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### The Morality of the Book of Judges

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**THE MORALITY OF THE BOOK OF JUDGES**

**A thesis  
presented to the faculty of  
Concordia Seminary  
St. Louis, Mo.**

**by**

**OTTO F. STAHLKE**

**in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree  
of**

**BACHELOR OF DIVINITY**

# The Morality of the Book of Judges.

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## THE MORALITY OF THE BOOK OF JUDGES.

### I.A. Purpose.

It has been common in recent decades to heap calumny upon Jehovah and to deprecate his religion because his chosen people, and especially the judges, did not perfectly uphold his precepts in their words and in their actions. The purpose of this discussion is to show that the records from the Book of Judges, to which exception has so frequently been taken, cast no reflection upon the true religion of Jehovah. The discourse will plainly be apologetic in nature, comprising objections that have been or can be raised against the morality of the book.

The purpose of this paper is not to establish the moral standard obtaining in this period of disorder, as though the standard of Jehovah were inferior to that of a later day, in that the deeds of God's specially chosen deliverers were to be an example to His people also morally, thereby making the standard. An objective examination of this morality would prove it the same as the Biblical morality of any other age; but that lies beyond our discussion. Again the purpose is not to prove that the judges or God's people did nothing contrary to the moral law of God.

### B. The Scope.

The subject of our investigation, then, are <sup>actions and speeches</sup> actions and speeches recorded in the Book of Judges which have been interpreted as proving that the morality of Jehovah had been of an order parallel to that of the Canaanite

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peoples, or, possibly, lower.

We shall not enter upon the historicity of the narrative, nor upon the integrity of the book, nor upon its canonicity except where these considerations are immediately involved or where they aid in the purpose of the whole.

C. Mode of Procedure.

It will be necessary to state the objections, both those of a summary nature and those more specialized. We shall determine whether the respective critic has a "hypothesis to maintain", or whether, perhaps, he objects "just because it is in the Bible". The axiom to which we shall have frequent recurrence is this: The Bible does not adopt all the actions which it records. 1) With the help of this principle we shall establish whether there is a real difficulty, i.e., whether the author or Scripture elsewhere approves of the respective deed. We cannot count among our problems those deeds of which Scripture expressly disapproves nor need we discuss those transgressions whose consequences were their adequate punishment. In these cases, however, we shall point out the consequences. Finally, we must also distinguish what motivated the actor to the particular deed, whether it was the Spirit of the Lord or whether it was his own carnal desire.

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1) William Smith, "Old Testament History", p.335.

**D. Bibliography.**

**1. Commentaries on Judges:**

**Keil-Delitzsch.**  
**George F. Moore, Int. Crit. Comm.**  
**Lange**  
**Starke**  
**Bachmann**

**2. Histories of Israel:**

**Stoeckhardt, "Altes Testament".**  
**E. Bertheau, "Zur Geschichte der Israeliten".**  
**William Smith, "Old Testament History".**  
**Urquhart, "Biblical Guide", vol.5.**  
**H. Ewald, "Geschichte des Volkes Israel".**  
**Josephus, "Antiquities of the Jews".**  
**Wellhausen, "Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels".**  
**E. Sellin, "Geschichte des israelitisch-jüdischen Volkes".**

**3. Miscellaneous:**

**Luther.**  
**H. Clintock and Strong, Cyclopaedia**  
**Encyclopaedia Biblica**  
**Oehler, "Theology of the O.T.". . .**  
**Ed. Koenig, "Theologie des A.T.". . .**  
**Theo. Graebner, "History of Israel" course with**  
**the F.G.**  
**Harper, "The Bible and Modern Discoveries".**  
**Wm.H. Thomson, "The Land and the Book".**  
**Hilton, "Samson Agonistes".**  
**Faine, "Age of Reason".**  
**Lehre und Wehre, 62,529.**  
**James Orr, "The Problem of the O.T.". . .**  
**Wellhausen, "Composition des Pentateuchs".**  
**Joseph Lewis, "The Bible Unmasked".**

II. General Objections to Morality and Implications.

In discussing the general objections to the Book of Judges we must distinguish two viewpoints which are diametrically opposed to each other. We believe that Jehovah is the Lord of All. Modern criticism turns this upside down and would have us believe that Jehovah is the product of the age, and that the conception of Jehovah changed as the moral character of the Israelites was developed and elevated. To determine, then, what manner of god Jehovah was at that time, we must seek to discover what kind of people the Israelites were.

Now, according to Th. Paine, the record of these times abounds in "obscene stories, voluptuous debaucheries, cruel tortuous executions, and unrelenting vindictiveness". 1) It is true, the age of the judges is a dark one, but the darkness is that which was superinduced upon the religion of Jehovah by the surrounding heathen. If the idolatry of the Canaanites, into which the people of Jehovah were continually lapsing, were taken as criterion for the morality which the religion of the Israelites inculcated, then indeed Jehovah, as a product of the age would be a paltry idol; for the worship of the Canaanites was one of fear and sensuality. Says Urquhart: "It is usual to regard this as the barbaric period of Israelitish history. There was no central government and, therefore, no provision, it is supposed, for the development of national unity. Each tribe settled down in such part of its allotted portion as it was then able to wrest

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1) Th. Paine, "Age of Reason", p.24.

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from its former possessors, lived an isolated life, and sank, it is supposed, into deepening barbarism and mis-rule. Israel (it is supposed) was indeed led into Canaan; but that was all. There was no further Divine provision". 1)

We may add that the period before the entry into Canaan is regarded as equally devoid of Divine guidance. Israel is thought as being a horde of nomads desperately fighting for their existence. 2)

The reflections cast upon Jehovah by this characterization of His people are obvious - if we grant, for the moment, that the Israelites made their God. Then Jehovah would be of the same "local color" as Baal, the terrors of whose wrath "appealed to the fear of erring men" and as Ash-toreth, who catered "to their thirst for sensual pleasure". 3)

This critical picture of the religion of Jehovah is drawn without regard for previous Israelitic history. The Pentateuch rings with cries warning the children of Israel to abstain from idolatry - and these cries cannot be disregarded, because they are meaningless in a critically reconstructed history of Israel. 4) Note especially Dt.7,1-6: "When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee: thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them;

1) Urquhart, "New Biblical Guide", Vol.5, p.9.

