

JUDGES (1)

The Seed of Decline



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Continuing from Joshua

The Book of Judges picks up immediately where the Book of Joshua left off. The Book of Joshua ended with the death of Joshua and Eleazar (**Jos 24:29-33**) and Judges begins with these very words *“after the death of Joshua...”* (**Judges 1:1**). As such, it was indeed meant to be a continuation.

The death of Joshua had one very significant impact; that Israel is now left without an appointed, national leader. And this is the new milestone which warranted it a whole new and separate book. As shall be seen throughout the book, this would prove to be one of the main factors contributing to Israel’s decline in spirituality.

What to expect

The Book of Judges is a story of a moral and spiritual decline; and the major theme which will be repeated throughout the book will be: *“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in their own eyes.”* So, expect to hear some disturbing stories, which will get worse as we progress through the book. The book gives a very realistic picture of a world plagued by sin. This should not be taken to mean that God compromises with sin, but rather as part of the history of salvation – of how God saves horrible sinners from sin; us included. We are going to see some horrid descriptions of the evil that Israel did; as a reflection on the horrid sins we are involved in. As you may see, the errors were very much understandable; and many seemingly unimportant seeds were later harvested into very disturbing deeds. This should warn us about the danger of compromise.

The Book of Judges identifies the root of the problem. Israel, as the people of God, had already been set free from slavery in Egypt. They had been given the Law of Moses. However, they lack the king, which was to administer justice in the whole nation of Israel. God must be their King, but He would also appoint earthly kings to bear the sword, by which he must represent God in administering justice amongst His people. In this regards, therefore, the Book prepares us for David; the king after God’s own heart. And it oreshadows the need for Christ, the King of kings and the Lord of lords who will accomplish the Kingdom of God on earth. The fact that the judges represented only limited tribes would give rise to increased disunity and chaos.

Take note though, that the lessons are not meant to be like a guidebook, but rather a collection of reflections. For reasons of interactions, I shall not divulge some information right in the beginning; thus taking us through the Book as a progressive story; opening the curtains one by one as we go along.

Judges 1: Adoni-Bezek and the Subtlety of Compromise

Upon beginning a new episode, we are told first of this king named Adoni-Bezek, an unknown king up to this point, and one who is only mentioned here. Yet, unlike the other defeated kings, his story does get a lengthier portion, which must mean that the writer intended something significant.

Adoni-Bezek, despite being unknown, must be somewhat powerful, for he had subdued seventy kings and cruelly treated them by cutting off their thumbs and big toes (**Jud 1:7**), most probably to prevent them from running or going to war ever again. Now, in Judges 1, he is receiving his just deserts, a retribution in kind.

But what is interesting is if we investigate deeper into this occurrence, and see how it sets a pattern for the conquests to come. There are two possible scenarios by which this story could be interpreted:

1. One story is that what had happened with Adoni-Bezek was the implementation of **Exodus 21:23-25**: *“Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.”* The fact that Adoni-Bezek had his thumbs and big toes cut off was justice for what he did to the

seventy kings; and the fact that he was later taken into Jerusalem probably as forced labor meant that he got just what he deserved.

And guess what? Adoni-Bezek himself agreed to this verdict. It was he himself who confessed, *“seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off have picked up scraps under my table. Now God has paid me back for what I did to them”* (**Jud 1:7**). Let’s put aside the fact that Adoni-Bezek did not say that the one who did justice to him was Yahweh (he used the general term *Elohim* which could refer to any god/s). He was still saying that he was held responsible by the Divine. God was demanding justice from a cruel king who ruled without considering accountability. And the Israelites? They were tools in God’s hand to achieve this very intent.

2. The second story would disagree. **Exodus 23:20-33** and **Deut 7:17-26** attest to what they did wrong. God had said that he would deliver Israel from nations stronger than they were (**Deut 7:7**) and of whom they were afraid (**Deut 7:19**). However, when God delivers them into the hands of the Israelites, here’s the instruction on what to do: *“He will give kings into your hands, and you will wipe out their names from under heaven. No one will be able to stand up against you; you will destroy them”* (**Deut 7:24**). And from Exodus: *“I will give into your hands the people who live in the land, and you will drive them out before you. Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. Do not let them live in your land or they will cause you to sin against Me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you”* (**Ex 23:31-33**). The instruction is for a total and thorough cleansing.

Therefore, by not killing Adoni-Bezek and (probably) bringing him to Jerusalem as forced labor, the Israelite disobeyed God’s clear instruction.

