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Judges 19

(2020)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Judges 19

Topics.

- A Levites unfaithful concubine goes to her father's house.
- The Levite brings her back, they spend a night in an old man's house.
- Men of the city demand the Levite comes out that they may know him.
- The man sends his concubine out, she is sexually abused and dies.
- The Levite puts her dead body on his donkey and goes to his home.
- He takes a knife and divides her into twelve pieces, and sends a piece to the twelve tribes of Israel.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JUDGES

The Israelites forgot the LORD, and worshipped false gods, so the LORD removed His protection and blessings from them, which resulted in them being oppressed by their enemies and crying to the LORD for deliverance. In answer to their prayer the LORD raised up twelve Judges to deliver them, but not Judges as we think of Judges today or preachers of righteousness, but rather military leaders and fighters, that led Israel to triumph over their enemies and delivered them from their wicked behaviour. Most suppose that Samuel (considered by some to be the last Judge) wrote some parts of the book, while other parts were written at a later time by someone of his generation or a later generation. The primary purpose of the Judges is best articulated in the following words, "The LORD raised up Judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. (Judges 2:16). For an overview of the entire book see the title:

- Overview of the Book of Judges (at the beginning of the index).

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER

The tribe of Dan was seeking an inheritance to dwell in, so they sent five men to scout out the land, they arrived at the house of Micah. They depart Micah's house and as they travel through the land of Laish they saw that the people were living peacefully. They return to Zorah and Eshtaol, tell their brothers to go up and possess Laish, on their way they stop at Micah's house. They steal his gods and religious garments and his Levite priest goes with them. They take possession of Laish, re-name the city Dan, set up Micah's carved gods and ordained Jonathan and his sons to be priests.

JUDGES 19:1-2

- **Judges 19:1-2:** In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite was sojourning in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, who took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. ² And his concubine was unfaithful to him (played the whore against him in KJV), and she went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there some four months.

Some believe that the concubines unfaithfulness was not sexual, but some other form of unfaithfulness, to support this idea they point out that it was unlawful for a husband to take a wife who had been sexually unfaithful back as the following verse shows:

- Then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance. (Deut. 24:4).

Added to this, it was the practice to put such a woman to death if she returned to her family. However, we are told that during these days, "everyone was doing what they considered right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25), which means they were not paying any heed to God's law at this time. Some feel that her unfaithfulness was a sin against his faith or ill treatment of him, while others feel her unfaithfulness only refers to her running away from him to her father's house, whatever her unfaithfulness may have been she left him to go to her father's house in Bethlehem Judah.

Following is some of the reasons she may have left:

- Upon hearing she had been unfaithful, her husband may have been verbally or physically abusive to her.
- She may have feared punishment.
- Her heart may have been alienated from him.

Whatever the reason we can only speculate since we are not told, however, he must have had some care for her since he could have replaced her with another concubine rather than take a journey to bring her back, especially since, "everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes," and had she been guilty of whoredom, it was a great act of forgiveness on his part to take her back, especially since under the law he could have legally had her put to death.

JUDGES 19:3

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- **Judges 19:3:** Then her husband arose and went after her, to speak kindly to her and bring her back. He had with him his servant and a couple of donkeys. And she brought him into her father's house. And when the girl's father saw him, he came with joy to meet him.

After four months (v2) her husband sets on a journey with his servant and two donkeys, verse nineteen tells us he had one donkey for food, wine and provisions and the other for his wife to return on. It appears he was returning to offer her forgiveness and reconciliation in the hope she would return, perhaps for the following reasons:

- He may have heard that she had repented of her sin or that she desired to return.
- It may have only been a quarrel between them.
- After four months his anger may have cooled and subsided and therefore, he now desired a reconciliation.

He meets her somewhere in Bethlehem perhaps in the fields or town before they came to her father's house, which implies, that she was glad to see him. She takes him to her father's house, (who he may or may not have known). Her father rejoices to meet his son in law, probably hoping that a complete reconciliation would be brought about between his daughter and her husband.

JUDGES 19:4

- **Judges 19:4:** And his father-in-law, the girl's father, made him stay, and he remained with him three days. So they ate and drank and spent the night there.

It is clear the father enjoyed his son-in-law's company and had a good opinion of him even though he knew his daughter had left him or he just loved having someone to drink with. It is also possible the father-in-law enticed the Levite to remain with him for three days so he could have time to truly unite the Levite's heart and his daughters' heart together.

