (4–6; cp. Psalm 79:5). ‘*O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry against the prayer of your people?*’ God is angry against our prayer when we pray with unbelief in our hearts (cp. Hebrews 11:6; James 1:5–8). Israel is pictured in verses 8 to 16 as a vine taken out of Egypt by God and transplanted in Canaan. The vineyard had flourished, but it was now desolate following many and varied attacks upon it. ‘*The man of your right hand*’ is the meaning of the name ‘Benjamin’ and probably refers to that tribe (17; cp. Genesis 35:18).

Have you noticed the urgency and depth of feeling in the prayers recorded in the psalms? We are often very cold in our prayers and this cannot be right. **Let us be determined to set our faces to pray for the work of God.** ‘*Restore us, O God; cause your face to shine.*’ When the face of God shines upon us, we know his smile and his blessing on our lives. Are you concerned enough for the spiritual need of our nation to be driven to urgent prayer for the work of God?

Do you not know that the Philistines rule over us?

The Philistines were determined to arrest Samson and came to attack Lehi in Judah. They demanded that the men of Judah hand over Samson to them if they were to avoid reprisals. Three thousand men of Judah went to speak to Samson to ask him why he was provoking the Philistines. They said to him, ‘*Do you not know that the Philistines rule over us? What is this that you have done to us?*’ (11). Samson replied that he was treating them as they had treated him (9–11). Dale Ralph Davis comments, ‘The tribe that had previously waded into battle after battle (1:1–20) has become a collection of spineless wimps (15:13). They regard the Philistines as their ruler and Samson as their enemy. They don’t even want to be Yahweh’s free people; they don’t even see that as a possibility’ (COMMENTARY ON JUDGES, page 182).

Samson’s patience and gracious attitude to these ungrateful, faithless men is highly commendable. He told the cowards that he would allow them to bind him with two new ropes and to hand him over to the Philistines providing they did not attempt to kill him. *The Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him* as the jubilant Philistines came to seize him. The ropes appeared to melt and fell from him. Single-handedly, he slaughtered one thousand of their soldiers using the fresh jawbone of a donkey as a weapon (13–16).

Samson appeared to glory in his great exploit but he did not give glory to God (16). He had to learn the lesson of dependence upon God. He became so thirsty and dehydrated that he feared he would die of thirst, *so he cried out to the LORD*. He acknowledged that God had given him a great deliverance as he prayed for water. The Lord miraculously provided water from a spring (18–19).

Are we any different to the unbelieving men of Judah if we accept the dominion of sin in our lives (see Romans 6:14)? **Spiritual victory is for those who trust in God and persevere in serving him!**

But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him

Samson's eyes were his downfall, and in the end, he lost them! He went to the Philistine city of Gaza *and saw a prostitute there, and went in to her* (1). Earlier in his life, he had said to his parents, *'I have seen a woman ... get her for me'* (14:2). Those who live undisciplined lives, live dangerously! The men of Gaza heard that Samson was in the city and they prepared to ambush him and kill him when daylight came. When Samson went to leave the city at midnight, he found the gates of the city were shut. This was no problem to Samson. He uprooted the gate posts and carried them and the gates to the top of a hill that faced toward Hebron (2–3).

Samson's entanglement with Delilah was his undoing. The fickle woman accepted a bribe from the Philistines to find out the secret of Samson's strength. He gave her a succession of false leads and she protested, *'How can you say, "I love you," when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and have not told me where your great strength lies.'* She pestered him daily and wore down his resistance so that *he told her all his heart*. She discovered that his strength was linked to his Nazirite way of life (15–18; cp. 13:5). After lulling him to sleep, Delilah cut his hair and his strength left him. She then tormented him and the Philistines put him in shackles (19–21).

Samson lost more than his strength! *But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him* (20). This is one of the saddest and most poignant verses in the Bible. The Philistines put out those eyes that had been the occasion of so much sin. The mighty deliverer, set aside to serve God (13:5), was now grinding in an enemy prison (21). Let Samson's tragic life be a warning to us. We must not allow our eyes to lead us into covetousness or lust. We must be disciplined in the things that we read or watch on television or the internet (cp. 1 John 2:16). **We dare not presume upon the presence of God if we walk in the pathway of disobedience. Remember those frightening words, *But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him.***

Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name

This psalm and Psalm 74 both record laments and prayers of Asaph uttered when Jerusalem and the temple lay in ruins. After describing the misery of God's people (1–4), he calls upon God for deliverance, confessing his nation's sin (5–12). He closes in anticipation of praising God for answered prayer (13).

Asaph's distress is understandable. His beloved city lay in ruins, the temple had been desecrated and their enemies had prevented them from burying their dead. The people of the neighbouring nations scorned and derided them (1–4, 12). Is it any wonder then, that Asaph cries out, *'How long?'* (5; cp. Psalm 74:10). It is important to see that he acknowledged the underlying cause of their distress. God had punished them for their wickedness, past and present (8–9). They had no excuse for they had been repeatedly warned of the consequences of their sin if they failed to repent of it (eg. 2 Chronicles 36:15–21).