The question, then, is which was it? Did Israel act in obedience to the Law, or in disobedience to direct command? Was Adoni-Bezek right in concluding that what happened to him was God’s justice for what he did, or was he wrong, because the very act itself was not what God had intended?

For the sake of brevity, I would not hold the suspense. Adoni-Bezek was right in concluding that God was the first cause for his defeat, and he was also right that it was retributive for what he had done. However, it was also right that Israel should not have performed that punishment but should have executed the king instead. The consistency thread, then, is this very same principle: *“you intended for evil, God intended for good”* which we have learned in **Gen 50:20**. Man’s sin and mistakes does not catch God by surprise, and He has the wisdom to work things out to achieve His immutable plan. Man’s accountability does not disprove God’s sovereignty. Keep in mind now that they would have done so with a lot of justifications in mind; which may include (1) they were only acting in obedience to the “eye for eye” in Ex 21, and that (2) it was the more humane thing to do.

But here’s the more important lesson from the story. This was not to be an isolated incident where the tribes of Israel disobeyed the commands of **Deut 7** and **Ex 23**. In fact, such disobedience would be a pattern for events to come. For the remaining of chapter 1, the writer dedicates the story to this failure. With the exception of the Simeonites who with the help of Judah totally destroyed the city of Zephath;

- The Benjamites did not drive out the Jebusites, who ended up living with them (**v. 21**)
- The tribes of Joseph spared one family for showing them the city of Bethel (**v. 24-25**) and later made the Amorites into forced labor (**v. 34**)
- Manasseh did not drive out the people of Beth Shan or Taanach or Dor or Ibleam or Megiddo and their surrounding settlements (**v. 27**)
- Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites in Gezer, and the Canaanites ended up living with them (**v. 29**)
- Zebulun did not drive out the Canaanites in Kitron or Nahalol, and made them into forced labor (**v. 30**)
- Asher did not drive out those living in Akko or Sidon or Ahlab or Akzib or Helbah or Aphek or Rehob and ended up living amongst them (**v. 31-32**)

- Naphtali did not drive out those in Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath but forced them into forced labor (**v. 33**)

However, I must explain that the transpiration of these events was told in a very subtle and naturalistic manner:

- There was no explicit reference to the command at **Ex 23** or **Deut 7**,
- It all happened almost naturally, as there is the process of the Israelites becoming strong and then defeating the enemies and turning them to forced labor (see, for example **1:28; 35**)
- As we later shall see, the Israelites of this generation were generally God-fearing people who eventually repented of their mistake when it is revealed to them (**2:4**)

The only subtle hint was the repeated use of the word “but,” which indicated that there was supposedly another course of action, and that this was the wrong one.

And I think the subtlety with which the story was told was intentional, as it was indicative of the subtle way the compromises were made. In events of celebrative victories in which the Israelites had just defeated the enemies God had required them to defeat; and the increasing confidence they gained as they gained power, few would still remember that we had broken the sacred trust. I could picture the way those compromises were sub-consciously built:

- In the name of faith, in pretense that they were obeying the very Word of God from of **Exodus 21:23-24**.
- In the name of ethics, in saying that sparing an enemy would be the more humane thing to do.
- By appealing to ignorance, perhaps saying that they had forgotten God’s command in **Ex 23** or **Deut 7**, or that those commandments might have become culturally irrelevant.
- Or some through arrogance, by thinking that they defeated the enemies as they gained strength, not because God gave them the victories as he had done before when He caused them to gain impossible victories over enemies multiple times stronger than they. Read **Ex 23:29-30** - The fact that the Israelites were able to drive the Canaanites out when they had increased in both power and numbers did not mean that God was not the one delivering from the hands of the enemies. In fact it was God who allowed them to increase.

See, the reason that God did not drive out the Canaanites immediately upon Israel’s entry was “*because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you*” (**Ex 23:29**). In other words, IT IS FOR YOUR OWN GOOD!