JUDGES 19:5-7

- **Judges 19:5-7:** And on the fourth day they arose early in the morning, and he prepared to go, but the girl's father said to his son-in-law, "Strengthen your heart with a morsel of bread, and after that you may go."⁶ So the two of them sat and ate and drank together. And the girl's father said to the man, "Be pleased to spend the night, and let your heart be merry."⁷ And when the man rose up to go, his father-in-law pressed him, till he spent the night there again.

Most journeys begin in the early morning or late afternoon, in order to avoid the burning heat, except in winter. The Levite, his concubine and servant, prepare to set out on their journey, but the Levite, yields to the hospitable insistences of his father-in-law and prolongs his stay for another day. A morsel of bread here would embrace any food that was suitable for a breakfast meal.

JUDGES 19:8-9

- **Judges 19:8-9:** And on the fifth day he arose early in the morning to depart. And the girl's father said, "Strengthen your heart and wait until the day declines." So they ate, both of them.⁹ And when the man and his concubine and his servant rose up to depart, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said to him, "Behold, now the day has waned toward evening. Please, spend the night. Behold, the day draws to its close. Lodge here and let your heart be merry, and tomorrow you shall arise early in the morning for your journey, and go home."¹⁰ But the man would not spend the night. He rose up and departed and arrived opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). He had with him a couple of saddled donkeys, and his concubine was with him.

Again, on the fifth day early in the morning the Levite, his concubine and servant, prepare to set out on their journey, and again the father entices them to stay a little longer, he probably hoped he could keep them late in the day so he could then entice them to spend another night with him, they did linger for some time, but eventually left late in the afternoon and travel until they arrived opposite Jebus.

THE CITY OF THE JEBUSITES

JUDGES 19:10-12

- **Judges 19:11-12:** When they were near Jebus, the day was nearly over, and the servant said to his master, "Come now, let us turn aside to this city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it."¹² And his master said to him, "We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel, but we will pass on to Gibeah."

Gibeah: (v12) was (one of the fourteen cities of Benjamin).

They come to the city of Jebus, which is about 10 km from his father in law's home in Bethlehem, which means it was only a two hour walk from the Levite's father in law's house in Bethlehem to the city of Jebus (Jerusalem). Though the journey was not long, it should be kept in mind that at this time the country was only half-conquered and everyone was doing what they believed to be right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25), so there were many dangers throughout the land, even amongst Israel's own people as the following (v22-30) will show. The words "which is Jerusalem," must have been inserted by Ezra or some later writer or translator, because Jebus at the time of the Judges was not yet called Jerusalem and the Jebusites were still in possession of the city:

- When they were near Jebus, the day was nearly over, and the servant said to his master, “Come now, let us turn aside to this city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it.” (Judges 19:11).

We are told in Judges chapter one that the men of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire. (Judges 1:8). Then later in the same chapter we are told that a section of the city was taken by the tribe of Judah and belonged to them, but the section that belonged to the tribe of Benjamin was still in possession of the Jebusites, because the tribe of Benjamin could not fully drive them out:

- But the people of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem, so the Jebusites have lived with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day. (Judges 1:21)

Following are three possible scenarios:

1. Sometime between the time the city was taken by Judah (Judges 1:8) and the time the Levite refused to spend the night in Jerusalem/Jebus because it was occupied by Jebusites (Judges 19:11). In (v12) the Levite refers to the city of Jebus/Jerusalem as a city of foreigners (strangers in KJV) (v12) (i.e., the Jebusites). He would not have called it a city of foreigners/strangers, if it was inhabited and dominated (at least the greater part) by the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The Levite also adds, “the people do not belong to the people of Israel,” (v12). These words show that sometime in the days of the Judges the Jebusites had driven out the vast majority of both the tribes of Judah and Benjamin and had the dominant control of the city, which means that the city was not as yet fully in the hands of the Israelites; or if it had been, was at some time retaken by the Jebusites and was now back in their hands. , This is not surprising since Jerusalem did originally belong to the Jebusites:

- Then the boundary goes up by the Valley of the Son of Hinnom at the southern shoulder of the Jebusite (that is, Jerusalem). (Joshua 15:8).

Again, we see that the words, “that is, Jerusalem” have been added.

2. At the time of the Joshua, the tribe of Judah did not drive out the Jebusites, but now at the time of the Judges Judah had at least driven them out from the area of the city allotted to them, and left the remaining area allotted to Benjamin for their tribe to go and take possession of, while Judah marched on to take possession of Hebron.
3. Judah and Benjamin had agreed that each tribe would go separately against Jebus/Jerusalem to take possession of that section of the city that had previously been allotted to them, Judah did, but Benjamin didn't.