2) Lewis Browne, "This believing World".

3) Urquhart, "New Biblical Guide", 18.22.

4) Cf. Ex.22,20;23,24.



thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. But thus shall ye deal with them: ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire. For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth". Modern criticism requires much violent wrenching of historical documents, such as has promptly been done in placing the Book of Deut. at a later date.

Alongside of many more general attacks on the Book of Judges there is great decrying of the acts of the various judges. These will be taken up under their separate heads.

The author of the book is severely dealt with, as are all the Scriptural writers. We offer an outburst of that stamp. Joseph Jewis says of the nineteenth chapter: "Why a story of this kind should be in the Bible is not difficult to understand. It would be out of place anywhere else. Although it has absolutely no connection with any act that has the slightest semblance to anything that has any bearing in any way with moral teaching, it is never-

theless quite a proper episode for the Bible to relate. It has not only no moral purport, but is absolutely devoid of anything that would make it celebrated as an immoral (immortal?) story. It is so repugnant to our present-day understanding that its notice in this book is merely for the purpose of calling your attention to it, and making you cognizant of the stories, with which the Bible is filled". 1) "Certes", no amount of argumentative and apologetic writing could change the tune of such a life.

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1) Joseph Lewis, "The Bible Unmasked", p.107.

### III. The Morality of Jehovah.

#### A. In His treatment of the Canaanites.

. A criticism of the morality of Jehovah which has frequently been reiterated, especially in the atheistic camp, is that He had commanded the complete extermination of the Canaanite tribes, and that therefore the conquest of Canaan by the Hebrew tribes had been accompanied by "a stream of innocent blood". 1)

True it is that Jehovah commanded that the Canaanites be killed. Evidence Dt.7,2: "And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee: thou shalt smite them and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them". Likewise verse 16. But the justice of this command is another question. Far from being an act of most violent injustice, it was an act of sincerest mercy toward the world at large. It is usually forgotten that Jehovah did not permit the execution of this command until the iniquity of those nations was full. Compare Gen.15,16: "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full". 2) Jehovah gave the Canaanites many years of grace, more than He gave to the generations at the time of Noah.

When at last the command to destroy was executed, the Canaanites were so hopelessly depraved, that no measures used against them could possibly be termed cruel.

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1) Frd. Delitzsch, "Babel und Bibel", II, 32.

2) Ed. Koenig, "Theologie des Alten Testaments", p.183.

Any reliable record will bear out the truth of Lev.18,25: "And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants". And the justice of Jehovah's command is attested in v.28 where the Israelites are threatened with a like consequence, viz: "That the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you".

Clearly the reason for the slaughter of the inhabitants of Canaan was not, primarily, to make room for the Israelites, whom Jehovah had arbitrarily chosen to be His people, but the wickedness of those nations. God only used the Israelites as instruments of wrath in these wars of extinction. "It is finally all one matter whether God uses storm, flood, earthquake, or sword as instrument of divine wrath". 1) If the moral justice of the Canaanite Wars is to be impugned, why not refer also to the moral justice of the earthquakes at Lisbon or to those of our times in Japan, New Zealand, or Nicaragua?

**B. In His Relations with His own People.**

A problem wholly different from the foregoing is Jehovah's morality in relation to His own people. Wellhausen ridicules the "burden of the Book of Judges:

"Abfall Drangsal Bekehrung Ruhe,  
Abfall Drangsal Bekehrung Ruhe". 2)

He regards it as unworthy of the Great Creator of heaven and earth to be so intimately connected with a morally

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1) Theo. Graebner in "History of Israel", F.G. Dept.  
2) Wellhausen, "Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels", p.258.

spineless people such as the Israelites, to be represented as angry and always willing to be reconciled when the pressure of the Canaanite hostility became too great for the penitent tribe, until finally the measure of His wrath was full, and in His exasperation He said to the children of Israel 1) : "Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation".

But Wellhausen forgets the purpose of the Book of Judges and the place it occupies in the record of Israelite history. To the later Israelites and to the Christian Church today it is a monumental document of evidence that God's grace is limitless. The Book of Judges was an unsurpassed source of comfort for the Jews at the time of the Exile. It was such, no doubt, already for David and Solomon, Ps.136. It shows how God is at the same time unbounded in His grace though unbending in His justice. It is the illustration "kat' exochen" of Hosea's words: O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help". When this wonderful book is properly understood, it becomes evident that none but the Great Jehovah is worthy of it, far be it that the book were not worthy of Jehovah. Those words of Judges 10,14, cited above, are well interpreted by Lange's Commentary: "It is the poignant grief of a father speaking to his frivolous child". That this understanding is the correct one is borne out by the fact that immediately thereafter we have the record of deliverance by Jephthah.

It may appear that we have side-stepped and have

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1) Judges 10,14.

left untouched the reason why Jehovah should have permitted His people to live in proximity with nations whose influence was so malicious as the book avers. The Book of Judges gives us a remarkable answer in the opening verses of its main body, Ch.3,1-4. The Lord left five lords of the Philistines, etc., for the sake of the generations of Israel, "to teach them war", "and they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the Lord, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses". The purpose for which Jehovah left the Canaanites, then, was the same as that for which these episodes were recorded. The children of Israel were to learn war, that is, they were to learn how alone they would be able to wage war successfully, namely, with the help of Jehovah. And, again, that they might be proved and strengthened; that they might become a nation excellent in faith. The words "teaching them war" are not to be understood as pointing to actual instruction in the external means of warfare.