On what basis did Asaph appeal to God for help? He cried out, *'Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name'* (9). God's holy character, his glory and his reputation were involved! It was his temple that the nations had defiled and his city lay in ruins. His servants and saints had been slain and left unburied, his people had become a reproach to their neighbours (1–4) and the heathen were mocking him (10). The psalmist also appealed to God on the basis of his mercy (8). God is still concerned for the glory of his name. We are his people and the sheep of his pasture (13; cp. Psalm 74:1).

The Christian church is often mocked. The ungodly are scornful of the message of the gospel and some, like the militant atheist and evolutionist Richard Dawkins, are pursuing a relentless campaign against Christian teaching. Let us now pray that God will magnify himself in reviving his church and that his name will be glorified in the salvation of sinners. **Let us be sure to praise him when he answers our prayers (13)! Let us face the future with confidence in God and a determination to please him and to serve him.**

I cannot redeem it ... lest I ruin my own inheritance

Boaz went the next day to the gate of the city, where, in ancient times legal matters and disputes were settled (1). He found Naomi's nearest relative and called ten of the elders of the city to be witnesses. The man was more than happy to redeem the land until he realised, however, that he would then be obliged to marry Ruth and he backed down (4–6). 'I will redeem it' became 'I cannot redeem it lest I ruin my own inheritance.' The man was more interested in his own inheritance than in marrying Ruth. Many people refuse to follow the Lord Jesus because they imagine that they will lose so much. They little realise that it is no profit to gain the whole world and lose their own soul (Mark 8:36)

Boaz was now free to redeem the property in question and to marry Ruth (7–10). The elders addressed Boaz and pronounced a beautiful blessing on him and on Ruth (11–12). God gave them a son, whom they named Obed. The Lord turned Naomi's emptiness and misery into great blessing and much joy. What a contrast is found between the words of the women (14–15) and Naomi's outburst when she returned to Bethlehem (1:20–21). Things were no longer bitter ('Mara') for her but pleasant ('Naomi')! She had the joy of helping Ruth bring up Obed (16). Ruth had left her family and country to follow the Lord (1:16–17) but he blessed her more than she could have ever imagined.

The book ends with a short genealogy which shows David to be the great grandson of Ruth and Boaz (17–22). Ruth is also found in the royal line of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5). Boaz foreshadows our great Kinsman-Redeemer, the Lord Jesus, who redeemed us with his own blood (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18–19). He gave his life to save us from our sins and to forgive us, cleanse us and give us peace with God. We have the Holy Spirit as our Helper to guide us into truth (John 14:16–17; 16:13). We have eternal life and an inheritance in heaven (John 3:16; 1 Peter 1:4). **Though it is not easy to live as a Christian in this godless world, there are blessings upon blessings for those who belong to the Lord Jesus.**

O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray

Samson had lifted up the huge gates of Gaza on his shoulders to thwart a Philistine ambush (3). He was now back in the same city as a prisoner working for the enemy in the humiliating task of grinding grain (21). He would have had much time to reflect on his folly as he toiled. Verse 22 points out that Samson's hair began to grow again. The Philistines organised a great festival of celebration, to sacrifice, and to praise their god, Dagon, for delivering Samson into their hands. They were very mistaken in their assessment of events. It was the absence of the Lord and not Dagon's power that had led to the downfall of Samson (20).

The blind man was taken from prison to the temple of Dagon to entertain the Philistines. The temple was packed with worshippers. Another three thousand people were on the roof. The Philistines had stationed Samson between the supporting pillars of the temple (25). While they were having great fun watching their enemy appear so helpless, Samson cried out to God, 'O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes' (23–28). The Lord graciously answered the prayer of his wayward servant. With a mighty heave against the pillars, Samson brought the temple crashing down, killing more Philistines in his death than in his entire life (29–30).

Samson's life and experiences illustrate that disobedience to God's word brings great misery and grief. Are you backslidden in heart? Oh, call upon the Lord and ask him to remember you. Samson's prayer was short and simple, but so effective (cp. 1 Samuel 1:11; Luke 23:42). If you belong to him, he will never forget you. Come to him now and prove that he is gracious. He will remember you!

*Thou knowest the way to bring me back,
My fallen spirit to restore;
O for thy truth and mercy's sake
Forgive and bid me sin no more;
The ruins of my soul repair
And make my heart a house of prayer.* (Charles Wesley)

Every one did what was right in his own eyes

The last five chapters of Judges recall events which took place after Joshua's death but before the judges ruled. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, who was active before Israel entered Canaan was still the high priest (20:28; cp. Numbers 25:7,11; Joshua 22:13). The events surrounding two Levites in chapters 17 and 19 were to have repercussions for the whole of Israel. Here is a sorry record of religious confusion, immorality, sexual perversion, violence and bloodshed. Verse 6 gives us the reason for the mess. *Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.* The book of Judges ends with the same statement (21:25).