At this point, I think it is important that we reflect on ourselves, and our daily lives. I am convinced that we too, would have made our own compromises to which we applied one or more of the above excuses. We may have built very strong walls and are utterly convinced that we did no wrong. However, as we open the Word of God and further study the lives of the Israelites, are we willing for God to open up our lives and expose the hidden sin that lies beneath? Before we go on, would you pray this prayer with me:

Search us, God, and know our hearts; test us and know our anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in us, and lead us in way everlasting (see **Ps 139:23-24**). For we do declare that all a person’s ways seem pure to them, but motives are weighed by you alone, O Lord (see **Prov 16:2**). Help us therefore to maintain a clear conscience before you, but to maintain the attitude of being open to rebuke lest we harbor hidden faults (see **1 Cor 4:4**). As we continue the study, be our judge and our Lord. Be also the Author and Perfecter of our faith. We rest secure in You and rely solely upon you; for we come only in the Name of Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Judges 2: 1-5 Repentance and Consequences

In the opening of Chapter 2, the author changes his tone and exposes the subtle sin that the Israelites were involved in in Chapter 1. The exposé of this subtlety came in exactly the opposite manner: it came from an angel speaking.

Here God explains His rebuke, and why He had instructed the Israelites to totally destroy the Canaanites. It was so that they can eradicate whatever idolatrous influences these nations would have on them. They were to destroy the altars so as to cleanse the land from foreign gods. Failure to do so would cause them to be entrapped by the idolatrous practices of the Canaanites (**Jud 2:3**).

Here's behind the scenes of the apparent cruelty that God had commanded them. All the way back to when the land was first promised to the Israelites (that is, when it was promised to Abraham), God had already given the prophecy that Abraham's descendants would return to Canaan only in the fourth generation. And there was a reason for that. It was because the sin of the Amorites had not yet reached its full measure (**Gen 15:16**).

Now what was the sin of the Amorites that made them and their surrounding civilizations deserve such judgment? Well, we only need to look at the description as given to us in **Leviticus 18** and **Leviticus 20** – where God forbade the Israelites from following their practices. In Leviticus 18, the practices were attributed to two distinct groups: *“you must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not do what they do”* (**Lev 18:3**). And the remaining of Leviticus 18 was detailing what these practices were. In Leviticus 20, it was made clear that the prohibitions were for this: *“you must not live according to the customs of the nations I am going to drive out before you. Because they did all these things I abhorred them”* (**Lev 20:23**)

Based on the lists in Leviticus 18 and 20, the sins of the Canaanites were mostly (1) Sin of idolatry and (2) Sexual sins. These are some of the sins the Canaanites were responsible of:

Sins of Idolatry

- Occultism (20:6)
- Child sacrifice (18:21; 20:2-5)

Sexual Sins

- Adultery (18:20; 20:10)
- Incest (18:6-18; 20:11-12, 14, 17, 19,20,21)
- Homosexuality (18:22; 20:13)
- Bestiality (18:23; 20:15-16)

To the Israelites, God had demanded very serious punishments for each of these sin, which was either exile or death. These are not trivial cases which can be restituted, they are sins which were deserving of the most severe punishments. Therefore, by God's standard these people were people deserving the death penalty; and the Israelites were but tools of justice in the hands of God who executed the judgment.

Judges 2:6- 3:6 The Cost of Comfort and the Hidden Cost of Compromise

Now that we know how serious the sins of the Canaanites were, we get an inkling as to why it was important that the Israelites cut off all relations with these nations.

Now, to set the story straight. It is easy for us to conclude that the generation Joshua brought to the Promised Land was a wicked generation who failed to obey God's commandment. However, this was not how the writer summarized their lives. Judges 2 started off with a rebuke from God, but also with immediate

repentance of the people (**Jud 2:4**). This was why at the times of Joshua and the elders who outlived him, the people lived serving the Lord (**Jud 2:6**). And they were able to live such acceptable lives because they “*had seen all the great things the Lord had done for Israel*” (**2:7**). So, they were considered God-fearing people.

Yet, their error was not without its consequence. The subsequent generation immediately reaped the compromise that they sowed: “*after that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what He had done for Israel*” (**2:10**). This was how they were described:

- **Verse 10.** “*Another generation;*” completely new. The wanderings were a period of purification where Israel was exposed neither to the cultures/ idolatry of Egypt nor to that of Canaan. They were given the Law to forge their identity as a nation and led under a direct theocracy represented with the sole representative leadership of Moses or Joshua. Theirs was the time when the Law was instilled in the mind of Israel. Moses was given the Law, and Joshua was required obedience. This generation, then, was the first ever to be completely free of pagan influences; and had in fact been brought up in one in which the Torah was taught.
- **Verse 10.** The generation “*knew not the Lord.*” Now, mind you that the generation preceding them was faithful to the Lord (**Jud 2:7**), and therefore it is highly unlikely that they hadn’t taught the ways of the Lord to their children. I am certain that they would have told them of the events in Egypt as commanded in **Ex10:2**, and would have observed the Passover ordinance as commanded in **Ex 12:24-27**. These reminders to pass down the faith of the forefathers were important “*so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your hearts,*” which was why they had to “*teach them to your children and to their children after them*” (**Deut 4:9**). Therefore, that they knew not the Lord would mean that the faith of the forefathers was just passed down as a cognitive memory rather than a personal conviction. Faith is not hereditary.
- **Verse 10.** Who “*knew not what the Lord had done for Israel.*” Once again, this does not mean that they do not have knowledge about what God had done; but that the cognitive knowledge did little to produce fruitful lives. People of my generation might attest to this. Most of us are not oblivious about World War II or the atrocities that occurred then. Many would read magazines or history books detailing such events. But how many of us would actually say that such knowledge still retain a deep impact in our lives? Or, another example. We in Asia would be able to identify that our particular church was founded by so and so missionary who probably left his comfortable life and led a sacrificial life to build the church which facilities we now enjoy. But this knowledge would do little to inspire the congregation of the present day, with the most probable reason being, “*times have changed.*”
- **Verse 12.** This was the compromise: The corrupt pagan culture they did not drive out. And the inevitable result was “*they followed and worshipped the various gods of the peoples around them.*” This was now the harvest of the seed of disobedience we witnessed in chapter 1, where we are told repeatedly that the Canaanites remained with them. The parents’ insistence for comfort is costing their descendants dearly.

But what the previous generation did seemed like a trivial sin. They had, for all their lives, lived in the desert because of what their ancestor did. And now that they had faithfully done what God commanded them to do, which was to progressively take over the land of Canaan, surely they deserved a little rest, a little enjoyment. And it was common practice during those times that the defeated nation would serve the conqueror. So what was wrong with taking them captive and making them into forced labor? That would make their lives a whole lot easier, and that was what most of them ended up doing. It seemed good to them, and they justified it. But it ended up being a

“trap and a snare” that invoked the next generation to worship the pagan gods they failed to annihilate.

The rest of the Book of Judges describes how this decline takes place. And we shall look into that next week. For now, I would close by looking into two verses:

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:1-2)

In Romans 12, we are called to actively resist the conformation to the pattern of this world. I have done a more thorough exposition of Romans 12:1-2, so you could refer to that for further readings. However, the point I want to make here is this: Compromise happens when we forget the constant spiritual warfare we are in. The world with its pagan and corrupt culture is always seeking to conform us into its pattern, and it does this through all the subtle things in life. It is what we continually hear, what we continually do, what we continually see, and the habitual doings that we continually witness that makes the worst of sin “normal”. Those trivial habits we think are so innocent. Those compromise that “everybody does”. Unless we are aware of this, and unless we consciously and actively resist this conformation, then we too, will fall under the same trap, the same snare.

The Bible thus warns us about the life of a sluggard:

“Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores up its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest – and poverty will come on you like a thief and scarcity like an armed man” (Prov 6:6-11)

We are in a perpetual state of spiritual warfare. This we need to be consistently aware about. Paul exhorted, “...be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph6:10-12). We need to be aware of the devil’s schemes. And the subtlety of compromise often seem so miniscule that we are not even aware of making them. However, the key to winning the war is total obedience to the Word of God. As it was in the times of judges, the fact that Judah and Simeonites had won the battles when their number had increased, that never meant that their victory was apart from the Lord. The commandments for physical battles applies today in our spiritual battles.

“I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run. I will send the hornet ahead of you to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way. But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land. I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, and from the desert to the Euphrates River. I will give into your hands the people who live in the land, and you will drive them out before you. Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. Do not let them live in your land or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you.” (Ex 23:27-33)

Those who live by the flesh would not find satisfaction in such command, because it will mean that they cannot gain glory from their victories. However, I would say that the fact that God fights all our battles, that He in His wisdom trains us to grow stronger in Him and not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear (**1 Cor 10:13**) means that our victory is fully assured in Him. And that we are indeed more than conquerors in Christ (**Rom 8:37**). The requirements that are given to us is for a life dedicated to God in worship, in which we commit our minds to be transformed in the likeness of Christ (**Rom 12:1-2**). And just as the Israelites were not allowed make a covenant with the foreigners or worship their gods, we are asked “*not to let sin reign in our mortal bodies*” but again, to offer ourselves to God (**Rom 6:12-14**).