C. In several minor Aspects.

1. Sending an evil spirit.

In the story of Abimelech and the Shechemites we read the following: "When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel, then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech". The inference that is made from these words is that Jehovah was a tribal deity which did not shrink from causing dissent nor from instigating

conspiracy when it so pleased Him or served His people. Jehovah is charged with not only justifying treachery but even encouraging and inspiring it.

That allegation is, again, based on a charming bit of higher critical exegesis, which utilizes an isolated difficult text to disprove all that is said in the remainder of the book. Jehovah proved His unmitigating justice many times in punishing His own chosen people when they did wrong. Should all this be made null because He punished the seventy-fold murderer by bringing about the failure of his bloody enterprise? Lange adds with unusual felicity: "It is at the same time a striking dogmatical proof of the unveiled clearness in which the divine providence is conceived also in the Book of Judges".

2. Occasion against the Philistines.

This is the incident of Samson taking the woman of Timnath. His parents objected. "But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the Lord that he sought an occasion against the Philistines". 1) Samson, however, besought his father: "Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well". The Hebrew says: "היא היתה לי", that is, she is the right one for the accomplishment of God's purpose. Milton, whom William Smith terms the "sanctified human genius", lets Samson present his case thus:

"They knew not  
That what I motioned was of God; I knew  
From intimate impulse, and therefore

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1) Judges 14,4.

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Urged that marriage on, that, by occasion hence,  
I might begin Israel's deliverance -

The work to which I was divinely called". 1)

This occasion against the Philistines was a part of Jehovah's plan to destroy the inhabitants of Canaan. Starks, Commentary on Judges: "God showed in this indirect procedure that His ways are not always according to human expectations. He is above human laws and can follow them or leave them as He pleases". "So thut Gott immerdar, und noch, und wird es wohl immerdar thun". 2)..

3. "Wine which cheereth God and man".

Jotham's parable, Judges 9, contains these words, from which one would expect the more recent American critics to draw far-reaching implications. Urquhart treats this passage satisfactorily, Biblical Guide, Vol.V, 91: "The reference to man is readily comprehended; but whence came the notion, and one, too, which could evidently be expressed without irreverence - that wine cheered God? To us the expression may seem peculiarly bold, and to be, indeed, little removed from blasphemy. But is there anything to show that to Jotham and the men of Shechem the suggestion was entirely unobjectionable? We turn to Num.15,4-10 and read: 'Then shall he that offereth his offering unto the Lord bring a meat offering of a tenth deal of flour mingled with the fourth part of an hin of oil. And the fourth part of an hin of wine for a drink offering shalt thou prepare with the

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1) Milton, "Samson Agonistes", line 221ff.

2) Luther III, 389.



burnt offering --- for a sweet savour unto the Lord".

It ought always to be remembered that this phrase: "a sweet savour unto the Lord is, literally: "A savour of rest unto the Lord". The sacrifice, and the oil, and the wine, did not bring "rest". They only brought a "savour" of it; for they were emblems and prophecies of the sacrifice of Christ and its fruits. But that promise of His full atonement for man, of the Spirit's anointing, and of holy joy in God's salvation - that promise "cheered" God. And the prophecy of coming blessing was not complete, therefore, without the drink offering. But once more this unexplained reference to the wine cheering God as well as man is intelligible only when we recognize that the drink offering had long before taken its place among the institutions of Israel."

## V. The Morality of the Age,

### A. Individual Morality.

Several cases that come under this head have been discussed in the previous sections, in those of the individual judges. It must be noted, however, that their deeds and lives were those of only a few people. Their history is not representative of the age. There were many pious people, as the parents of Samson, Jephthah's daughter and her associates, and especially the persons of whom we are told in the Book of Ruth, an example of the beautiful life of faith which still obtained in Israel. We can rightly disregard such a hysterical indictment as that of Th. Paine: "I come to the book of Ruth, an idle, bungling story, foolishly told, nobody knows by whom, about a strolling country-girl creeping slyly to bed with her cousin Boaz". 1). That is plainly an uncontrolled outburst of ignorant criticism of the Bible - or, which were still worse - of misrepresentation. The picture of family life as portrayed in "Ruth" suggests the following point, that of

### B. Domestic Morality.

We would not be understood, however, as asserting that the story of Ruth were an adequate representation of the domestic life of the times. The Book of Judges itself precludes this view and brings the indictment against the Israelites. Chapter 2, v.10ff: "And there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel."

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1) Paine, "Age of Reason", 132.

And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim: And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger. And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth". The Jews fell into the same corruptions that prevailed among the Canaanites.

But not as though the children of Israel were not of themselves inclined to sin. We have that terrible story of violence in the last chapters in illustration. A Levite, a man of the priestly tribe, took a concubine. His case was by no means isolated. We quote Starke: "Die Weiber der Ibräer waren von zweierlei Art: einige waren ordentliche und eigentliche Ehefrauen, welche vermöge einer ordentlichen Ehestiftung, nebst ihren Kindern, an der Ehre und den Gütern des Mannes teil nahmen. Andere aber waren Kebsweiber, welche ohne Ehestiftung, Heiratsgeld, und andere sonst übliche Ceremonien genommen wurden, welche aber nebst ihren Kindern nicht alle Rechte eines ordentlichen Eheweibes hatten, ob sie gleich sonst fuer Ehefrauen gehalten wurden". The quotation from chapter two sufficiently condemns this situation. Polygamy was never pleasing to God, even though it was tolerated on account of the hardness of their hearts.