Micah, an Ephraimite, was superstitious and religious but wicked. He robbed his own mother of her fortune. She may have suspected him or his sons for she made certain that he heard the curse that she put on the thief. If it was a ruse to scare the culprit into making a confession, it certainly worked. Micah confessed his crime and then his mother blessed him (1–2). She told him that she had dedicated the stolen silver to the Lord for her son, to make a carved image and a molten image. What confusion! Micah already had a shrine in his house and he added these new images to his collection of idols and an ephod (cp. notes for 22 May on Judges 8:27). He consecrated one of his own sons to be his priest (3–5). These actions violated God's commands which forbid idolatry (Exodus 20:4) and which restricted sacrifice and worship to the tabernacle (which was in the territory of Ephraim at Shiloh) and the priesthood to the Levites (Numbers 3:1–13; Deuteronomy 12:4–14).

Moses had warned the Israelites about '*every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes*' (Deuteronomy 12:8). We, too, live in evil days when everyone does what is '*right in his own eyes.*' Many tell us that they have 'their own religion' or their 'own ideas about God.' You will find it very difficult to reason with them because they despise God's Word. **If you are doing your own thing in religion, beware! Be determined with God's help to remain true to his Word.**

You are a virtuous woman

Boaz was much older than Ruth who was probably in her twenties. He had already been impressed by her love and loyalty to Naomi (2:11) and it had not escaped his attention that Ruth had gone into his field to work rather than to look for a husband (10). Boaz was delighted that Ruth should desire to marry him and counted it as a *kindness* that she should wish to marry him. It was obvious from his reply that Ruth had made a very positive impression upon the people of Bethlehem: '*And now my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman*' (11).

Boaz was an older man than Ruth and wanted to marry this hard-working younger woman but he was not prepared to dishonour God's law by depriving a nearer relative of his right as 'kinsman-redeemer' (12–13). The Lord was to honour him for his integrity.

Ruth rose to leave early in the morning before anyone would be able to recognise her so that it would not be known that she had slept on the threshing floor (14). He sent her away with six measures of barley which he lifted up on to her shoulders (15). This would have weighed about eighty pounds (36 kilogrammes) and demonstrates that Ruth was a strong woman. She told Naomi of all that Boaz had done for her and Naomi advised her now to wait, being confident that Boaz would act that very day to settle the matter of being her kinsman-redeemer. (16–18).

Boaz and Ruth lived in days of moral decline but they were modest and chaste in their behaviour. Boaz was also concerned that Ruth's action would not be misunderstood (14). Our times are no different. **There must be no place in the Christian's life for unseemly talk, immodest behaviour or lack of integrity (Ephesians 5:3–4.** The Lord has chosen us and called us to be holy (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:15). We must be different from those in the world (cp. Matthew 5:14–16)!

Shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?

The customs described in this chapter and the next arise out of God's law for what is called 'levirate' marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5–10; cp. Genesis 38:8). When a married man died childless, his brother or nearest male relative was expected to marry his widow. The children of this union inherited the dead man's property and maintained the family line. The Sadducees referred to this law in their opposition to the teaching of the Lord Jesus (Luke 20:27–33). The near kinsman was also obliged to redeem (buy back) any property belonging to the dead relative, so as to keep it within the family (Leviticus 25:25–28).

Naomi possessed some land belonging to Elimelech (4:3). Ruth, the childless widow of Mahlon, son of Elimelech, was entitled to call on a relative to be her kinsman-redeemer and to marry her. Naomi said to Ruth, *'My daughter, shall I not seek security for you that it may be well with you?'* (1). The word 'security' is better translated 'rest' as in the Authorised Version and English Standard Version).

How was a Moabite woman to find a husband in Bethlehem? Naomi had rightly calculated that Boaz was a near kinsman who had a duty to marry the widow of a near male relative. On this basis, Naomi told Ruth to wash, anoint herself, put on her best garment and go to the threshing floor of Boaz where he would be sleeping following a day's work. She followed Naomi's instructions to lie at his feet (2–6). Boaz discovered her at midnight she said, *'Take your maidservant under your wing, for you are a near kinsman'* (9). This was a proposal of marriage which Boaz was happy to accept (10).

Naomi was concerned that Ruth had *rest* (1) and her desire was fulfilled. There are many around us who have broken homes and broken hearts. They desperately need *rest*. The Lord Jesus came into the world and died on the cross to save sinners? He says, *'Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'* (Matthew 11:28). **Have you come to Jesus for rest?**

Now I know that the LORD will be good to me

Times were tough for the Levites. The Lord had decreed that the other tribes support them financially so that they could devote themselves to God's service (Deuteronomy 14:27–29; 26:12). There was widespread apostasy and consequently little support for the Levites. A young Levite from Bethlehem left home to look for work and he arrived at Micah's house.

