**The Angel of the Lord at Bokim**

The quote *“In the beginning, God made man in His image and man has been returning the favor ever since”* is commonly attributed to Samuel Clemens. The French philosopher Voltaire wrote in 1740: *“If God created us in his own image, we have more than reciprocated”.* Many of both Voltaire’s and Clemens’ writings reveal some belief in God although some think they were both atheists. In the case of Clemens, that may be due to his disdain for organized religion. In his later years, Clemens seemed to become bitter due to personal tragedies. He was preceded in death by three children and his wife. From the notes of Clemens’ personal secretary Isabel Lyon about his daughter: *"I had a very plain talk with Mr. Clemens this morning about Jean’s condition... The dreadfulness of it all swept over him as I knew it would, and with that fiercest of all his looks in his face, he blazed out against the Swindle of life – & the awful treachery of a God that can create disease & misery & crime. Create things that men would be condemned for creating, that men would be ashamed to create. And you agree with him – you have to."*  Our Sunday school lesson this past Sunday contained the word “anthropomorphic” (I had to look it up too). The short definition is ascribing human form or attributes to a non human. The context in in our Sunday school lesson was “the right hand of God”. In our study of Judges chapter 2, we see that the Israelites abandoned God and turned to the religions of the Canaanites. Those religions involved the worship of idols, often made in the image of animals or inanimate objects.

The chapter begins with the angel of the Lord speaking to the Israelites, reminding them that He had led them out of Egypt and that He would never break His covenant with Israel. They however, broke the covenant with Him and because of their disobedience, He would not drive out the Canaanites from the land and they would be a thorn and a snare to Israel. The term “angel of the Lord” here is thought to refer to a preincarnate appearance of Jesus. Note that He said **“*I*** *brought you up out of Egypt***”:** Verse 10 says that the new generation knew neither the Father or what He had done for Israel. The people did evil by serving the Baals, the various false gods in Canaan. God punished them by handing them over to their enemies. The hand of God that had previously fought for them was against them and they were constantly defeated. God sent judges at multiple times to save them from their enemies, however they always returned to their sinful ways. When God sent a judge, they would repent as long as the judge lived but became even more corrupt after the death of the judge. The chapter ends with God declaring that He would use the nations in Canaan to test Israel to see if they would obey Him as their forefathers had done.

Some lessons we can learn from this chapter:

The Israelites drifted away from God because the previous generation died off and they did not know of God or what He had done for Israel. They did not know because their parents did not teach them (see Rom. 10:14). As I previously wrote, the church is always one generation from extinction.

We should put our faith not in leaders but in God. So long as Joshua and the judges who followed were alive, Israel remained faithful to God but abandoned him after their deaths. Too often the retirement of a dynamic preacher can lead to the decline of a church. Worse yet, the moral failings of a preacher can repel would be Christians.

It takes faith to believe in the unseen (see Heb. 11:1). The Israelites traded the one true God who was unseen to idols they could see. Faith is the stumbling block for many who require concrete evidence of God’s existence. Voltaire wrote *“I cannot imagine how the clockwork of the universe can exist without a clockmaker”.* Like the Canaanites, many civilizations have worshipped gods with whom they could identify, often erecting statues showing them in a human form. Our Sunday school study of the term anthropomorphic led to a discussion of whether or not God has a physical body. In our attempts to understand God, we sometimes think of Him in human terms since we can relate to that and I think that can marginalize the holiness of God. I’ve heard many people say that God has a sense of humor (see Rom. 11:34), perhaps erroneously ascribing a human quality we know to the mind of God which is beyond our comprehension. After all, the source of much of our humor is someone’s pain or embarrassment.

Finally we can be like Clemens, lamenting that a loving God would not allow \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank). Satan is the author of evil in this world and his struggle against God is also beyond our comprehension. I think that we must accept that God allows Satan’s actions because the time has not yet come for his final defeat. Do not think for a moment that He has abandoned us (see Matt. 10:29-31).