In other respects also the Israelites were very deficient along the lines of ethical nicety. They con-

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tinually adopted customs and perversions from those of the previous inhabitants of Palestine. In a sense this may be called the "barbaric period of Israelitic history". There was no centralized power and therefore no force which could successfully counteract the heathen influences. Milton describes the situation thus:

**"But what more oft, in nations grown corrupt,  
And by their vices brought to servitude,  
Than to love bondage more than liberty -  
Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty -  
And to despise, or envy, or suspect,  
Whom God hath of his special favor raised  
As their deliverer? If he aught begin,  
How frequent to desert him, and at last  
To heap ingratitude on worthiest deeds!"**

### **G. Administrative Morality.**

Henry Preserved Smith presents the modern viewpoint in regard to Israel's social makeup: "The social organization is still that of the desert. There is no central authority, no authority, at all, properly speaking, even for a single tribe. The Sheikhs have a certain influence due to the purity of their blood, but the influence is never sufficient to coerce the freemen of the tribe. A man of extraordinary energy, or one who shows especial powers in war, is doubtless respected in the community. The expression of his wishes will receive some attention because his fellow-tribesmen desire to stand well with him, or because they fear his displeasure. He may declare war or rather plan a campaign, but his following from the fighting men will be volunteers moved by personal affection for him or by the confidence in his ability to lead them where they will get revenge.

or booty, or both. He cannot issue an order or levy contributions". 1)

This picture is true if one observes the nation from without and forgets the previous history of the Israelitic nation - or, if you like, denies that history. There still existed, even in the days of the judges, a very strong central authority, not one of men, but of God, speaking through the Mosaic law. It was to this authority that the children of Israel repeatedly made appeal when they were oppressed. Israel was still a theocracy. The universal response to the gruesome message of the Levite in chapter nineteen postulates the common recognition of one authority. MacDill writes: "In the Book of Judges the Pentateuchal laws and history are repeatedly and variously recognized. God's covenant with Israel, the prohibition of leagues with the nations of Canaan, ch.3,6, and of intermarriages with them, ch.13,4.5 - cf. Nu.6, 2-12, the separation of the Levites to the priestly office, ch.17,7-13, the law of the Nazarite, ch.13,4. 5, circumcision, ch.14,3, a central place of worship, ch.19, 18, and many other laws and institutions are mentioned just as they are set forth in Deuteronomy and other books of the Pentateuch". 2)

The law was, then the same as that under Moses, and the morality of its administration is the morality of Jehovah. Departures from the law of the Lord did not form precedents for the justification of later de-

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1) "Old Testament History", p.88.  
2) "The Mosaic Authorship of the Pentateuch", p.208.

fections. It seems that the law was at times misinterpreted, as false doctrine has always been mingled with the word of God. This may well have been the case in the doctrine of vows - but that properly belongs under

**D. Religious Morality.**

When we recall which religions were chiefly followed in Canaan, and what the proportion of their influence was, the status of the religious morality becomes somewhat easier to establish. Add to this that the entire period is characterized by successive backsliding and restoration, we come closer to its understanding, though it becomes correspondingly more difficult to make a comprehensive statement. In as much as the children of Israel followed the religion of Jehovah, the morality of that religion is on as high a plane as Jehovah Himself. Where the nation fell utterly into Canaanitic idolatries and the attending evils, it was adequately punished, as the book amply shows. But these are only the two extremes. All possible combinations of Jahvism and baalism are to be traced. We must carefully distinguish then between that which was done, motivated by God's law, and what by heathen ethics. Even God's own heroes were not free from Canaanitic influences. Alexander Mac-laren aptly writes: "Their faith was limited, and acted but imperfectly on their moral nature".

It is possible also that the law of God was only partly and imperfectly known and understood by the people. That seems to be the case in Joshua 9, where the Israelites were tricked into giving an oath that was contrary

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to the will of God by the Gibeonites who feared total extinction; yet the Israelites felt bound to keep that oath. The same was the case in Judg. 21 where they swore not to give their daughters to the Benjamites for wives. If we grant that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter, this perversion might have been the deciding factor here also.

#### VI. The Morality of the Author.

The purpose of the author in writing the Book of Judges is stated thus by Starke in his Commentary: "Der endzweck dieses buches ist dreifach: 1) historisch, 2) verbildlich, 3) moralisch. (Der) moralische z. eck (ist), das volk durch exempel zu lehren, dass alles ihr unglueck von der uebertretung des goetlichen gesetzes, alles ihr glueck und heil aber von buszfertiger bekehrung zu Gott und dem gehorsam gegen seine gebote herruehre, welches eine vorberereitung auf die bevorstehende kirchen-reformation Samuels sein sollte".

Such tirades as those of Th. Faine and Joseph Lewis, etc., are entirely beside the mark. They look only on the surface. They read those narratives, which the author relates but by no means condones, and then proceed to muster such expansive accusations as their minds are able at the time to produce, failing to see that the author records his materials very objectively. Starke: "Die suenden und fehler, so man an den richtern, und sonderlich dem Simson bemerket, sind keineswegs zur nachfolge oder zum deckmantel der bosheit aufgeschrieben".

The Book of Judges teaches many beautiful lessons and nowhere inculcates by precept or by example any that would not bear examination by our modern moral philosophers.

## VII. Conclusions.

### A. The injustice of objections against the true religion on the basis of "Judges".

It has been repeatedly stated that God did not command the judges to sin. Their sins were born of their own flesh. The religion of Jehovah must not be deduced from the biographies of the Israelite leaders. The rule of faith and life was the Law of Moses, and that this Law was known and taught and observed in Israel is shown in the quotations from Macdill, where he shows how many of the Mosaic statutes were upheld. Indeed, there were many transgressions, but they were always known to be such. "The Law of the Lord is perfect".

### B. The objective character of the narrative.

William Smith records the objection: "It is said, these acts are more than simply recorded. Ehud is immortalized as a deliverer and ruler in Israel; Jael receives the magnificent eulogy of the inspired prophetess". "But the employment of the former for the work for which he was fitted does not imply approval of all his acts; and the latter is honored for her services to Israel, without any judgment being passed on the means by which they were rendered". 1)

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1) "Old Testament History", p.335.