God had given instructions that only Levites were to be set aside to serve God as priests (Numbers 3:5–10). Micah must have been uneasy at having one of his own sons as priest because he persuaded the Levite to be his priest, with the offer of a good wage (7–12). The Levite should have known God's law but he sold his soul for material gain. How could he allow an idolatrous Ephraimite to consecrate him as a priest and be content to indulge in idol worship overlaid with a form of worship to Jehovah (*'the LORD'*)? He was doing what was right in his own eyes.

The extent of Micah's self-deception is revealed by his words in verse 13, *'Now I know that the LORD will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest.'* We will see that this was a totally false assumption by what follows in the next chapter of Judges. We may have the trappings of religion such as church-going and saying prayers and yet be far from God because our hearts are not right with him. **If you imagine that God will bless you while you do your own thing, take heed. God is not mocked!** Do not wait until it is too late to discover that you have had a useless religion (cp. Matthew 7:21–23).

Religion is often used as a cloak to cover sin, but there can be no forgiveness unless we repent and trust in God to save us through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord only honours those who honour him (1 Samuel 2:30). Are you seeking to please him by obeying his Word?

God has given it into your hands

The tribe of Dan had failed to dislodge the Amorites from the territory that had been allocated to them (1:34). They sent five spies to seek for more territory and on their journey to the north, they lodged at Micah's house. They recognised the Levite and asked him what he was doing there. He told them how Micah had hired him as his priest. They asked him to enquire of God concerning their mission and the Levite assured them that God would go with them and give them success (2–6).

They went on to discover Laish, a prosperous city on the eastern border of Naphtali. The spies returned to their own people and encouraged them to go to possess Laish (7–10). The Danites set off led by six hundred armed men and, passing through the mountains of Ephraim, they came to the house of Micah. They greeted the Levite and the five spies stole Micah's images and ephod. They persuaded the protesting Levite to go with them to be their priest. He was pleased at his enhanced status as priest to a whole tribe and showed no loyalty to Micah who had befriended him (11–20; cp. 17:12). There are two vital principles here that we do well to learn:–

- The Levite's prophecy of success for the men of Dan was fulfilled, but it is obvious that he was a wicked and idolatrous man. Many who claim to have prophetic gifts today are heretical. The occasional prophecy is self-fulfilling, but we must not allow ourselves to be deceived by such people (cp. Matthew 7:21–23).
- The Danite spies, like Micah, had plenty of religious talk. They urged their people to possess Laish and its territory, '*for God has given it into your hands*' (10). We are again reminded that there is all the difference in the world between words and deeds. There are many today who have a 'pick and mix religion.' They speak of 'spirituality' but they reject the Bible as the only rule and guide for faith and practice, and they have no interest in leading a godly life. Beware of 21st century 'Danites'. **If our lives do not match our Christian profession, we are no better than Micah or the Danites!**

Blessed be the LORD who has not forsaken his kindness

Boaz invited Ruth to eat with the reapers and then commanded his young men to allow her to glean among the sheaves which meant rich pickings compared with gleaning from the corners of the field as commanded by the Lord (15–16; cp. Leviticus 19:9–10; 23:22). When a sheaf of wheat was dropped at harvest it was to be left for *the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow* to gather (Deuteronomy 24:19). Ruth qualified on all three counts – as a stranger in Bethlehem where she was without a father, and as a widow.

Naomi was surprised and delighted when Ruth returned well supplied with food. Iain Duguid points out that an Ephah would have been between twenty-nine and fifty pounds of grain which would feed someone for several weeks. (ESTHER & RUTH, page 161). Naomi had a further surprise when she discovered that Ruth had gleaned in the field of Boaz, a near relative of Elimelech (18–23). She praised God, saying, '*Blessed be the LORD, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living and the dead!*' (20) and she urged Ruth to continue to glean in the field of Boaz as he had invited (21–23).

On her return to Bethlehem, Naomi had complained that the Almighty had dealt very bitterly with her (1:20). She now saw the grace of God in her life and her complaint gave way to praise. God promises to supply all our needs (Matthew 6:25–34; Philippians 4:19). Iain Duguid writes, 'In her grief and confusion, Naomi had misunderstood God and misjudged Ruth. She had failed to see that the Lord is the God who welcomes the outsider. She had forgotten that he is the shepherd who does not stop showing his covenant faithfulness to the wandering sheep. She didn't remember that he is the Father who waits with open arms to welcome back the prodigal daughter' (ESTHER & RUTH, page 166).

We have a wonderful God who gave his precious Son to die to save us from our sins and who will never forsake us even when we fail and sin. He is worthy of our love and devotion!