The Levite ignored the advice of his servant to enter the city of the Jebusites and instead determined to continue on to Gibeah, because he knew it was occupied by Israelites (i.e., Benjamites). However, the following tragic and horrific events show that it would have been far better for him to have taken the advice of his servant and stayed the night in the city of foreigners (i.e., the Jebusites), than travel on to Gibeah and stay with his own countrymen.

There are two good lesson to learn from the following horrific events (v22-30):

1. Just because people are titled, God's people, or call themselves God's people, does not mean they are living a lifestyle that God would approve of.
2. Just because a person is an unbeliever or foreigner does not mean that they are full of evil intentions and works, in fact many are far more charitable than some who belong to God's Kingdom.

Setting the city on fire: (Judges 1:8) in ancient times during war, fire was used as a weapon and setting a city on fire was a common method of defeating an enemy, after which the victor would then take possession of the city and rebuild it.

The distance from Bethlehem to Jebus/Jerusalem: is about 10 kilometres, a two-hour walk. After leaving Bethlehem the Levite his concubine and servant probably reached the town of Gibeah (one of the fourteen cities of Benjamin) sometime around five o'clock.

JUDGES 19:13-15

- **Judges 19:13-15:** And he said to his young man, "Come and let us draw near to one of these places and spend the night at Gibeah or at Ramah." ¹⁴ So they passed on and went their way. And the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin, ¹⁵ and they turned aside there, to go in and spend the night at Gibeah. And he went in and sat down in the open square of the city, for no one took them into his house to spend the night.

The Levite, his servant and his concubine stopped at the city of Gibeah, because it belonged to Benjamin. The fact the Levite did not want to enter the city of Jebus/Jerusalem because it was occupied by foreigners and preferred to go on to the city of the Benjamites, shows he desired to avoid any appearance of evil and the company of those who were not of Israel and did not believe in the true God, which implies that he was a godly man.

JUDGES 19:16-19

- **Judges 19:16-21:** And behold, an old man was coming from his work in the field at evening. The man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was sojourning in Gibeah. The men of the place were Benjaminites. ¹⁷ And he lifted up his eyes and saw the traveler in the open square of the city. And the old man said, "Where are you going? And where do you come from?" ¹⁸ And he said to him, "We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim (toward the side of the mountain Ephraim in KJV), from which I come. I went to Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to the house of the Lord, but no one has taken me into his house. ¹⁹ We have straw and feed for our donkeys, with bread and wine for me and your female servant and the young man with your servants. There is no lack of anything." ²⁰ And the old man said, "Peace be to you; I will care for all your wants. Only, do not spend the night in the square." ²¹ So he brought him into his house and gave the donkeys feed. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank.

Shiloh: is mentioned in the following books: Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, 1 Kings, Psalms, and Jeremiah. It is located, in the West Bank, north of Bethel, east of the Bethel–Shechem highway, and south of Lebonah in the hill-country of Ephraim in the tribal territorial allotment of the tribe of Ephraim. The distance from Jerusalem to Shiloh is around 17km (less than a 2-hour walk). After the Israelite conquest of Canaan, the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant were installed in Shiloh until the Ark was captured by the Philistines (c. 1050 BC) in a battle with the Israelites at Ebenezer (an unknown site). Soon after this battle Shiloh was destroyed.

The Levite was going to the "House of the LORD," (v18) which at this time was the Tabernacle in Shiloh in Ephraim.

- Then the whole congregation of the people of Israel assembled at Shiloh and set up the tent of meeting there. (Joshua 18:1).

Following is some of the reasons he may have wanted to visit the House of the LORD:

- He lived near where it was located in Ephraim
- He desired to visit it to offer prayers and perhaps thank God for reconciling him to his wife.

- He may have been one of the Levites who ministered at the tabernacle.

An old man was coming from his field in the evening: (v16), which was also a field on Mount Ephraim. Though it was the culture of the East to be hospitable to visitors, it is possible that the old man's generous hospitality was motivated by hearing of the Levites story and his desire to visit the House of the LORD, or because he believed, as many did, that God would bless them if they had a Levite dwelling with him.

The remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim (toward the side of the mountain Ephraim in KJV): (v18): which was where the Levite, his servant and concubine were going, because he lived in a city on one side of the mountain, what the name of the city was we are not told here nor, are we told anywhere else in Scripture.