As in these examples so also in others the author has recorded the facts without comment. It is left for the reader to draw the inferences, chiefly that it was not profitable to fall away from God in any way.

#### C. Relation of Morality to Religion.

The relation between morality and religion in the heathen cults is well shown by Urquhart: "A host of degrading superstitions sprang from this idolatry, which tyrannized over the mind and effectually shut out from this religion all moral". 1) Morality is an ex-crecence of religion. It is the same also in true religion; yet the morals of the Israelitic people are not the morals of Jehovah, because the priests of Jehovah were continually inveighing against the Canaanite practices. The history of orthodoxy in the period of the Judges is one uninterrupted protest against the baalim and asheroth. It cannot be maintained, then, that the religion of Jehovah was the cause of the moral excesses, neither directly nor indirectly.

#### D. Comparison of Israelite Morality Then and Later.

The Book of Judges gives us a clue as to the relation of morality in Israel then and later. It offers the comprehensive statement: "And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods". That is the first member of the comparison. Under Samuel there

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1) "New Bible Guide", p.23.

was a thorough reorganization and restoration, which continued in its progress until it reached its climax under Solomon. With the division of the kingdom came another great wave of heathenism, against which the kingdom of Judah remained firm longer than Israel, the northern kingdom. Under Josiah there was another reformation. At the return from the exile there was a time of staunch faithfulness, likewise under the Maccabees; but since the coming of our Lord, the Jews must be regarded as an unbelieving sect, because they refuse to accept the Savior who was promised them so many centuries before.

A. Caleb offering his Daughter. Judg. 1, 12, 13.

Harper says of Caleb: "He offers, in pure Eastern custom, the bribe of a woman. --- Does not a love story lie behind the few words which follow?" 1)

It is hardly necessary to conjecture in this fashion. We need not justify the act, because the Bible nowhere commands it. It is recorded without comment, objectively. The incident must be understood in the light of those times. Caleb had no divine command to make this offer. He probably did not make this offer without the consent of his daughter, similarly as a father could not devote his daughter to the Lord without her consent. His daughter, Achrah, one would suppose, would not be reluctant to give this consent, chancing that she might become the wife of the greatest hero of the time, the man who would have smitten the city of Debir.

B. Ehud.

The story of Ehud's stabbing Eglon is presumably one of those which Paine would call "paltry contemptible tales of cruel tortuous execution". It is a story such as scoffers delight in criticising "because they are in the Bible". There have been many similar occurrences in history, which, however, draw out no condemnatory pasquinades. There are Hermodias of Athens, the Roman youth, who had the consent of the Senatus to stab Porcena, and, in later history, William Tell. By justifying the act of Ehud we

1) Harper, "The Bible and Modern Discoveries", p.176.

do not wish, however, to substantiate the Jesuitical principle, that murder in such cases is not only permitted but a duty. We ask that Ehud be treated with the same fairness as other men in history.

In addition to this it must not be forgotten that Ehud was carrying out in part the general command of God against the Canaanites, and Ehud had an express message (thing, or act) against Eglon, Judg.3,15.30. He was raised up by Jehovah to deliver the Israelites. That does not mean as yet that God's command to Ehud was to stab Eglon as he did. Ehud found his own means, not waiting for further revelation. He thus "prevents" the plans of God, humanly speaking.

6. Jael.

Jael delivered the Israelites from Jabin by killing his captain Sisera with a tent-peg, pounding it through his temples. Harper calls this "a terrible story". 1). Thomson quotes Dr.Kitto, saying: "It was a most treacherous murder, wanting all the extenuations which were applicable to the assassination of King Eglon by Ehud". 2)

It is not necessary that we defend the morality of her act. Deborah indeed praises Jael for the delivery she has wrought for Israel, but she stresses only the delivery, she does not praise the method which Jael used, Judg.5,24-27.

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1) Harper, "The Bible and Modern Discoveries", p.185.  
2) Wm. H. Thomson, "The Land and the Book", p.218.

But, again, there are many circumstances that shed light on her deed, enabling us to understand the murder from her viewpoint, and those "extenuations" which were applicable in the case of Ehud are by no means wanting. "We need by no means take for granted that because the Kenites were not at war with the tyrannical Jabin, that therefore they were treated with justice by him. It is nearly certain that in those lawless times the defenseless Kenites would be oppressed by Jabin and would sigh for and gladly embrace any opportunity to escape from his intolerable bondage. This deliverer, therefore, would be esteemed a patriot and hero, not a murderer". 1)

Jael may have had special reasons to fear and hate Sisera. He, being in command, would most certainly abuse them, or allow them to be insulted without redress by his rude soldiers. Jael or some of her friends might have been injured in the highest degree.

The peculiar law in regard to asylum deserves to be considered. It is usually because of Jael's disregard for this law that she is so severely berated. Wm. Thomson: "The settled Arabs know no such laws, and I do not believe that the Kenites did".

The whole history of the tribe of Heber, the Kenite, affirms that they were friends of God's people and perhaps believers. They would sympathize, and though not taking sides at first, would seize the opportunity when the Canaanites were totally overthrown, as here after the de-

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1) Wm. Thomson, "The Land and the Book", p.218.

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feat of Sisera.

We must also remember that if the Kenites had attempted to shield and aid Sisera after his defeat, they would have rendered themselves partisans in the war on the losing side and might have been treated as enemies by the now victorious Israelites.

After listing these and more extenuations Thomson continues: "On the whole, therefore, I conclude that if all the circumstances and influences which impelled Jael to the daring act and sustained her in it, were known, we should find that she violated neither the customs of her people, nor the laws of war then in force, nor the abstract and greater laws of righteousness, by thus destroying the enemy of God's people and the oppressor of her own, who from necessity sought in her tent an asylum to which he had no right, and the granting of which might have involved her and her whole family in ruin. --- Under these impressions I can join Deborah in celebrating the deed and the actor: Judg. 5, 24-30".