She happened to come

When Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem, *it was the beginning of barley harvest* (1:22). God made provision for the poor in his law. Landowners were not to harvest the corners of their fields and forgotten sheaves were to be left for the needy to glean (Leviticus 19:9–10; Deuteronomy 24:19–23). Ruth took advantage of this law and went to glean at harvest time, to provide food for Naomi and herself. *She happened to come* (3). Mark this verse! See how God so wonderfully works in everyday events. *She happened to come* to the field of Boaz, a rich and near relative of Naomi. It may have been that Naomi had been too ashamed and broken in spirit to seek direct help from this relative.

Boaz noticed a stranger among the gleaners and asked his servant in charge of the reapers, *‘Whose young woman is this?’* The man replied, *‘It is the young Moabite woman who come back with Naomi from the country of Moab.’* He also pointed out that she had worked hard from early morning apart from a short rest (5–7). Boaz had heard of Ruth's devotion to Naomi, and more important, her trust in the Lord. He said to Ruth, *The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel under whose wings you have come for refuge* (11–12). Remember that these were the days of the judges when people were doing what was right in their own eyes (1:1; Judges 21:25). Boaz was a light in the prevailing darkness who readily acknowledged the Lord when greeting the reapers (4) and now Ruth. Notice how Boaz encouraged Ruth in word (11–12) and in kind deeds (8–9, 14–15).

The Lord more than compensated Ruth for her sacrifice in leaving her family and country (11–12). Ruth *‘happened to come’* but she discovered that there are no ‘chance happenings’ in her life because she belonged to God, *under whose wings she had come for refuge* (12). What a privilege to know that the Lord uses what we may perceive as ordinary and insignificant events in our lives to further his wise, kind and loving purposes for us (Romans 8:28)! **He wonderfully directs our lives. Let us worship him and praise him for his goodness.**

You have taken away my gods which I made

It appears that Micah was away from home when his idol-shrine was plundered by the Danites. He enlisted his neighbours to pursue the thieves from Dan in order to recover his gods and his priest. They were not in the least troubled when he caught up with them. They asked Micah why he had gathered such a company to go after them and he protested, *‘You have taken away my gods which I made ... Now what more do I have?’* (22–24). Micah must have known that all forms of idolatry are forbidden by the Lord and yet he assumed that he could make gods. He soon realised that his company was no match for the Danites who threatened violence if they heard any more from him, and so he returned home empty-handed.

Micah's conviction that the Lord would be good to him proved to be so wrong (17:13). He was a thief who reaped what he had sown and he lost everything. He made his own gods and they failed him when he most needed help. How foolish to trust in dumb idols (read Psalm 115:4–8)! The Danites were just as foolish. What use would Micah's gods be to them when they had been unable to protect Micah's house or to prevent themselves from being stolen?

Lucky charms and talismans are also useless idols but many people still trust in them. How can a piece of wood or precious metal protect us? Superstition is folly! Anything that you make into a god will surely fail you and will be taken from you. **Man-made gods cannot help you in the day of trouble or judgment.** If you are not a Christian, I urge you to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, repent of your sin and trust in him alone to save you. There is no other way to know the almighty God who reveals himself through the Bible. This precious book points us to the Lord Jesus Christ in all of his grace, love and power; it tells us how we are to live and please God. If we do not feed ourselves daily on God's Word, we leave ourselves more open to self-deception and spiritual disaster.

They had no ties with anyone

The people of Laish had enjoyed a serene and prosperous life until the arrival of the wicked Danites who slaughtered them and set fire to their city. They were an isolated people. *They had no ties with anyone* (28). That isolation resulted in disaster. There is a vital spiritual lesson which we can draw from this incident. No Christian or church can afford to be isolated. Fellowship between believers and churches is a precious privilege and how we need to support and encourage one another in these evil and confusing days. Paul's letters in the New Testament reveal that he was a concerned and prayerful friend to many Christians throughout much of the Roman Empire. He appreciated the friendship and fellowship of others. Do you?

Laish was rebuilt by its conquerors and renamed Dan. Micah's carved image was set up, and Jonathan the Levite, officiated over the idol worship in defiance of God whose house was at that time in Shiloh (28–31). Dan later became a national centre of idol worship in the northern kingdom after the death of Solomon (1 Kings 12:28–30). Dale Ralph Davis comments, 'The Danites' sanctuary stands over against the legitimate house of God at Shiloh (18:30–31). No need to go to Shiloh now; Dan is its own little "Israel". The Danites have their own convenience-store shrine near by — where they can control it. They can worship as they please. Does this not parallel the contemporary mood (even in the church) that worship is actually a very individual affair, a matter of sheer preference?' ('COMMENTARY ON JUDGES,' page 208).

