

## The Weekly Word

Feb 13-19, 2017

This is the week we celebrate love. There is no greater love than the love God has showed us in Jesus Christ. May God's love shine through as you read His Word this week.  
Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

### Monday, February 13: Judges 9- An ugly day...

All I kept thinking as I read this chapter was how ruthless and ugly we humans can be. This is a horrible account from beginning to end. Abimelek is a scoundrel of the highest order. The people of Shechem have no honor and no shame. Where is any semblance of living by God's Word? Where are priests or heads of clans who can instruct people in the way of God?

Israel has devolved into a godless people no better than any of the Canaanite peoples...

How easy it is to leave the Lord's path and become lost in the 'wilderness of the world.'

Judges is an example for us of what NOT to do and of potential consequences if we do stray. Unfortunately history is littered with stories of God's people straying. Fortunately God doesn't abandon us... sending voices to call us home back to the safe harbor of true and living faith in Him.

Time spent in God's Word. Time spent in self-examination with God's Word as the standard. Time spent in confession. Time spent in the presence of the Lord and with others who are seeking to stay close to the Lord as well. Time spent living in ways we know honors the Lord... these are our prime defenses against the pull of the human heart to anarchy and sins of self.

*So I come today, Lord, seeking You, seeking the correction and strength You can give to live rightly in Your eyes. And so I admit that unbridled sin in me could be as ugly as Abimelek. I cry out to You to forgive me and call me home. Correct me so that I do not stray. I am Yours. I am Yours. Through Jesus, I pray. Amen.*

### Tuesday, February 14: Judges 10- what's your relationship with the Lord?...

Who are these people who lead or save Israel? Aside from Deborah, they have all been military leaders, typically men who will fight. Spiritual leadership, calling Israel back to the Lord, has not played an obvious part in the job description.

Where is the spiritual discernment? Where are the priests? There hasn't been a word about celebrating the Passover or any of the religious feasts mentioned in Deuteronomy and this chapter alone references almost 70 years!

In trouble again, the chapter ends with these words, *The leaders of the people of Gilead said to each other, "Whoever will take the lead in attacking the Ammonites will be head over all who live in Gilead"* (18). Is this any way to pick the leader of the Israelite people? It sounds like a school yard where the biggest and strongest lead. Israel's lone attribute for leadership... the person who is the strongest or bravest?

Israel's relationship with the Lord has been reduced to "God, I am drowning. Save me!"

As crass as this may be, it is easy to fall into a similar trap. Life is going fairly well and thoughts of the Lord drift further and further into the recesses of our life. Worship becomes less regular. Involvement beyond the occasional worship attendance is nil. Giving is a token or an afterthought. Service... what service? Then the bottom falls out. A family member becomes sick,

your job is threatened or something of the sort. We wonder, “Where is God when we need Him? Why did this happen to ME?” Eventually we cry out, “God, I need a new job or healing...”

Is that any different than Israel?

NO, not really.

So reading the sad tale of Israel causes me to consider my connection and relationship with the Lord. Am I staying close by His side, in good and bad times or am I drifting??? Do I turn to the Lord when I need something but rarely turn to God simply to stay connected with the Lord?

I have gone through seasons with my budding adult-children when the only time they called was when they need something. Oh, they maybe chatty at first but then the ask comes... As a parent I longed for a deeper connection. I helped out because I wanted to stay connected but the relationship could have been much deeper. Is that the way I am with the Lord?

I hope not...

How about you???

*Lord, I sit with You today, just to be with You. NO ask right now, just presence... in Jesus' name I enter Your presence and sit. Amen and amen.*

### **Wednesday, February 15: Judges 11- Jephthah...**

The closing scene of this chapter dominates the narrative and I will return to it in a moment but first I wanted to ponder the rest of the chapter.

Jephthah is an outcast, sent away by his family because he is a half-brother.

How mean we can be, protective of self and judgmental of others. It is so easy for me to fall into behaviors like that. Rather than getting to know a person I make judgments based on outward appearances... how sin can and does ravage me from the inside out!

But then when trouble strikes, the family reaches out to Jephthah, who obviously has some leadership and military gifts. He has gathered rabble around himself. Rather than being altruistic Jephthah negotiates his best deal. I win I become your head (9). Profit and gain for personal benefit is nothing new. It is as old as the hills. I should never be surprised when my favorite athlete leaves “my team” for another simply chasing the money or CEOs making gobs of money while their companies make huge ethical lapses... and so on.

Empowered by God’s Spirit (29), Jephthah wins...

Before the battle Jephthah makes a vow to the Lord (30) that whatever comes out of his house when he returns home victorious, he will sacrifice to the Lord. The devastating part of the account is that his only daughter comes out of the house when he comes home. The thought of this makes me shudder...