#### D. Deborah and Barak.

##### 1. Their Praise of Jael, the Kenite Woman.

It would seem from the 24th verse of the song of Deborah that she gave Jael unmodified praise for her dreadful act. The poetess sings, "Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent". But we may question whether any moral commendation is directly intended. Jael is eulogized not for her peculiar method but for her delivery of Israel. Deborah's joy here is national and

not religious. If we were to charge Deborah with a low standard of morality, then it would be as just to regard the heathen Medes and Persians as a truly pious people because they are called God's "sanctified one" to do His work of vengeance on Babylon (Is.13,3), as, from what is said in Deborah's song, to consider Jael an example of righteousness.

**2. The vengeful Spirit of the Song.**

The spirit of this song is similar to that which we find in "the minatory, or imprecatory, psalms, which in modern times have so frequently been assailed" 1) These are Psa.137,7-9; 139, 19-22; 35; 109, etc. With regard to this Keil writes, touching especially the heaping of verbs in verse 27: "Die Haufung der Worte, nicht weil sich darin die 'Lust befriedigter Rachgierde ausspricht' ". 2) Wm. Thomson has this to say, after offering many extenuations of Jael's act: "Under these impressions I can join with Deborah in celebrating the deed and the actor: Judg.5, 24-30". 3) We can go even farther and say with Stoeckhardt: "Das war kein Muechelmord, keine Suende, sondern ein Gott gefaelliges Werk des Glaubens. Es heisst ausdruecklich, dass der Herr den Sissera in die Hand eines Weibes gegeben hatte. Da machte (es war Gottes Wille) es keinen Unterschied, ob die Feinde mit Gewalt oder mit List ausgerottet wurden". 4) There is, in fact, no need

1) Introduction to the O.T., Concordia Publ. House, p.57.  
2) Keil-Delitzsch, "Commentary on Judges", 5,27.  
3) Wm. Thomson, "The Land and the Book", p.220.  
4) Stoeckhardt, "Geschichte des A.T." p.

of an apology of Deborah's praise of Jael since the latter is not reprehensible. Jael's deed and Deborah's song are pleasing to God. The matter that Jehovah should be pleased to destroy the Ganaanites, we have treated above.

### E. Gideon.

#### 1. Harsh Treatment of the Cities of Succoth and Penuel.

While discussing the Book of Judges Th. Paine is moved to exclaim: "The Bible is filled with murder!" 1) Undoubtedly he has in mind also the punishment of the people of Succoth and Penuel, Judg.8,4-17, who had refused to support the cause of Israel's delivery from the Midianites. More than that, they were traitors and hypocrites in their dealings with the chosen man of God. In their treason against Gideon it follows that they were traitorous against Jehovah. They despised his deliverer, they despised God. Therefore their punishment was in every respect just. 2) The mode of punishment, "thorns of the wilderness and briars", which appears strange to us, must be taken in the light of the times. "It is not unnaturally suggested in the East, where men are continually lacerating their half-clothed bodies with thorns in passing through thickets". 3) It might, however, appear that Gideon were acting in a vindictive spirit. But being a man of God, an example of faith, Hebr.11,32, we may look upon him as executing upon them the righteous wrath of God upon His disloyal

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1) Th. Paine, "Age of Reason", p.114.

2) Keil-Delitzsch, "Commentary on Judges", 8,17.

3) Wm. Smith, "O.T. History", p.349.



children.

## 2. Setting up the Ephod.

After the successful campaign against the Midianites the men of Israel asked Gideon to be their king. He refused. However, he requested them to bring their golden earrings and other golden trinkets to him, and out of this mass of gold he made a large ephod which he set up in Ophrah. That Gideon's motives were, we are not told. However, it is certain that this ephod was too heavy that it could be worn by the priest of the tabernacle. His motive cannot have been pure vainglory, because we may expect that in that event he would have accepted the crown. Yet we cannot prove him entirely without fault. - The act was then reprehensible chiefly because "he encroached upon the prerogatives of the Aaronitic priesthood". 1) The outcome was disastrous to the Israelites because they idolized this ephod. But that does not properly come under our discussion of the morality.

## 3. His later Years.

Gideon fell into the sin into which Solomon later also fell. "He had many wives". In this he transgressed the laws of Jehovah. This act of his is not condoned in Scripture. It is recorded without comment and does not constitute a blot upon the morality of Jehovah. His sin brought its retribution in the next generation, in the history of Abimelech.

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1) Keil-Delitzsch, "Commentary on Judges", 8, 27.

**1. Claiming the Land against the Ammonites.**

The accusation in this case comes from the king of the children of Ammon, a contemporary of Jephthah. This king came to reclaim some land which had belonged to his people several centuries ago. Jephthah sent messengers to ask the king why he was coming to fight. "And the king of the children of Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land, when they came up out of Egypt, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now therefore restore those lands again peaceably". (Judg.11,13.) This is a characteristic display of oriental presumption. Over three hundred years previous to this incident the Israelites had taken the land in question from the Amorites. The latter had conquered it from the Ammonites, and now the Ammonites came to the children of Israel to reclaim the land. "It was not to be expected that they (the Israelites) would conquer the country from the powerful kings who had it in possession for the mere purpose of restoring it to the ancient occupants". 1) The Israelites were now the rightful owners. By remaining silent for so many years while Israel was in possession, the Ammonites had forfeited their claim to the land. This incident has "laid down the just principle which has been followed out in the practice of civilized nations, and is maintained by all the great writers on the law of nations."

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1) McClintock and Strong, Cyclopaedia, sub Jephthah.