We live in a time which is similar in many ways to the times of the Judges. God has been forsaken by much of western society and millions are filling the spiritual vacuum in their lives by turning to false religion. The occult New Age movement has gained millions of followers and satanism and witchcraft are openly practised. We are now reaping a terrible harvest for our folly – lawlessness, cruelty, wickedness, violence and decadence abound. **Let us now pray that God will have mercy upon us and turn many to himself, and that**

The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me

Naomi returned to Bethlehem a broken woman. The years away from her home and her people had taken their toll. The people asked, '*Is this Naomi?*' (19). Naomi means 'pleasant' but she asked them to call her 'Mara' which means 'bitter': '*Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty*' (20–21). Naomi had left Bethlehem full of herself and of her plans to make a new life in Moab with her family (cp. Proverbs 14:14), but she came back empty. The years away from God had left an aching void. She said, '*the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me.*' Let the experience of Naomi be a warning to us to beware of backsliding!

I have had friends who once followed the Lord Jesus but today they are far away him. Just as Naomi was barely recognisable to her neighbours in Bethlehem, there is no discernible trace of their former Christian profession. My heart aches for them! Were they ever truly saved? The great day of judgment will reveal all. Christian men and women, you must take up your cross daily and follow Christ (Matthew 16:24). Maintain your fellowship with God through prayer and the reading of his Word. Do not neglect to worship the Lord and to be with his people. Seek always to put Christ and the interests of God's kingdom first in your life (Matthew 6:33). If we belong to the Lord and stray from him, he will chastise us because he loves us, and this will be painful as the Almighty deals bitterly with us (Hebrews 12:5–11).

The Lord is very gracious! When Naomi decided to return to her people and to her God, she began to see the Lord's blessing in her life. Ruth decided to go with her and to serve God (16–17) and the rest of Naomi's story is of one blessing upon another as the Lord so signally worked in her own life and in the life of Ruth. She proved the wonderful words of God written centuries later, '*I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely*' (Hosea 14:4). **If you have backslidden from the Lord, return to him now and repent of your sin. He will freely forgive you and he will restore your soul.**

Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God

Elimelech and his two sons died and after ten years in Moab, Naomi heard *‘that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread’* and so she decided to return to Bethlehem (5–7). Iain D. Campbell refers to Warren Wiersbe’s summary of the book of Ruth where he describes the first chapter of Ruth as the weeping chapter, the second as the working chapter, the third as the waiting chapter, and the fourth as the wedding chapter. He goes on to write, ‘The first chapter of the book of Ruth, is the chapter of the broken heart: it’s a weeping chapter. It tells the story of sorrow. Naomi weeps, Orpah weeps, Ruth weeps’ (THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO RUTH, page 10)

Naomi bade a tearful farewell to her two daughters-in-law, but both indicated their willingness to go back with her to Bethlehem. Naomi seemed to show little spiritual concern for Orpah and Ruth as she urged them to return to their country (8–13). Orpah loved Naomi but decided to return to her people; she wept, but chose the gods of Moab (15). She may later have had a new husband and bore children in Moab. Iain Duguid comments, ‘Whether she found what she was looking for in Moab or not really doesn’t matter. Either way, she missed the pearl of great price. She failed to find friendship with Israel’s God, the only God there is. The saddest part of Orpah’s story is that she probably never knew what she was missing’ (ESTHER & RUTH, page 146).

Ruth was determined to stay with Naomi however, and she expressed her desire to go with her in a beautiful and tender manner. She said to Naomi, *‘Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God’* (16–17). She bound herself with an oath, calling upon the LORD, Naomi’s God, to punish her if she failed in her promise to Naomi (17). Ruth made a sacrificial choice, being prepared to leave her people behind and go with Naomi to a country which was foreign to her. She was to be blessed beyond her wildest dreams! **The Lord Jesus calls us to deny themselves and follow him (Mark 8:34–37) but to he gives blessing upon blessing and eternal life to those who obey his call.**

But there is no one who will take me into his house

I pointed out in the notes for 7 June that the events recorded in these chapters occurred at the beginning of the period of the Judges. The Jewish historian, Josephus, also confirms this.

The sordid tale of the outrage at Gibeah and of the civil war between the tribe of Benjamin and the rest of Israel begins with a Levite, who like Micah, lived in the mountains of Ephraim. He went to Bethlehem to bring home his concubine who had been unfaithful to him. He was wine and dined by her father for four and a half days before he returned home with her and his servant (1–10). The servant wanted to lodge in Jebus (Jerusalem) for the night, but the city had not yet been conquered. The Levite preferred to find a Hebrew city and though it was now late in the day, he journeyed on to Gibeah (four miles north of Jerusalem) which belonged to the tribe of Benjamin (11–14). Here he was to receive worse treatment than any heathen people could inflict upon him!

There is a stark contrast between the hospitality shown to the Levite in Bethlehem and the lack of it shown in Gibeah. He waited in the open square of the city, hoping to be offered the traditional hospitality of those times. No one offered him any hospitality, however, until an old man who was also from the mountains of Ephraim came in from his work in the evening. He told the old man his story and added, *‘But there is no one who will take me into his house’* even though he had ample supplies to feed his party and their two donkeys (15–19). The old man warmly invited the weary travellers to his own home.