The seed of decline was the compromise the Israelite made by not obeying God. They trusted in their own wisdom (and deep within just wanted more comfort than what God allowed). The more important thing is to ask ourselves: What about us? What kind of compromises have we made in our spiritual lives? One nature of sin that we can be sure of is “*you may be sure that your sin will find you out*” (**Num 32:23**). But if we commit our lives before God, then He alone will work through us, in spite of all our strengths and weaknesses, for good (**Rom 8:28**). To me, this is the blessed assurance.

This is the importance of parents' witness. God intended that the Israelites' lives in Canaan to have just the right balance of comfort and struggle. Not too much struggle that they cannot survive (**Ex 23:29**, compare with **1 Cor 10:13**), but also not too little that they would slide into their comfort zones and be plain letargic. It was never God's plan that they took the Canaanites as forced labor – they had to sweat it out themselves. If you are struggling, give thanks because of it as your fight is seen by your children and, unbeknownst to you, God is preserving the mentality of your children. As I have repeatedly mentioned, we need to remember God when we have plenty, and rely on Him when we lack; and wisdom is in asking for neither too much nor too little, in order that we may keep the “daily bread” mentality (see **Prov 30:7-9**), which is a complete and consistent reliance upon God.

The problem of the new generation was that they were not acquainted with struggle. What then was the remedy? Struggle. Which was why God then gave them over to the enemies. They were now defeated, plundered (**2:14**), in great distress (**2:15**), and thereby groaned (**2:18**). He gave them over, but not to complete and utter abandonment lest their conscience be dull due to hopelessness. He raised judges to act as the peoples' conscience, who displayed with their lives and actions obedience to God and the result thereof.

- **Verse 19.** Total Depravity and Increasing Evil. “*When the judge died*” represents one generation passing. Sin doesn't start off anew, it picks up where it was last restrained. In the words of Romans 1, it may go like so: Previous generation, free sex. After that, sexual perversion. After that homosexuality. Despite a change in generation, the sin progresses (or more accurately degresses). It was a downward spiral – it always was, it still is, and always will be.

This is because:

“For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:19-21)

Contrary to popular views, man is not exercising freedom when he sins. “*Sin enslaves, and everyone who sins is a slave to sin*” (**Jn 8:34**). We are subjected to frustration. We think we are progressing; the world thinks it progresses in science, technology, in philosophy. But in actual fact we are still very much in a bondage of decay. All the sophistication of information technology, for example, only

leads to the expediting of the spread of evil. All of a sudden, people in Asia who are still very much conservative are now aware how acceptable homosexuality has become in the west. And because of it, the previously guilt-ridden sinners think they gain some sort of approval by defining the new normal. Here is the effect of sin: we tend to relativize truth but absolutize sin. When confronted with moral expectations, we relativize it and say that morality must be made a social consensus. However, when we see a particular weakness gaining approval, we try all we can to absolutize it. Why else do you think the west insists that evolution be taught, but yet forbids public prayer? We want freedom of press but are not permitted to say anything against homosexuality. We protest against animal cruelty but condone abortion. See, we shouldn't be surprised when sinners sin – it is our nature.

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph 2:1-9)

Paul uses a very unique way of explaining this in Ephesians. We are dead in our transgressions, but yet we live gratifying its desires. We have no more freedom of will, despite how much it feels like we do. We lost mastery over our own flesh and live gratifying its sinful nature, and whether we admit it or not, are living under the ruler of this world, Satan.

So does this then present a bleak and pessimistic vision of the future? Yes and no; depending how we look at it. **2 Thes 2:3-12** describes what we will see happening. The Holy Spirit is restraining evil, but the lawless one is allowed to do his work, and God will allow the powerful delusion to deceive those who are perishing. But at the same time, such lawlessness becomes to believers the evidence of their faith, that what God had foretold is being accomplished before our very eyes; therefore assuring us that He is indeed in control, and is working all things for good as He has promised. And the more we witness this, the more we stand in awe of God and in obedience to His Word.

Sexual Depravity and Generational Cleansing

In this next section we are going to make an in-depth study of cases of generational cleansing – where God judges a whole generation in order to purify the remnants. You see, the Canaanites were not the first civilization to come under God’s total judgment (and it will also not be the last). Prior to this, there were at least two other civilizations, which was the people at the time of Noah and also Sodom & Gomorrah.