2. The mooted Sacrifice of his Daughter.

Judg. 11, 26-40 has occasioned the comment: "The Bible Sanctions Human Sacrifice and Cannibalism". 1) In this question it is not left to us to determine whether Jephthah did according to his vow or not. Judg. 11, 39 is clear enough: "And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed".

To have greater difficulty in determining what his vow was. The Authorized Version translates: "If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering".

It is possible also to translate: "Shall surely be the Lord's", or "I will offer it up for a burnt offering. Cf. I Kings 18, 27; Ex. 21, 16; II Sam. 2, 21; Prov. 30, 8.

Starke suggests: Das affixum des Wortes - " וְאֶתְּחַבֵּד " kann auch auf das kurz vorhergehende " וְאֶתְּחַבֵּד " gezogen, und also uebersetzt werden: und ich will ihm (dem Herrn) ein Brandopfer opfern. Jos. 15, 19; II Sam. 7, 9.

Lange (taking "and" instead of "or" ) has this to say: "Man ersieht, dass in Jiftachs Worten, 'es wird Gott gehoeren, und ich werde es zum Opfer bringen',

1) James Pontius, "Holy Bible in a Nutshell", p. 4.

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keine Tautologie sein kann. Es decken sich beide Sätze nicht, sie können nicht für einander stehen. Die Allgemeinheit und Weite des Gelübdes machte beide Sätze nothig, da einer allein für beide Fälle, Menschen und Thiere, nicht ausgereicht hätte".

Clearly all these take for granted that in making this vow, Jephthah had both man and beast in mind, as coming from the door of the house to meet him. It is not necessary, however, to conclude from the fact that he speaks of the door of his house that he had only a human being in mind. The Hebrew word for door has a much wider meaning. For is it true that only a human being could come "to meet" him, Gesenius sub "קָרַב II", encounter, meet, come "obviam". The possibilities, then, were that he could be met by a human being, or by a clean or an unclean animal. An unclean animal could not have been sacrificed to the Lord. That would have been an abomination to the Lord. Starke: "Fand nun eine Bedingung statt in absicht auf die thiere, so findet sie vielmehr platz in absicht auf einen menschen: Denn, wuerde nicht ein unschuldig menschenopfer dem Herrn noch viel mehr als das opfer von einem unreinen thiere, misfaellig gewesen sein?"

Would Jephthah have vowed to offer a human being as a burnt offering? Many contend that "Jephthah was a rude Gileadite, whose spirit had become hardened by his previous life as a freebooter". Berthean asks, "wo ist denn Jephtha als der Kämpfer für das Gesetz und als Vertreter der mosaischen Prinzipien geschildert?" 1)

1) E. Berthean, "Zur Geschichte der Israeliten", p.296, note.

We are satisfied that Jephthah was not such as these men describe him. Hebrews 11,32 holds him before us as an example of faith. It was for that reason that he was chosen to "judge" Israel. His freebooting does not warrant the conclusion upon his religious character. The analogy of David proves that. We note, also, that in his dealings with the king of the Ammonites Jephthah observed laws given by Moses, even quoting from them. His mention of the God Chemosh to the king of the Ammonites was made in the manner of an argumentum ad hominem.

But even though Jephthah was a righteous man, he could err and make such a rash vow. The patriarchs committed similar inconsistencies. Yet Jephthah was very cautious and sober in his dealings with the Israelites when they approached him and likewise with the Ammonites, and this vow was not made in tumult of battle but at a time when he could think over what he vowed. It seems that Jephthah knew well enough what the consequences might be. He vowed just as he did because he intended no light vow.

Did he then intend to sacrifice the person that might come as a burnt offering? He must have been acquainted with those numerous condemnations of human sacrifice that ring through the books of Moses. Israel would hardly have permitted him to have gone to that extreme of heathen idolatry because they had just returned to penitent grief. They would have objected as they did when Saul was about to slay Jonathan, I Sam.14,44. This impresses us the more since there was a lapse of

two months during which the news could spread over all the tribes.

The Scriptures nowhere condemn his vow as not in accordance with the will of God. In fact from the words, "he did according to his vow", one may take that the historian regards its execution with approbation. So Keil.

We have sufficient reason, therefore, to seek farther as to what the purport of the vow was. Many modern commentators have claimed that Jephthah's daughter was devoted to the service in the temple. This view cannot stand, however, as long as it sets aside the "  $\eta \xi \iota \gamma$  ". Keil has given satisfaction on that score. We quote his Commentary on "Judges", p.320: "In dem Worte '  $\eta \xi \iota \gamma$  ' liegt nicht wie in dem deutschen Worte Brandopfer der Begriff des Verbrennens, sondern nur das Aufsteigen auf den Altar oder die voellige Hingabe an den Herrn. '  $\eta \xi \iota \gamma$  ' ist das Ganzopfer im Unterschiede von den andern Opfern, von welchen nur ein Teil dem Herrn uebergeben wurde. Wenn nun eine Jungfrau zum geistlichen '  $\eta \xi \iota \gamma$  ' bestimmt wurde, so verstand es sich von selbst, dass sie fortan ganz dem Herrn gehoeren, also lebenslaenglich Jungfrau sein und bleiben musste. --- Ueber diesen geistlichen Opferdienst erfahren wir zwar aus dem A.T. nichts naeheres; aber das Fehlen genaueerer Angaben darueber berechtigt keinesfalls dazu, die Sache selbst in Abrede zu stellen. Auch ueber den geistlichen Dienst der Weiber bei der Stiftshuette fehlen naehere Nachrichten, und wir wuerden ueber diese Institution gar nichts erfahren haben, wenn nicht diese Weiber zu Mose's Zeit ihre Spiegel zur Anfertigung

des heiligen Beckens geopfert und spaeter die Soehne  
Nli's solche Weiber geschlaendet haetten".