The ministry of hospitality is most important. A Christian home provides a place of peace and joy for many a lonely and weary traveller on life’s pilgrimage. Others have been won to Christ through this ministry. All Christians should be *hospitable to one another without grumbling* (1 Peter 4:9; cp. Romans 12:13). **Let us pray that God will use us in the great ministry of hospitality.**

Consider it, take counsel, and speak up!

The peace and warmth of the old man's hospitality was rudely interrupted by a mob of sexual perverts at his door. These depraved men were of the kind given up by God to *vile passions* (Romans 1:24–28). The old man and the Levite were shameful and heartless in their attitude to those they should have loved and protected. The Levite eventually offered his concubine to the sex-crazed men at the door. There is here a parallel with the case of Lot who offered his daughters to the Sodomites to protect his angel visitors (who proved more than a match for those battering at Lot's door – Genesis 19:1–8). The callous Levite left his concubine to be abused until the following morning. He was sleeping while she was dying outside the door of the house. When he woke up, he went outside and coldly commanded her to be up and going, not realising that she was dead (22–28).

The abuse and death of his concubine provoked the Levite to drastic action. When he arrived home, he cut up her corpse into twelve parts and sent a part to each tribe of Israel. This gruesome deed was intended to warn and to challenge them to act against the wicked perverts of Gibeah. *'Consider it, take counsel, and speak up!'* (29–30). The outrage at Gibeah was remembered for centuries as an example of great wickedness (cp. Hosea 10:9).

Gibeah had become the 'New Sodom'. When God is forgotten, life becomes cheap, wickedness flourishes and society becomes sick. Sexual perversion is wicked and we must warn that it is an abomination in the eyes of God, whatever our godless generation believes. *Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people* (Proverbs 14:34). We must pray urgently for our government and never accommodate the rising tide of wickedness. ***Consider it, take counsel, and speak up!***

There was a famine in the land

The time of the Judges was a bleak period in the history of Israel when *everyone did what was right in his own eyes* (Judges 21:25). God punished his people with hardship and famine because of their unfaithfulness to him. Elimelech *went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons* (1). The word 'sojourn' means 'to reside temporarily'. Iain M. Duguid writes, 'Bethlehem, whose very name means "House of Bread," was a place of no food. In that situation, Elimelech had a choice to make, a road to choose. He could stay in Bethlehem, the empty breadbasket of Judah, mourning the sin that surrounded him and trusting God to provide for him. Alternatively, he could leave the Promised land behind in search of greener fields, in this case the greener fields of Moab, where food was more abundant (ESTHER & RUTH, page 132). The Moabites were no friends of Israel. Their king had hired Balaam to curse Israel and their women had seduced the Israelites to worship false gods (Numbers chapters 22 to 25). More recently they had oppressed the Israelites until God raised up Ehud to deliver them (Judges 3).

The 'sojourn' became permanent: *They went to the country of Moab and remained there* (2). Elimelech's name means 'my God is king' but this does not appear to be true of him in the choices that he made. While the people of Bethlehem survived the famine (6) Elimelech placed his family in a pagan environment in Moab where the people worshipped the fire-god Chemosh (2 Kings 3:26–27; Jeremiah 48:13). When his sons grew older, they married unbelieving girls.

They should never have left the land which the Lord had given to them. Those of us who are parents have a solemn responsibility to bring up our children in a godly environment and under a sound Biblical ministry. Many Christians have come to rue the day when for the sake of material advancement, they have moved the family to an area which is spiritually barren. **They have more readily succumbed to the pressures of the world around them because they did not have the encouragement and help of a good Biblical church.**

RUTH

The events recorded in the book of Ruth occurred during the period of the Judges (1:1), probably between the years 1150 and 1120 BC. David was born approximately 1040 BC and Ruth was his great-grandmother (4:18–22). The book tells of the disaster that befell the family of Elimelech of Bethlehem when he took them to the land of Moab to escape famine in their own country. Elimelech and his two sons (who had married heathen women) died in Moab, and Naomi his widow, returned to Bethlehem with Ruth, one of her daughters-in-law. Boaz, a close relative, willingly assumed the responsibility of kinsman-redeemer by marrying Ruth, who is found in the family-tree of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5).

The story of Naomi and Ruth is one of bereavement, heartbreak, sorrow and disillusionment. In all these sad events, however, we see the wonderful purposes of God. His ways are wonderful indeed! How we all need to see this when everything seems to go wrong for us and when we face difficult times.

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

(William Cowper)

Outline of Ruth

1. Ruth chooses to follow the Lord – Chapter 1
2. Ruth gleanes in the fields of Boaz – Chapter 2
3. Ruth finds a kinsman-redeemer – Chapter 3
4. Ruth marries Boaz – Chapter 4

For further reading:

Esther & Ruth by Iain M. Duguid (Puritan & Reformed Publishing)
The Gospel according to Ruth by Iain D. Campbell (Day One).