Thoughts that I ponder:

- Rash words can often come back to bit us!
- Vows to the Lord are sacred words and should NEVER be taken lightly.

I hate this story. So many thoughts war inside of me. Why was he so foolish to make this kind of vow? How could God let him go through with it in the name of faithfulness?

And yet Jephthah’s story is a constant reminder to me that vows are sacred and God expects us to fulfill our vows to Him.

Mixed emotions still raging, I turn to pray...

*Lord, help me understand.*

*Lord, positively help me to be more altruistic than a human left to his own devices. Lord, help me to be wise in my vows and absolute in my honoring and fulfill my vows spoken to You. Through Jesus, I pray. Amen.*

### **Thursday, February 16: Judges 12—People problems...**

The opening remembrance of this chapter is a dispute between Jephthah and Ephraim. Ephraim was slighted because they weren't called to battle alongside Jephthah and Gilead. Now, of course, Jephthah remembers things differently, saying he called to them but Ephraim never came. The dispute escalated and 42,000 Ephraimites died in the battle that resulted.

There is an African proverb that goes, "When elephants fight the grass gets trampled."

My hunch is that the 42,000 who died had little to no vested interest in the originating squabble. They are simply the causality of their leaders wounded pride.

Talking through issues, particularly when you have culpability, is never an enjoyable time. Being humble and facing your faults, while at the same time being gracious to the other person(s), is hard for me and yet, I believe that is Jesus call to His followers, especially when the situation is between Believers.

I was recently involved in a situation of miss communication. We are still working things through. It is hard work. However, in the end my hope and sense is that God gets as much or even more glory as the issue is worked through by sisters and brothers. Check out the letter to Philemon... the Gospel works!!!

Today God is pressing me to return to the situation I mentioned and make sure things have been worked through. How about you? Is the Lord bringing to mind a broken relationship that is in need of repair? If so, listen to His voice and do what you need to do...

*Oh, Lord, help me with my friend. Guide my words and bridle my tongue so that only truth-filled words, God-honoring words pass through my lips. Allow me to face my faults honestly and humbly and that You, Lord, receive all the honor and glory that will result from this repaired relationship.*

*And, Lord, if by chance we cannot repair, allow me to do everything in my power to be an agent of peace and reconciliation. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

### **Friday, February 17: Judges 13- Oh the ways of God...**

I was struck by the timeline... 40 years of unfaithfulness and then God sends a 'Savior.' However, the Savior in the works is just being born, so it would likely be 20+ years for Sampson to grow up before God's salvation through Sampson can be brought into reality.

Considering all this, it hit me how grand God's plan is and how it unfolds in His time. God sees the beginning and the end at the same 'time.' We, however, are limited by time and can only see the present moment and time that has past.

With all of this spinning in my head, my heart swelled with graciousness for the Lord who has the whole world and all time in His hand. I marveled at how God works and how He moves years in advance to bring His will into being in His appointed time.

I began to think about how God moves... and was awed by the Lord and the way He works...

*God, you are never surprised. You are in total control. I bow to You, my Lord and my God. I thank You, Lord for all the ways you have worked in my life... praising You for Your grace and love and providential care. Through Jesus, I pray. Amen.*

### **Saturday, February 18: Judges 14- I am available just as I am...**

The longest story in Judges is about Sampson. As I read this unfolding story I scratch my head. “Why would the Lord choose him to be a savior for Israel?” Sampson seems to be a bit unstable. He doesn’t seem to think things through either. He creates the issue by offering the riddle and he doesn’t anticipate that the town folk will try to find out the answer. I seems that Sampson isn’t the brightest or most stable blub in the pack.

And yet the Lord chose him!

It hit me... it is God’s call not our human makeup that is ultimately important. In Sampson’s case God will use Sampson’s makeup –as rough around the edges as it is –to bring about His intended goal of releasing Israel from the Philistines grip.

God can and does use me and us, with all of our issues, to bring about His intended purposes, too. This is so freeing. I don’t have to be PERFECT to be used by God!

Now this isn’t a license for me to be lax in my faith and my seeking after maturity, but I don’t have to be perfect to be used. Halleluiah!

We are valuable to God’s kingdom. We are useful for God’s kingdom. We are important to God’s kingdom just as we are today.

How do you think God might use you today? What gifts, talents, abilities and personality traits will you offer to the Lord? Will you offer yourself, warts and all, to the Lord today, allowing Him to use you in any way He chooses?

*Lord, that is my offering to you this morning. You may have all of me, my good traits and my bad ones, my maturity and my immaturity. Lord, God, I place my body, my life, myself, my all on the altar as an offering to You. I pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

## **Sunday, February 19, 2017, Sunday Worship**

*If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.*

*If you are reading along with me from the PCOG website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at [office@pcogonline.org](mailto:office@pcogonline.org).*

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.