This interpretation is a very recent one in the his-  
tory of the interpretation of this passage. Without a  
known exception the fathers believed that there was an  
actual bloody sacrifice. The scholastic age followed this  
earlier interpretation. Luther writes: "Man will er habe  
sie nicht geopfert; aber der Text steht da klar". 1) The  
later Jewish interpreters were the first to assert that it  
was not literally a burnt offering. This is what Luther  
had in mind. This view of Luther continued after him.  
Shakespeare writes: 2)

"To keep that oath were more impiety  
Than Jephthah's, when he sacrificed his daughter".

However, we are constrained to apply Luther's principle to  
these venerable and sincere theologians: "Darum ist es  
hoeth, --- dass sie das, so der Wahrheit und dem rechten  
Verstande nicht gemessz ist, kuehnlich verwerfen, damit  
sie nicht durch den grossen Namen und Ansehen der Vaeter  
und Kirchenlehrer betrogen werden, wie ich und alle  
Schulen der Theologen betrogen und verfuehrt worden  
sind". 3) The question is not how it has been interpre-  
ted but how it ought to be interpreted.

The view that Jephthah's daughter was devoted to  
the service in the temple fits into the historical re-  
cord, - in spite of all that modern critics might say  
about primitive standards of those times. - It is, in

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1) Randglosse in the Bible edited by Veit Dietrich.  
2) III. Henry VI, Act 5, Sc.1, line 91.92.  
3) Luther I, 285.

fact, in support of their hypothesis that they are so eager to regard it as an actual bloody sacrifice, making it to constitute a sign of the time. - One particular which is best understood in this way is that the daughter asks to be left alone to bewail her virginity, not her death. She asks to go into seclusion. Chastity demands that she should not bewail her virginity in the city, in the presence of men. It were strange that she would flee from her home and her father when her death was to follow upon her return. Her willingness to uphold her father's oath tends to support our view. Were she to have been sacrificed, she would have been more sorrowful. There is no trace of blood in the narrative. There is not a word about a preparation for the burnt offering nor about a reaction of the people. The conclusion is that there was no blood in the narrative. The magnitude of Jephthah's grief is readily understood even though the performance of his vow did not mean the death of his daughter. His plans were to found a regal house, Judg. 11, 2-11. This attempt was frustrated by the daughter's devotion to the Lord.

It is objected that although women served in the temple, their obligation to celibacy cannot be proved. But the silence of Scripture is no proof to the contrary. The words of Clericus also find their full application here: "Profecto non est, ut saepe dixi, putandum tam exiguo volumine, quale est Vetus Testamentum, contineri consuetudines omnes Hebraeorum, aut plenam omnium eorum, quae apud eos facta sunt, historiam haberi. Quare necesse est ad multa subinde alludi quae non adsequimur, quia



alibi eorum mentio nulla occurrit". Again, it is objected the national institution of the annual celebration of this event were disproportionate. We must not forget, however, how great a figure Jephthah was in the eyes of Israelites after he delivered them from the Ammonites. Such days were then as naturally and as easily inaugurated as our Mother's Day or Father's Day today. And just this annual celebration may be adduced in support of the position that the maid was not sacrificed. The Israelite girls went out annually to "lament", as the King James' Version has it. But the correct meaning of the word there used is "to repeat often, to rehearse; hence to commemorate, to praise, to celebrate", Gesenius' Thesaurus sub " **נָחַם** II", c. " **ל**" Judg.11,40. Compare Arab. " **نسى** IV", 'to celebrate with praise, pr. to utter'. "Four days a year the Israelitish maidens celebrated this incident in their nation's history. Is it credible that such a place would have been given to the praise and celebration of one of the darkest deeds which man had ever perpetrated?" 1) The annual celebration of a human sacrifice would not have been recorded in such a commendatory and approving manner as is this celebration.

We conclude that it is certainly not contrary to the record which has been left for us to maintain that Jephthah's daughter was not literally burned. We would not feel justified in stating our conclusion differently.

Considered in this manner, the morality of Jephthah's vow needs no discussion. His vow was neither rash nor

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1) Urquhart, "New Bibl. Guide", vol.V, p.101.

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uncertain. But even those who argue that the outcome was not so satisfactory could not raise a valid objection against the morality because the Scriptures nowhere commend the vow nor its fulfilment, and Jephthah's mention in Hebrews 11,32 does not make him in every respect a perfect human being. Had he killed her, we would be justified in regarding it as one of the terrible sins that even a servant of the Lord might commit in his temporary perversion.

### 3. The Shibboleth Story.

After the conquest of the Ammonites the Ephraimites complained insolently that they had not been asked to fight against the Ammonites. "And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at great strife with the children of Ammon; and when I called you, ye delivered me not out of their hands". A battle ensued in which Jephthah again showed his excellent strategy by maneuvering to get control over their river crossing. The Ephraimites were defeated, and, in addition, their retreat was cut off. Jephthah punished them very severely. He seems to us to have been cruel to excess

"In that sore battle when so many died  
Without reprieve, adjudged to death  
For want of well pronouncing Shibboleth".  
Milton..

It was certainly just to punish these insurgent Ephraimites. The fact that such a great number of them were killed does not affect the justice. There were 42,000 who were killed in the battle, counting those who died

at the river, being unable to pronounce the "sh" sound. The method by which the Ephraimites were determined can hardly be called into question. It gave some of them a chance to save their lives, no doubt, and hardly would any Gileadite try to cross pretending he were an Ephraimite.

G. Samson.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter eleven: "How faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. ----- And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson".

Samson is lauded for his faith. By it he has obtained a good report. This does not, however, necessitate his complete exoneration of all the deeds which he did. If we remember that on the whole he carried out the will of God against the Philistines, and that in those exploits in which he followed the bent of his own mischievous and lascivious impulses he transgressed the same laws which other sinners transgress, and that he was deserving of damnation as any other sinner, and that it was by repentance and faith that he had forgiveness of sins, we shall have no difficulty with the morality of his various experiences.