- ***The people of the time of Noah***

God described the men of the time of Noah as those of great wickedness and whose inclination were incessantly evil (**Gen 6:5**). They were utterly corrupt and full of violence (**Gen 6:11**). And **2 Pet 3** indicate that they scoffed at Noah for announcing the impending judgment, and it seemed like it was never going to happen.

Further investigations to what happened even AFTER the Flood may give more insight as to how the culture behaved. Right after the Flood we found a very strange occurrence where Noah was given to drunkenness, was exposed to nakedness, which was seen by his son Ham, and cursed Ham for not covering his nakedness; after which the story of Noah ended abruptly (**Gen 9:20-29**). When looked at its surface this story was very strange, not only for the fact that it seemed strange to curse Ham's son Canaan for an action that seemed trivial. Some commentators have actually given the possibility that there had been a motive for homosexual conduct on the part of Hamⁱ. Even after the whole earth had been cleansed of sinful men, old habits and culture remained, and we immediately see drunkenness and sexual misconduct.

- ***The people of Sodom and Gomorrah***

The people of Sodom and Gomorrah were at the very least guilty of the sin of homosexuality and of gang rape. These were what they attempted to do to the two angels (**Gen 18:5**). In **Ezekiel 16:49-50**, the sins of Sodom further included pride, gluttony, laziness, selfishness at not helping the needy and 'detestable things' which probably included the homosexual practices they came to be known for. Or, to use the classifications of **Jude 7**, these were sins of "*sexual immorality and perversions.*" And **Isa 3:9** shows that their depravity has reached such an extent that they no longer feel guilty about their sins, but rather "*parade their sin*" almost in pride.

A Final Cleansing

Note first the similarity between the sins of the Canaanites (**Lev 18 and 20** – especially represented by idolatry and sexual perversions) and those of Sodom and Gomorrah. **Jude 14-16** seems to further equate what happened at Sodom and Gomorrah to the depravity in the times of Noah (Enoch would have more specifically prophesied about the judgment at the time of Noah, his great grandson, which was evident by how he named his son – Methuselah – which meant "his death will bring." And the Flood did happen at the death of Methuselah)ⁱⁱ. But this description was also used for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah in Jude 7. But another verse comes to mind, which is **2 Peter 3**. This time, Peter equates what happened during the times of Noah with what is going to happen in the last days. Just as the people scoffed at Noah for warning them about the Flood when he was still building the Ark (which I think happened for 80 years), people in the last days will scoff because the Second Coming is nowhere in sight. And again, our Lord Jesus equates what happened with the times of Noah and Sodom and Gomorrah with what will happen in the last days. "*Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed...*" (**Luk 17:26-30**).

A point worth noting (which is something we will come back to at the end of the study on Judges), is that by the end of the Book of Judges, the writer seemed to purposely describe the moral conditions of the Israelites to be similar to that of Sodom and Gomorrah. If we compare **Judges 19** with **Genesis 19** (which we are going to do just not at this point), you will see striking similarities, which suffice to say, meant that the Israelites have now stooped to the level of the Canaanites. God, however, saved the Israelites before the decline of sin could go any further (and we are going to see how in the studies of 1 Samuel).

Another comparison is crucial; and that is to **Romans 1:18-32**, because this will hint at another final cleansing. In Romans 1, Paul described how the decline of spirituality would happen. There will be one cause for this, which is because the people will try to deny the existence of God and therefore accountability to Him. They suppressed the plain truth of the existence of God with their wickedness (**1:18**), and slowly

descended into further and further depravity. In Romans 1, take note of (1) how sinners rebel, (2) what kind of exchange sinners make and (3) what God gives them over to, as illustrated below:

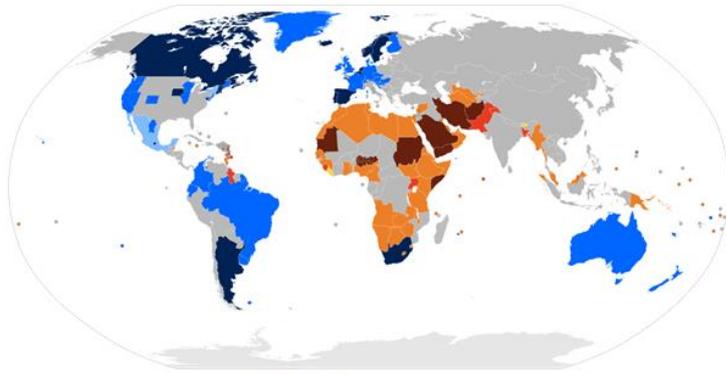
Rebellion	Exchange	Given over to	Temptation of Eve
Initial Rebellion: Suppressing Truth with wickedness (1:18)	Glory for Images (1:23)	<i>Sexual Impurity</i> - Free sex, probably includes incest (1:24)	"Did God really say?" (Gen 3:1)
Rejected God, not acknowledging Him (1:21)	Truth for Lie (1:25)	<i>Shameful lusts</i> - homosexuality and unnatural sexual relations (1:26-27)	"You will not certainly die" (Gen 3:4)
Did not think worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God (1:28)	Natural for unnatural (1:26) (Implied) Righteousness for evil (1:32)	<i>Depraved mind</i> – every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity (1:29-30) Final sign: Not only indulgent in their sin, but also approving those who do them (1:32)	"You will be like God" (Gen 3:5)

I have also put a comparison to the Genesis 3 account of the deception of Eve, because Paul mentions that the deception will be somewhat similar (2 Cor 11:3).

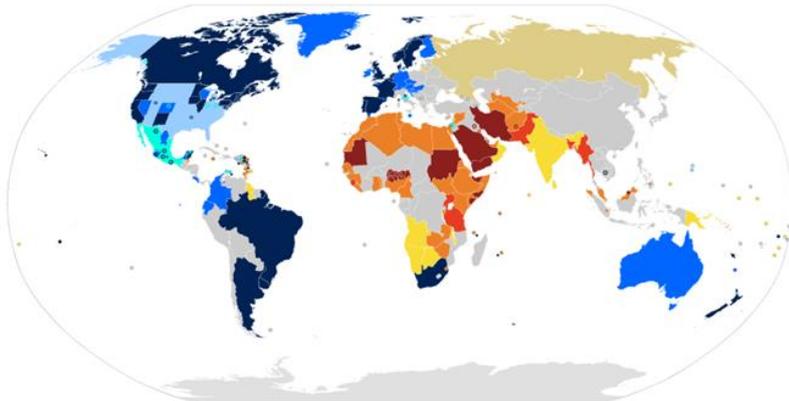
That was a long sidetrack, but this is why it was important. All throughout the Bible, God has judged (or spared) whole civilizations based on whether or not they repented of the sins that were exposed to them. This is important in the study of Judges because of two reasons: ① As we shall see, Israel, now without a national leader, gets increasingly wicked and in Judges 19 was almost comparable to Sodom, which God abhorred and ultimately destroyed. We need to see how this decline happened, and why. ② 2 Pet 3 equates what happened at these cities to the impending day of the Lord, which will be a judgment with fire.

God waited for more than 400 years for the sin of the Amorites to reach its full measure (Gen 15:16). God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built (1 Pet 3:20). And now, God is waiting patiently whilst the sin of mankind is slowly filling up to its full measure, whereupon the judgment with fire shall come. And why? "The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9) and because of that, "our Lord's patience means salvation" (2 Pet 3:15).

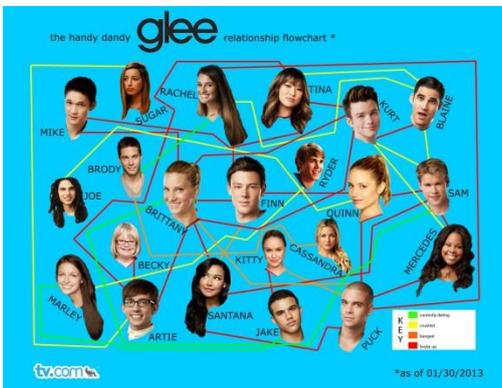
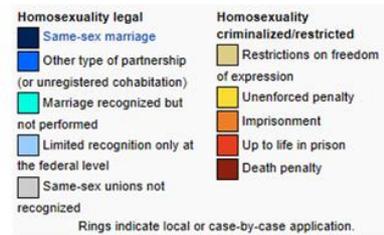
So let me end by asking us this: How far are we from filling up the full measure of sin? Almost in every case, the extent of sexual depravity were taken as some sort of spiritual thermometer for how deeply depraved a civilization is. And if we take Isa 3:9 and Rom 1:32 to indicate that the worst of depravity is when people start to not only unrepentantly practice these sexual perversions but but to also parade this sin publicly in some sort of depraved approval of it, then the following graph should begin to tell us how close we have come to final judgment:



Taken: June 2011



Taken: June 2014



Homosexuality has of recent become a hot topic, where people would insist on approval. Medias were orchestrated to make those disapproving Christians look intolerant, judgmental, and even evil. They have of recent mentioned about the importance of “coming out” – where the Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual and Transgender (or otherwise now known as LGBT) would publicly announce their sexual “orientation.” Television shows such as the popular “Glee” has a clear (and creative) agenda of getting the public to accept the LGBT community and every other sexual perversion must now be accepted. A friend of mine recently said this: Pluralism is a religion that attacks all other religions.

Another pause is therefore necessary; this time to inspect ourselves. 2 Pet 3 clearly tells us of the coming judgment; but it also tells us how we should now live in the current world which is degrading itself to destruction. Peter reminds us repeatedly about the kind of lives we should live:

“Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and the speed of its coming... So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to his (a new heaven and a new earth), make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him. Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation... Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever! Amen.” (2 Pet 3:11-18)

As a close to this chapter, I would like to summarize what I had tried to do, in case it got lost in the lengthy explanation. The reality of sin is such that we can expect civilizations go from bad to worse. Ever since the

time of Adam, God had always preserved remnants, whom He personally taught to live acceptable lives before Him. But ever since Christ's first coming, we are now living in what the biblical writers call "*the last days*" (eg. **Acts 2:17, 2 Tim 3:1, Heb 1:2, 2 Pet 3:3**). The reason this is called the last days is because there will be one final spiritual decline, which will end in one final cleansing by fire. And this will happen when Christ comes again as the Judge. "*As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be at the coming of the Son of Man*" (**Mat 24:37**) indicates that this final cleansing was comparable to the cleansing in the days of Noah. Morality will go from bad to worse; and people will start scoffing at God. But the end WILL come at the appointed time. And as those who were found in the Ark were saved from the judgment by water, so shall all who are found in Christ be saved from the judgment by fire.

When put this way, one warning seems inevitable. Being normal, or following the norm is not good enough. Excuses such as "everyone's doing it" just doesn't cut it. Because those who were normal died in the Flood; and those who followed the norm fell under judgment. Being conformed to the pattern of the world means that we are gratifying our sinful desires. Those who do not resist the devil will end up following the path he forged: going from bad to worse. Christ is the Way, the Truth, the Life; and the only way back to God. It doesn't matter if this sounds arrogant; the only question we should ask is if the statement is right. Live, then, as sojourners in this world, so we would have a place in the Kingdom of God. He is our King, our Lord and not only our Savior. If sinners will inevitably sin, we who are called sons of God will inevitably be conformed to the image of Christ. The gate is narrow, but it is the only way.

ⁱ I put here an explanation by Bruce L. Gerig (2005) taken from <http://epistle.us/hbarticles/secrets.html> :

It should be noted that there are three words for "naked" used in the OT: *arom* (Strong #6174), *erom* (#5903), and *erwa* (#6172) – the third one (found in this passage) "associated with sexuality" and referring especially to the genitals. It may be noted that the phrase "uncover nakedness [*gala erwa*]" is often used in the OT as a sexual euphemism indicating illicit sex or rape. This expression for sexual union is used throughout the incest prohibitions in Lev 18:1-18, 20:17-21,9 where, for example, we read: "If a man takes his sister, a daughter of his father or a daughter of his mother, and **sees her nakedness**, and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace, and they shall be cut off in the sight of their people; he has **uncovered** his sister's **nakedness**, he shall be subject to punishment." (20:17, NRSV) Notice the parallelism here between "seeing nakedness" and "uncovering nakedness," both inferring "having sex with." Because of a different context, "seeing" and "uncovered" in the Noah story do not prove that Ham had sex with Noah – but they do suggest some possible link between "nakedness" (*erwa* = genitals) and looking and sex in this story.

ⁱⁱ I covered this topic on the session on *Toledoth* of Genesis 5. Further investigation into the lineage of Noah indicates that his great grandfather, Enoch, was probably given the prophecy about the Flood when his son Methuselah was born. The birth of Methuselah somehow made a turning point in Enoch's life, and from then on Enoch walked faithfully with God for the rest of his life. The name Methuselah actually meant "his death will bring," and when we count the chronologies, the Flood actually happened right during the year of the death of Methuselah.