No one has taken me into his house: (v18) considering this was a city of Benjamin and the man was a Levite, and their culture and the Jewish religion was to show visitors to their city hospitality, this lack of hospitality raises the question "why would no one would accept them into their homes?" Perhaps the answer to this question, was that they were afraid (at least in this area) to let anyone into their homes, for a very good reason, as the following horrific events show.

JUDGES 19:20-23

- **Judges 19:22-23:** As they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, worthless fellows, (certain sons of Belial in KJV), surrounded the house, beating on the door. And they said to the old man, the master of the house, "Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may know him."²³ And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing.

Worthless fellows (certain sons of Belial in KJV): (v22) the word belial in Hebrew, does not have a capital B and does not refer to an evil spirit as many believe. Rather it is used to characterize a wicked, reckless, lawless, licentious and worthless person and often used in various text to carry the idea of one who is completely lacking worth and value. Later in Jewish and Christian texts the word belial became personified as the devil, which is the reason it is spelt with a capital B in English. In the following chapter (Judges 20:5) the Levite tells the people of Israel that it was the leaders of the city that rose against him and surrounded the house, which clearly show that, "the sons of Belial," refers to the worthless evil leaders of the city that sexually abused the Levites concubine.

Beating on the door: (v22): there is a very similar story to this, equally horrific in the book of Genesis as the following verses show:

- Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." (Genesis 19:8).

These may be the only two occasions such intense evil, wickedness, abuse and horror have taken place throughout history, or that they are the only two recorded. In the book of Hosea, it is written:

- They have deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah: he will remember their iniquity; he will punish their sins. (Hosea 9:9).
- From the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel; there they have continued. Shall not the war against the unjust overtake them in Gibeah? (Hosea 10:9).

These verses show that abuse, horror and murder of the Levites concubine was engraved upon the minds of all Israel, and as such became a reference for evil and gross sins against the LORD.

They were making their hearts merry: meaning they intoxicated themselves with strong drink.

Bring forth the man: they wanted the Levite brought forth, that they might forcefully rape him to satisfy their extreme sexual lusts.

This man is come into my house: therefore, according to our Jewish laws of hospitality I am obliged to protect him.

Worthless men beat at the door: (v22) it is difficult for anyone with a compassionate and empathic heart to comprehend these men's extreme lusts and horrific violence against the woman. However, even today in various countries during wartime there are corrupt soldiers who after invading villages randomly rape innocent and helpless woman without any sense of empathy or compassion.

That we may know him: though this maybe an ambiguous expression, the context makes it very clear what it means, the men wanted to satisfy their extreme lusts by sexually raping the Levite. In the following verse of Genesis, the same expression is used:

- And they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them." (Genesis 19:5).

In this story Lot invited two angels into his house at Sodom. They entered his house, but before they lay down, the men of the city of Sodom surrounded the house and called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them." Lot pleaded with the men not to act so wickedly, and offered his two virgin daughters to them to do as they pleased, so that they would not rape his two guests, but they refused his offer and continued to break the door down, but the two angels took them out of the house and destroyed the city. (Genesis 19:9-25).

This man is come into my house: the Levite appeals to the sacred rights of hospitality, just as Lot did in the following verse:

- Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." (Genesis 19:8).

JUDGES 19:24-26

- **Judges 19:24-26:** Behold, here are my virgin daughter and his concubine. Let me bring them out now. Violate them and do with them what seems good to you, but against this man do not do this outrageous thing."²⁵ But the men would not listen to him. So the man (the Levite) seized his concubine and made her go out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go.²⁶ And as morning appeared, the woman came and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master (lord in KJV) was, until it was light.

The horror of this story lies in how low these men had sunk, in morality, empathy and compassion and their faith toward God, especially since they were Benjamites. Equally as bad as this is the fact, the behaviour and actions of the old man and the Levite manifests the existence of an extremely base morality and an equally extreme selfishness and a shamefully low estimate of the rights and dignity of women, which shows the depths human nature had fallen at this time. For the Levite to sacrifice a defenceless woman for a whole night to such brutalisation is a horrifically repulsive act of utmost selfishness.

The master of the house decided it would be a less wickedness to prostitute his own virgin daughter (which also means she would have been a young girl) and the concubine to gratify the men's raging lust than sacrificing the Levite. There is no doubt it was a dreadful dilemma that he faced, nevertheless he cannot be justified in the cowardly offer he made, no more than Lot could be justified in a similar case, in offering his two daughters to satisfy the lusts of the men of Sodom.