All the people went up and came to the house of God and wept

The desperate act of the Levite shocked Israel into action and representatives from every tribe except Benjamin gathered at Mizpah. There were four hundred thousand men among them, equipped for battle. The people of Benjamin may have been summoned to this assembly because they were aware of it (3). The Levite told the people about the dreadful events that had taken place at Gibeah (1–5).

The Israelites were outraged and were determined not to return to their homes until they had dealt with the wicked Benjamites. They appointed a tenth of their men to look after the food supplies for the army (8–10). The Israelites sent representatives to the tribe of Benjamin requesting that they hand over the guilty men so that they might be put to death (10–14). Their request was refused and they prepared for battle. They asked counsel of God but were twice defeated, losing forty thousand men in two battles (15–25). *All the people, went up and came to the house of God and wept* (26). The Hebrew for ‘*the house of God*’ is ‘Bethel.’ The people may have gone to this city which was near to Gibeah rather than the tabernacle. On this occasion, the Lord not only directed them through Phinehas the high priest to go out and fight against the Benjamites, but also assured them of victory (28).

We do not know why the Lord allowed the Israelites to suffer defeat when they had sought him for direction. They did not sink into helpless despair, but they fasted and further sought the Lord. They persevered and were eventually brought through victorious. They also had the courage to take action, though costly, to deal with sin in the land.

Let us learn a lesson from the experience of the Israelites. There are times when we prayerfully make decisions and have the peace of God in taking a course of action that may appear to be right, only to find later that things go terribly wrong; churches have similar experiences. We must persevere and never give in to lethargy or despair in such times but trust in God who is altogether wise and good.

The LORD defeated Benjamin before Israel

In the third battle with the Benjamites, the other tribes of Israel set an ambush in similar fashion to what Joshua did at Ai (Joshua 8:1–29). The main Israelite army faked a retreat in order to draw the army of Benjamin away from Gibeah to leave the town vulnerable to attack. *The Benjamites did not know that disaster was upon them* (29–34). Ten thousand Israelites attacked Gibeah, setting fire to the town and killing all the inhabitants. Details of the battle are repeated and amplified from verse 35 through to verse 48. It is important to recognise that the credit for Israel's victory is given to God. *The LORD defeated Benjamin before Israel* (35). Twenty-five thousand Benjamite soldiers were killed in the battle leaving a remnant of six hundred who fled to the rock of Rimmon, about four miles east of Bethel.

The Israelites should have been content with the victory that the Lord gave them in the battle, but they went berserk in their desire for revenge upon the Benjamites. They were not content with destroying Gibeah, but slaughtered every Benjamite they could find, including women and children. They destroyed all their cities and the tribe was on the brink of annihilation. This enormous slaughter was totally unnecessary and it soon led to problems which are revealed in the next chapter. There is a warning for us here – righteous anger may easily turn to sinful anger and action if we are not careful to exercise self-control. *Be angry and do not sin', do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil* (Ephesians 4:26–27). **If you have good reason to be angry with someone, do not allow the devil to take advantage of your anger.**

The Benjamites paid a huge price for their sin. If you have not repented of your sin, please be warned by this incident. You may not have sinned in such a dreadful manner as those wicked men of Gibeah, but you are heading for disaster if you do not turn to Christ for forgiveness and trust in him. *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 6:23).

They had made a great oath

The Israelites *came to the house of God* (Bethel) and wept bitterly because of the destruction of the tribe of Benjamin (2). Their grief is also recorded in verses 6–7 and 15–17. God did not answer their question (3). They should have recognised that the tribe was missing because of their excessive zeal in battle. This final chapter of Judges contains another warning against making rash vows to God (see notes on Jephthah's vow – 28 May). The Israelites had made two foolish oaths before fighting the Benjamites which led to further bloodshed:

- That they would not allow their daughters to marry into the tribe of Benjamin – a wife vow (1).
- *They had made a great oath* that anyone who had not come up to their assembly before the Lord at Mizpah should be put to death – a war vow (5; cp. 20:1).

They made peace with the six hundred men who remained (13), but how would their tribe survive if they were not allowed to marry any Israelite woman? They found their solution by acting upon their second vow. They discovered that no one had come to Mizpah from the town of Jabesh Gilead (8–9). They slaughtered all of the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead except for four hundred virgins who were given as wives for the Benjamites. This still left two hundred of them who were without wives (10–18). They remembered that the daughters of Shiloh performed their dances at a yearly feast and the two hundred were given permission to take wives from these young women whose fathers were released from the oath made at Mizpah (19–23).

The Israelites should have sought God for release from their foolish vows to avoid more unnecessary bloodshed. We must remember that any vow to God which would lead us to commit sin must not be kept. We must of course repent of our foolishness in such cases. The book of Judges ends with the statement that *everyone did what was right in his own eyes* (25). We have seen that this lawlessness brought disaster and much misery to so many in Israel. **How tragic that so many refuse to learn this lesson in the twenty-first century!**