This is such a horrific story it is impossible for anyone with even the smallest sense of compassion and empathy to comprehend. For a father to prostitute his own daughter and a man to sacrifice his wife to such horror is beyond the comprehension of any normal and sane man or woman. The response of the twelve tribes of Israel spoken of in the following chapter shows how true this statement is. (They wipe out the entire tribe of Benjamin except for 600 men)

The Levite made his concubine go out to them: (v25), and they sexually abused and murdered her. He should have chosen to fight for her, even if it meant his death, which is what most men would probably do, but it is possible he reasoned, "they would kill him and the old man if he did and then sexually abuse both women," so he chose the lesser of the two evils.

JUDGES 19:27-28

- **Judges 19:27-28:** And her master rose up in the morning, and when he opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, behold, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold. ²⁸ He said to her, "Get up, let us be going." But there was no answer. Then he put her on the donkey, and the man rose up and went away to his home.

The woman fell down at the door (v26) dead no-doubt from extreme grief, emotional terror and excessive physical abuse, her hands upon the threshold (v27) as though they had been stretched out in agony toward the men in the house for help.

Her master comes out looks at his concubine and says, "Get up, let us be going: (v28), it is possible the man in panic and haste to flee this inhospitable place didn't realise she was dead, or thought she was sleeping, and now that the men had gone, he desired to get her and himself out of this city and to safety as fast as he could, for fear the men may return, so his only thought was to return to his home as quickly as he could so she could safely rest and recover. In the following chapter we find he did afterwards seek revenge in a most dramatic manner for her death. (v29-30).

Instead of going to the House of God at Shiloh, as he had intended to do, he picks up her dead body and places her on one of the donkeys he had brought with him and returned with haste to his city on one side of Mount Ephraim with a plan to later seek justice against the guilty evil men, by calling on the help of the other tribes of Israel, spoken of in the following chapter.

JUDGES 19:29-30

- **Judges 19:29-30:** And when he entered his house, he took a knife, and taking hold of his concubine he divided her, limb by limb, into twelve pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. ³⁰ And all who saw it said, "Such a thing has never happened or been seen from the day that the people of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt until this day; consider it, take counsel, and speak."

Divided her: (v29) though the details are different, a similar method is recorded in the book of Samuel that was used to arouse the tribes of Israel to rise up as one man. Nahash (an Ammonite) besieged Jabesh-gilead, and all the men of Jabesh said to him, "Make a treaty with us, and we will serve you." But Nahash said, "If all your men gouge out their right eyes, I will make a treaty with you, and in this way bring disgrace on all Israel." When Saul head of this he took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by messengers, saying, "Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen!" Then the dread of the LORD fell upon the people, and they came out as one man. (1 Samuel 11:1-7).

He took a knife: (v29) we are safe to suppose that the Levite had no expectations of the elders of Gibeah pursuing justice for him and his concubine/wife, and there was no king at this time and no supreme head over all the tribes. Being a Jewish Levite, it is certain he was aware of the story of Saul taking a yoke of oxen and cutting them in pieces then sending them throughout all the territory of Israel to gather the tribes together as one man. (1 Samuel 11:1-7). Knowing this dramatic action accomplished what Saul had intended, he takes it to another level by cutting his concubines/wife body into twelve pieces and instructing messengers to take a piece to the chiefs of each tribe. Since he cut he body into twelve pieces he clearly included the tribe of Benjamin, since he had no intention of punishing the entire tribe, but just those who were guilty, and would naturally presume the majority of the tribe would be as equally abhorred when they heard of the evil barbarous and depraved brutality that had been committed against his concubine/wife and join with the other tribes.

Regardless of what we might think of this Levites behaviour, the fact he went to such extremes efforts to gather all the tribes together to bring punishment upon these evil guilty worthless men, shows that he did hate to the max what had taken place. It is impossible to think of any other method that could have been more certain of rousing universal horror and indignation than receiving a body part of another man's wife and hearing the story of how she had been forcefully and brutally abused and killed.

The following verses show that the whole nation felt the stain and shame of these worthless men's barbarous inhuman act for many generations.

- They have deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah: he will remember their iniquity; he will punish their sins. (Hosea 9:9).
- From the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel; there they have continued. Shall not the war against the unjust overtake them in Gibeah? (Hosea 10:9).

All who received a body part of the woman and heard the terror of the story were so moved with horror that they called upon each other to determine what manner justice should be done upon the lewd and inhuman men guilty of such a horrendous crime

The following chapter shows that the Levites plan worked, for all the tribes of Israel 400,000 men came out, and assembled as one man to the LORD at Mizpah, and ask the Levite, "how did this evil happen?" (Judges 20:1-3). The story is continued in the following chapter.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.